



CHAPTER REFERENCE

The Murder at the Vicarage

Agatha Christie

A chapter-by-chapter reference for continuity, sequels and adaptation, and a feedstock document for generating marketing assets.

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What this is

A chapter-by-chapter reference for continuity, sequels, and adaptation, and a feedstock document for generating marketing assets. 32 chapters, each with **Summary**, **Characters**, **Worldbuilding**, **Conflict**, **Timeline**, and **Best Quotes**.

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32 chapters, numbered 1 to 32, in manuscript order. Each begins on a new page.

1 Chapter 1

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

Chapter 1

The chapter opens on a Wednesday at lunchtime in the Vicarage, where the narrator, a Church of England vicar named Len, is having lunch with his young wife Griselda and his nephew Dennis. Over a meal of boiled beef, dumplings, and rice pudding (all poorly prepared), Len makes a dark joke that anyone who murdered Colonel Protheroe would be doing the world a service. Dennis immediately quips that the remark will be held against Len when Protheroe turns up dead.

The conversation turns to Griselda's inadequacy as a housekeeper, which she cheerfully acknowledges, and then to the source of Len's frustration with Protheroe: a parishioner, Mrs. Price Ridley, believes a pound note she placed in the offertory collection was not properly recorded, and Protheroe, a churchwarden who relishes making trouble, has used the complaint as a pretext to demand a full audit of the church accounts, implying possible embezzlement. Protheroe is scheduled to come to the Vicarage the following evening to review the accounts. Len is also behind on preparing a talk for the C.E.M.S., having been distracted by Canon Shirley's *Reality*.

After Dennis escapes to play tennis at the Protheroes', Griselda and Len retreat to his study, where she mentions the afternoon's tea guests, Mrs. Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell, and Miss Marple, and speculates about the mysterious Mrs. Lestrangle, a newcomer to the village. The chapter closes with a warm, teasing exchange between Len and Griselda about the nature of their marriage, ending with Griselda departing through the study window.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 1

Griselda

Len's wife. Described as "nearly twenty years younger" than Len, "most distractingly pretty," and "quite incapable of taking anything seriously." She is cheerfully incompetent as a housekeeper, treats parish life as entertainment, and is openly irreverent about church matters (expressing hatred of missionaries, dismissing Mrs. Price Ridley's complaint, speculating about Mrs. Lestrangle in the manner of a detective novel). Her emotional state is consistently playful and affectionate toward Len, though she needles him deliberately. She explicitly states her motivation for marrying him: it made her feel powerful to win someone who disapproved of her. Role: **protagonist's wife, major character**.

Dennis

Described as Len's "young nephew." No physical description provided. He is quick-witted and irreverent, his first line is a joke about Len's carving-knife remark being used as evidence against him. He escapes the afternoon tea by claiming a tennis invitation from the Protheroes. Emotional state: light, evasive. Role: **minor character, present in scene**.

Mary

The Vicarage's domestic servant. No physical description provided. Characterised entirely through action: she speaks in a "loud, businesslike voice," thrusts dishes "in a truculent manner," sets things down with bangs and clatters, and leaves the room without ceremony. She is described as being "in service at the Vicarage as a stepping-stone to better things and higher wages." Role: **minor functional character**.

Colonel Protheroe

Does not appear in this chapter but is the dominant subject of conversation. Described (through others' characterisations) as pompous, officious, and a "great opposer of ritual in any form." His first wife is said to have "run away from him." He is a churchwarden who has seized on Mrs. Price Ridley's complaint to demand an audit of church accounts, using the word "defalcations." He is scheduled to visit the Vicarage the following evening. Griselda infers (and the narrator does not contradict) that he makes trouble because he feels unimportant at home. Role: **referenced/offstage antagonist.**

Mrs. Price Ridley

A "devout member" of Len's congregation. She placed a pound note in the offertory collection on the anniversary of her son's death and was distressed to find only a ten-shilling note listed as the highest item in the posted collection total. She brought her complaint to Protheroe after Len's response failed to satisfy her. No physical description. Role: **referenced/offstage, functionally significant.**

Mr. Hawes

The new curate, described as having been at the Vicarage "just over three weeks." He has "High Church views and fasts on Fridays." Protheroe objects to his "becking and nodding and crossing himself." Not present in the scene. Role: **referenced/offstage minor character.**

Miss Marple

Named as one of Griselda's afternoon tea guests. Griselda describes her as "the worst cat in the village" who "always knows every single thing that happens, and draws the worst inferences from it." Len counters that she has "a sense of humour." No physical description in this chapter. Role: **referenced/offstage.**

Mrs. Lestrangle

A newcomer to the village who has taken a house locally and "hardly ever goes outside it." Griselda describes her as mysterious and speculates about her in the language of detective fiction. Griselda mentions having called on her the previous day but finding her out. Len believes Dr. Haydock knows something about her. No physical description provided. Role: **referenced/offstage, introduced as a figure of mystery.**

Mrs. Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell

Named as afternoon tea guests alongside Miss Marple. No descriptions or characterisation beyond the listing. Role: **referenced/offstage minor characters.**

Dr. Stone and Miss Cram

Mentioned by Griselda as possible additional tea guests. No description or characterisation. Role: **referenced/offstage minor characters.**

Dr. Haydock

Mentioned once by Griselda as someone who likely knows something about Mrs. Lestrangle. No description. Role: **referenced/offstage minor character.**

Canon Shirley

Referenced as the author of *Reality*, a book that distracted Len from his C.E.M.S. preparation. Not a character in the scene. Role: **referenced, non-character**.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 1

The Church of England parish structure

The chapter establishes the social and institutional world of a rural English parish. Key roles mentioned: Vicar (Len), curate (Hawes), churchwarden (Protheroe). The churchwarden role carries oversight authority over church finances, which Protheroe is exploiting.

The offertory system

Collections taken at church services are posted publicly. The specific mechanism, an "offertory bag" and a publicly displayed list of collection amounts, is established as the source of the dispute. The discrepancy between Mrs. Price Ridley's pound note and the posted ten-shilling maximum is the inciting grievance.

C.E.M.S.

Referenced as an organisation for which Len is preparing a talk. The acronym is not expanded in this chapter. (Likely the Church of England Men's Society, but this is not stated in the text.)

The Stain on the Stairs

A detective novel found in Len's study, used by Griselda to tease him about his secret taste for the genre.

High Church practice

Mr. Hawes's "becking and nodding and crossing himself" is identified as a point of conflict with Protheroe, establishing a Low Church / High Church tension within the parish.

The village social world

A network of named women (Mrs. Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell, Miss Marple) who gather for tea and gossip. Mrs. Lestrangle is established as an outsider to this network. Dr. Stone, Miss Cram, and Dr. Haydock are also part of the village community. The Protheroes have a house where Dennis is playing tennis, suggesting a property of some standing.

S.P.G.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, referenced by Griselda when she jokes about Len embezzling its funds. Not described; assumed known to the reader.

Scotland Yard

Referenced in passing as the body Len telephoned in a panic when Griselda failed to return from London. Establishes that the story is set in England and that Scotland Yard is the understood authority for serious matters.

CONFLICT

Chapter 1

The chapter contains two interlocking conflicts. The primary external conflict is institutional: Colonel Protheroe, using Mrs. Price Ridley's complaint about the offertory collection as a pretext, is demanding an audit of the church accounts and has effectively accused Len of financial impropriety ("defalcations"). This conflict is unresolved at chapter's end; Protheroe is coming the following evening. A secondary, comic domestic conflict runs throughout, Len's stated belief that clergy should be celibate and his wife's cheerful failure to meet his ideals of a vicar's wife, which resolves warmly in the closing scene, underlining the affection beneath the friction.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 1

- Protheroe is scheduled to visit the Vicarage **the following evening** (Thursday) to review the church accounts.
- Griselda's tea is scheduled for **four-thirty** that same afternoon (Wednesday).
- Len teaches at the Church Day School **on Wednesday mornings**, which leaves him "unsettled for the rest of the day."
- Hawes has been at the Vicarage **"just over three weeks."**
- Griselda is described as **"nearly twenty years younger"** than Len.
- Len proposed to Griselda after **"twenty-four hours' acquaintance."**
- Griselda once stayed in London and sent a wire that was not delivered because **"the postmistress's sister was having twins."** No date given; referenced as a past event.
- Mrs. Price Ridley attended early service on **"the anniversary of her son's death"**, no specific date given.
- Griselda called on Mrs. Lestrangle **"yesterday"** (Tuesday) and found her out.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 1

"I had just finished carving some boiled beef (remarkably tough by the way) and on resuming my seat I remarked, in a spirit most unbecoming to my cloth, that anyone who murdered Colonel Protheroe would be doing the world at large a service."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's, and arguably the novel's, inciting statement; establishes the narrator's voice, his self-aware irony, and plants the seed of the central murder plot.

"That'll be remembered against you when the old boy is found bathed in blood. Mary will give evidence, won't you, Mary? And describe how you brandished the carving knife in a vindictive manner."

WHY IT LANDS Dennis's joke functions as foreshadowing and establishes the chapter's tone of dark comedy; it also introduces the motif of the vicar as an unlikely suspect.

"She is not in the least meek."

WHY IT LANDS A single dry sentence that defines Griselda's character against the expectation encoded in her name; exemplifies the narrator's understated comic voice.

"It's so much nicer to be a secret and delightful sin to anybody than to be a feather in their cap. I make you frightfully uncomfortable and stir you up the wrong way the whole time, and yet you adore me madly."

WHY IT LANDS Griselda's explicit statement of her motivation for marrying Len; the most character-defining speech in the chapter and a key piece of her psychology.

"At my time of life, one knows that the worst is usually true."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: the narrator's world-weary realism, offered as a gentle corrective to Griselda's youth, also quietly prepares the reader for a story in which dark suspicions will prove founded.

"And then a very curious thing happened. Griselda rose, crossed the room and kissed her elderly husband affectionately."

WHY IT LANDS Griselda's playful self-narration; marketable for its charm, and character-defining in showing how she uses wit to express genuine affection, while also nodding to the detective-fiction genre the novel inhabits.

2 Chapter 2

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

Chapter 2

The chapter unfolds almost entirely within the Vicar's study and drawing room over the course of a single afternoon. The narrator, a vicar, has been attempting to compose an address for the Church of England Men's Society when he is interrupted first by Lettice Protheroe, then by his curate Hawes, before joining his wife Griselda for afternoon tea with four parish women.

Lettice Protheroe drifts in through the garden gate and study window, vague and scattered, confusing the day of the week and having missed a luncheon appointment for the third time. She mentions a dispute between her father, Colonel Protheroe, and the artist Lawrence Redding, who has been forbidden the house after painting Lettice in her bathing dress. She speaks carelessly about wishing her father would die so she might inherit money, and makes passing remarks about her absent mother, her stepmother Anne, and a planned visit to Dr. Stone's archaeological excavation, an appointment she has already missed by nearly an hour. She leaves without having communicated any clear message for Dennis.

The curate Hawes arrives next, seeking details of the Vicar's earlier interview with Colonel Protheroe. The Vicar tells him the Colonel raised his "Romish tendencies" but that the real purpose of the visit was another matter; the Vicar also delivers his own rebuke to Hawes, who receives it reasonably well.

At tea, the Vicar joins Griselda and four parishioners, Miss Marple, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell, and Mrs. Price Ridley, who are gossiping about Dr. Stone and his secretary Miss Cram, Lawrence Redding and Lettice Protheroe, and the mysterious Mrs. Lestrangle, recently visited by Dr. Haydock. Griselda attempts to defend Miss Cram and then mischievously fabricates a lurid story about Mrs. Lestrangle's past, which Miss Marple gently but firmly deflates. The chapter closes with Miss Marple implying, through an analogy about Joe Bucknell's wife, that Lawrence Redding's romantic interest lies not with Lettice but with someone else (with a pointed look at Griselda). The Vicar rebukes the assembled gossip; Miss Marple's final reply, that idle tittle-tattle is very wrong and unkind, "but it so often true, isn't it?", lands as a direct hit.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 2

Griselda

The Vicar's wife. No physical description provided in this chapter beyond sitting behind the tea table and appearing "out of place" in her environment. Emotional state: playful, mischievous, indignant when Miss Marple calls her innocent-minded. Actions: sits for a portrait by Lawrence Redding (referenced, not shown); presides at tea; defends Miss Cram; fabricates a sensational story about Mrs. Lestrangle; confirms she is also being painted by Redding. Role: ally/supporting character. Note: Miss Marple's pointed look at Griselda when implying Redding's real romantic interest is significant and is the cause of the Vicar's surge of anger.

Lettice Protheroe

Described as "a pretty girl, very tall and fair and completely vague." Emotional state: dreamy, scattered, mildly distressed ("I feel shattered. Definitely."), but not deeply troubled by anything. Actions: drifts in through the garden gate and study window; collapses in an armchair; asks after Dennis and Griselda; discusses the dispute over Lawrence Redding; expresses a wish that her father would die; departs having missed her appointment at the barrow. Stated objectives: unclear and shifting, she is looking for Dennis, then Griselda, then mentions gramophone records, a lost dog, a broken wristwatch, and the barrow appointment. Role: minor/supporting. Relationship to other characters: daughter of Colonel Protheroe; stepdaughter of Anne Protheroe; her mother left the Colonel for another man (details pre-date the family's arrival in the village). The Vicar infers she is "something of a minx."

Miss Marple

Described as "a white-haired old lady with a gentle, appealing manner." The Vicar notes she is "much the more dangerous" of the two women he sits between. Emotional state: composed, observant, gently authoritative. Actions: participates in gossip about Miss Cram, Lawrence Redding, and Mrs. Lestranger; corrects Griselda's fabrication; implies through analogy that Redding's interest is not in Lettice but in another woman (with a look at Griselda); delivers the chapter's closing Parthian shot. The Vicar notes she "always sees everything" and uses gardening and birdwatching as cover for observation. Role: minor/supporting, but narratively significant. Her final line is the chapter's thematic punctuation.

Miss Wetherby

Described as "a mixture of vinegar and gush." Emotional state: censorious, excitable. Actions: condemns Miss Cram for working as secretary to an unmarried man; gossips about Mrs. Lestranger and Dr. Haydock; asks Miss Marple's opinion on Lawrence Redding and Lettice. Role: minor.

Miss Hartnell

Described as "weather-beaten and jolly and much dreaded by the poor." Emotional state: blunt, hearty. Actions: speculates about Dr. Stone being "caught" by Miss Cram; comments on the age gap between them; takes Griselda's joke "broadmindedly." Role: minor.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Described as speaking "in a severe voice." Emotional state: disapproving, conventional. Actions: objects to Miss Cram staying at the same hotel as Dr. Stone; speculates about Lawrence Redding and Lettice; suggests Mrs. Lestranger may be ill. Role: minor.

Hawes (the curate)

No physical description in this chapter, though Miss Marple notes he "looked worried." Emotional state: seeking information; receives the Vicar's rebuke "very well" on the whole. Actions: asks about the Vicar's interview with Colonel Protheroe; receives a reprimand about conforming to the Vicar's ruling. The Vicar feels remorseful afterward for not liking him better. Role: minor/supporting. His "Romish tendencies" are a point of contention with Colonel Protheroe.

Lawrence Redding (referenced/offstage)

An artist. Referenced as painting Griselda and as having painted Lettice in her bathing dress, for which Colonel Protheroe forbade him the house. Lettice says she and Lawrence "simply shriek about it." Miss Marple implies his romantic interest is not Lettice but someone else. Miss Hartnell associates him with "Paris! Models! The Altogether!" Role: referenced/offstage.

Colonel Protheroe (referenced/offstage)

Lettice's father. Described by Lettice as "dreadful" and "horrible over money." Has forbidden Lawrence Redding the house. Has quarrelled with Dr. Stone, accusing him of being "an ignoramus." Miss Marple calls him "rather a stupid man, the kind of man who gets the wrong idea into his head and is obstinate about it." Role: referenced/offstage.

Anne Protheroe (referenced/offstage)

Colonel Protheroe's second wife (married approximately five years prior to the chapter's present). Described by the Vicar as "a remarkably handsome woman in a rather unusual style." Lettice says Anne "hates me" but is "quite decent" to her, and predicts Anne will "break out" because she is "getting old." Role: referenced/offstage.

Dennis (referenced/offstage)

Appears to be a young person connected to the Vicarage household (Lettice asks for him; the Vicar mentions he understood Dennis was going to play tennis at Old Hall). Role: referenced/offstage. Relationship to the Vicar is not specified in this chapter.

Dr. Stone (referenced/offstage)

A "well-known archaeologist" staying at the Blue Boar while supervising excavation of a barrow on Colonel Protheroe's property. Described as "bald-headed" and "dull" by Griselda; Miss Marple notes he is "quite well off" and has "rather a violent temper." Has quarrelled with Colonel Protheroe. Role: referenced/offstage.

Miss Cram (referenced/offstage)

Dr. Stone's secretary. Described as "a healthy young woman of twenty-five, noisy in manner, with a high colour, fine animal spirits and a mouth that always seems to have more than its full share of teeth." Village opinion is divided between considering her disreputable and considering her a woman of "iron virtue" who intends to marry Dr. Stone. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Lestrangle (referenced/offstage)

A woman living in a cottage in the village. Dr. Haydock has been seen leaving her cottage, which the assembled women find notable and suspicious. Griselda fabricates a story about her having been the head wife of a cannibal chief before being rescued by Dr. Haydock. Role: referenced/offstage.

Dr. Haydock (referenced/offstage)

A doctor. Has been seen coming out of Mrs. Lestrangle's cottage. The women note he has been "very quiet" about any prior acquaintance with her. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Protheroe (Lettice's mother, referenced/offstage)

Left Colonel Protheroe for another man before the family came to live in the village. Lettice says she believed for years her mother was dead. Role: referenced/offstage.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 2

The Vicarage drawing room

Where afternoon tea is held. Griselda presides at the tea table. The room is implied to be a conventional domestic space in which Griselda looks "out of place."

The Vicarage garden and studio

There is a studio in the garden where Griselda sits for Lawrence Redding's portrait. The garden has a gate that connects to a path through the woods.

The path from Old Hall through the woods

A shortcut connecting Old Hall (Colonel Protheroe's property) to the Vicarage garden gate, which brings visitors directly to the study window rather than to the front door. Established as the customary route for people coming from Old Hall.

Old Hall

Colonel Protheroe's residence. The Protheroe family home, where Lettice and her stepmother Anne live with the Colonel.

The Blue Boar

The local inn or hotel where Dr. Stone is staying during the excavation. Miss Wetherby implies that Dr. Stone and Miss Cram are staying on the same floor.

Dr. Stone's barrow

An archaeological excavation site on Colonel Protheroe's property, being superintended by Dr. Stone. Lettice had an appointment to visit it at three o'clock.

Mrs. Lestrangle's cottage

A cottage in the village where Mrs. Lestrangle lives. Dr. Haydock has been seen leaving it.

The Church of England Men's Society

A parish organization for which the Vicar is preparing an address. Establishes the Vicar's clerical duties and the Anglican parish context.

The Mothers' Meeting

A parish gathering referenced in passing by one of the women as having had a "regrettable incident." No further detail given.

The Choir Boys' Outing

A parish event referenced in passing. No further detail given.

Village social dynamics

The chapter establishes a small English village in which gossip circulates freely among a tight network of parishioners. The Vicar occupies a position of social and moral authority, though his rebukes carry limited practical weight. Miss Marple is established as the village's most acute observer, using gardening and birdwatching as cover for surveillance. The poor are a distinct social category, "much dreaded" by Miss Hartnell (implying she is involved in some form of parish charity or oversight).

The clock on the Vicar's writing-table

Runs approximately fifteen minutes fast. A small but specific continuity detail: when the clock shows a quarter to five, the actual time is half-past four.

CONFLICT

Chapter 2

The chapter contains no single dominant conflict but rather a web of simmering tensions. Externally: Colonel Protheroe's prohibition of Lawrence Redding from Old Hall (over the bathing-dress portrait) creates friction involving Lettice, Redding, and by extension Griselda. The Vicar's unease about Hawes's "Romish tendencies" represents a low-level ecclesiastical dispute. The chapter's sharpest conflict arrives at the close: Miss Marple's implied suggestion, via analogy, that Redding's romantic interest is not Lettice but Griselda provokes the Vicar's "wild surge of anger" and his public rebuke of gossip. Miss Marple's unanswered final line escalates rather than resolves this tension.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 2

- Lettice has forgotten a lunch appointment "for the third time."
- Lettice had an appointment to see Dr. Stone's barrow at **three o'clock**; by the time she remembers and departs, it is **five-and-twenty to four** (i.e., 3:35 p.m.), she is already approximately thirty-five minutes late.
- The Vicar's writing-table clock shows a **quarter to five** when he leaves for tea; he notes this means it is actually **half-past four**.
- Dennis was told (by Lettice, on a **Friday**) to come play tennis at Old Hall; the chapter takes place on Wednesday, meaning the invitation is now four or five days stale.
- Colonel Protheroe married his second wife (Anne) **approximately five years prior** to the chapter's present ("some five years previously", stated by the narrator).
- Miss Hartnell saw Mrs. Lestrangle "walking round her garden at **three o'clock this afternoon**" in apparent good health, establishing a same-day timeline for the gossip about Dr. Haydock's visit.
- The Protheroe family's arrival in the village pre-dates the chapter's present by an unspecified period; the first Mrs. Protheroe's departure also pre-dates their arrival ("It was before your father came to live here").

"I use the word drifted advisedly. I have read novels in which young people are described as bursting with energy, joie de vivre, the magnificent vitality of youth. ... Personally, all the young people I come across have the air of animal wraiths."

WHY IT LANDS The Vicar's dry comic voice is established here; the line also characterises Lettice before she appears and sets the chapter's tone of wry, deflating observation.

"If only father would be decent and die, I should be all right."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Lettice, her careless amorality is stated baldly and without apparent self-awareness, establishing her as a figure of comic but unsettling vacancy.

"Miss Marple is a white-haired old lady with a gentle, appealing manner, Miss Wetherby is a mixture of vinegar and gush. Of the two Miss Marple is much the more dangerous."

WHY IT LANDS The single most marketable and character-defining line in the chapter; it introduces Miss Marple and immediately signals her as the chapter's, and likely the novel's, most significant intelligence.

"My dear," she said, "you are very young. The young have such innocent minds."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's surface sweetness concealing pointed implication; the line is directed at Griselda in a context that makes it gently but unmistakably barbed, and it demonstrates Miss Marple's method of delivering observations under cover of benevolence.

"Miss Marple always sees everything. Gardening is as good as a smoke screen, and the habit of observing birds through powerful glasses can always be turned to account."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical: establishes Miss Marple's surveillance methods and her role as the village's omniscient observer, directly relevant to her function as a detective figure.

"Dear Vicar," said Miss Marple, "You are so unworldly. I'm afraid that observing human nature for as long as I have done, one gets not to expect very much from it. I dare say the idle tittle-tattle is very wrong and unkind, but it so often true, isn't it?"

WHY IT LANDS Thematically central: Miss Marple's philosophy of human nature stated directly, her gentle demolition of the Vicar's moral rebuke, and the chapter's closing note, the "Parthian shot" the Vicar acknowledges has gone home.

3

Chapter 3

SUMMARY

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CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 3

The chapter opens immediately after a visit from Miss Marple, with Griselda teasing her husband, the vicar Len, about his defensive reaction to Miss Marple's implied suggestion of an affair between Griselda and the young artist Lawrence Redding. Griselda dismisses the insinuation with characteristic irreverence, noting that Lawrence has never actually made advances toward her and speculating that he may be interested in Lettice Protheroe instead. Before leaving the room, she unsettles Len with the admission that he would believe anything she told him. Len then heads out to make parish visits.

That evening, after a sparsely attended Wednesday service, Len encounters Mrs. Lestrange alone in the church admiring the stained glass and the screen. They walk together to her house, Little Gates, where she invites him in. Len observes her closely for the first time: she is tall, gold-haired, dark-browed, and Sphinxlike, with unusual golden eyes. Throughout their conversation on impersonal topics, pictures, books, architecture, Len senses she wants to confide something urgent but cannot bring herself to do so. He offers help as he leaves; she declines but does not dismiss the gesture entirely. Outside, Miss Hartnell intercepts him, pressing for gossip about Mrs. Lestrange. Len deflects her and continues home.

On impulse, Len detours to the garden shed Lawrence Redding uses as a studio to check on Griselda's portrait. He opens the door without warning and discovers Lawrence passionately kissing Mrs. Anne Protheroe. He retreats to his study. Shortly after, Anne Protheroe enters through the study window, breathless and transformed. She confirms the affair, declares her misery in her marriage to Lucius Protheroe, and says she wishes her husband were dead. Both believe they hear someone outside the window. Len counsels her against rash action. She leaves, and Len reflects uneasily that he has badly misjudged her character, she now strikes him as a woman capable of anything.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 3

Griselda (Len's wife)

No new physical description in this chapter. Emotional state: playful, irreverent, and briefly vulnerable when she asks whether Len believes her. Actions: mocks Miss Marple after her departure, jokes about the portrait sittings, kisses Len, exits the scene. Stated: she is being painted by Lawrence in a heavy fur-collared cloak, not in the nude; Lawrence has never made advances toward her. Inferred: her hesitation when asked whether she *wants* Lawrence to make love to her ("N-n-o") introduces a note of ambiguity the narrator does not pursue. She also tells Len he would believe her "whatever I said," which she frames as a flaw in him but which functions as a small, unresolved warning. Role: ally/wife; present only in the opening scene.

Miss Marple

Does not appear in person in this chapter; referenced and quoted by Griselda. Griselda twice calls her a "nasty old cat" and then concedes, "That kind of old cat is always right." Len acknowledges at the chapter's end that Miss Marple had not been deceived about the Lawrence–Anne situation and that he had entirely misread her meaning glance at Griselda. Role: referenced/offstage; established as a reliable social observer.

Lawrence Redding

Does not speak in this chapter. Appears briefly and wordlessly in the studio scene, where he is discovered kissing Anne Protheroe. Referenced throughout the opening scene as the subject of Miss Marple's insinuations. Griselda notes he has never made advances toward her and wonders why. Len had previously assumed Lawrence's interest lay with Lettice Protheroe. Role: minor/present but silent; central to the chapter's revelatory moment.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Introduced and described in detail for the first time. Physical description: very tall; gold hair with a tinge of red; dark eyebrows and eyelashes (possibly artificial); golden-coloured eyes; perfectly dressed. Emotional state: composed on the surface, but Len perceives a suppressed urgency, a desire to confide something she ultimately cannot bring herself to say. Actions: admires the church screen, walks with Len, invites him into Little Gates, sustains impersonal conversation, declines his offer of help but does not reject it outright. Makes no mention of a husband or relations. Len's inferred impression: "This woman would stick at nothing." The word *sinister*, introduced by Griselda in a prior scene (referenced here), recurs in Len's thoughts. Role: minor but atmospherically significant; mystery figure.

Miss Hartnell

Physical description: moves in a "heavy and cumbrous way." Emotional state: gleefully nosy. Actions: intercepts Len outside Little Gates, presses him for information about Mrs. Lestrangle, references Miss Marple's opinion of Len's unworldliness. Role: minor; functions as a representative of the village gossip network.

Mrs. Anne Protheroe

Physical description given here for the first time: brown-haired, pale-faced, very deep-set grey eyes; flushed and breathless when she enters Len's study. Emotional state: desperate, agitated, transformed from her usual composed self, Len reflects he has never truly seen her before and that she is, in this moment, beautiful. Actions: enters Len's study through the window uninvited, confirms the affair with Lawrence, declares her misery with Lucius, says she wishes her husband were dead, hears (or believes she hears) someone outside the window, accepts some comfort from Len's counsel, promises to think over what he has said, and leaves. Stated: "We love each other." "I wish he were dead." Inferred: Len revises his assessment of her entirely, concluding she is "a very desperate woman ... who would stick at nothing once her emotions were aroused." Role: minor character elevated to significant plot function within this chapter.

Lucius Protheroe (Colonel Protheroe)

Does not appear. Referenced by Anne as the husband she is miserable with; she says no woman could be happy with him and that she wishes he were dead. Len notes that earlier that same morning he had himself expressed the view that the world would be improved without Colonel Protheroe in it (this prior scene is referenced but not reproduced in this chapter). Role: referenced/offstage.

Lettice Protheroe

Does not appear. Referenced by Len as the person he had assumed Lawrence was interested in, and as someone who, Len feels certain, has no idea of Lawrence's feelings for her stepmother. Role: referenced/offstage.

Dr. Haydock

Referenced only by Miss Hartnell, who asks whether Mrs. Lestrangle has known him long. Len cannot answer. Role: referenced/offstage; connection to Mrs. Lestrangle implied but unconfirmed.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 3

The Vicarage	Len's home. Contains a study with a window that opens onto the garden; this window becomes the point of entry for Anne Protheroe and the suspected point of eavesdropping. The garden includes a shed being used as a studio by Lawrence Redding.
The Church	Described as well worth looking at. Contains "rather fine old stained glass" and a screen that Mrs. Lestrangle specifically admires. Len disrobes in the vestry after the Wednesday evening service. The Wednesday evening service is noted as "sparsely attended as usual."
Little Gates	Mrs. Lestrangle's house, formerly belonging to an Anglo-Indian colonel. Len notes with relief the disappearance of "brass tables and Burmese idols." Now furnished simply but in "exquisite taste," with "a sense of harmony and rest about it." Contains a drawing room where Len observes Mrs. Lestrangle closely.
Lawrence Redding's studio	A shed in the Vicarage garden, lent to the young artist. The site of the chapter's central discovery. No interior description beyond its function.
The Church of England clergy	Len's professional identity shapes his responses throughout. He is conscious of the dignity of his office (discomfited at being called an "angry tiger"), and asserts that a clergyman is capable of behaving like a gentleman, i.e., of keeping a confidence, when Anne asks whether he will tell her husband.
Social architecture of the village	The chapter establishes a clear structure of social observation and gossip. Miss Marple and Miss Hartnell are positioned as nodes in a surveillance network. Len is aware of "danger points" in his own movements, he specifically notes passing "the danger point of Miss Marple's garden" and feels "reasonably safe" only because he calculates the news of his visit cannot yet have reached her.

CONFLICT

Chapter 3

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict is the revelation of the affair between Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe, which cuts across Len's prior assumptions (that Lawrence was interested in Lettice) and introduces a volatile situation: a married woman in a desperate, passionate attachment to a younger man, openly wishing her husband dead. The internal conflict belongs to Len, who must reconcile his pastoral duty, his earlier misjudgements, and his own unease, he counsels Anne against rash action while privately acknowledging he had that very morning expressed sympathy with the idea of Colonel Protheroe's absence from the world. Neither conflict resolves; both escalate. The possible eavesdropper at the window adds an unresolved external threat.
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TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 3

● Len makes parish visits "that ought to have been made earlier in the day," suggesting the afternoon.
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- The Wednesday evening service is the next temporal marker; Len disrobes in the vestry and finds the church empty afterward, placing this scene in the evening.
- Len walks with Mrs. Lestrangle and visits Little Gates after the service; duration of the visit is not specified.
- Miss Hartnell intercepts him immediately upon his exit from Little Gates.
- Len returns to the Vicarage via the garden gate, detours to the studio, and makes his discovery, all on the same evening.
- Anne Protheroe arrives at his study window shortly after he has settled in his chair and begun to reflect.
- Len notes that "that same morning" he had expressed the view that the world would be better without Colonel Protheroe, establishing that the morning scene (in a prior chapter) and this evening scene fall on the same day.
- No specific dates, character ages, or historical references with dates are given in this chapter.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 3

"I wish you weren't so terribly easy to deceive, Len. You'd believe me whatever I said."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: Griselda's line functions simultaneously as affection and as a quiet, unresolved warning about the narrator's reliability as an observer of those closest to him.

"What they need," said Griselda, "is a little immorality in their lives. Then they wouldn't be so busy looking for it in other people's."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant and marketable: a crisp articulation of the novel's ironic view of village moral surveillance, delivered by the character who is herself under suspicion.

The word Griselda had used occurred to me, sinister. Absurd, of course, and yet, was it so absurd? The thought sprang unbidden into my mind: "This woman would stick at nothing."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and character-defining: Len's involuntary assessment of Mrs. Lestrangle establishes her as a figure of genuine menace and plants the phrase "would stick at nothing", which he will use again, almost verbatim, of Anne Protheroe by the chapter's end.

She said very quietly: "We love each other. ..." And even in the middle of her evident distress and agitation she could not keep a little smile from her lips. The smile of a woman who sees something very beautiful and wonderful.

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: the detail of the involuntary smile against distress renders Anne Protheroe fully human and establishes the depth of her feeling in a way that makes her subsequent desperation credible.

"I'm so unhappy. Oh! I'm so dreadfully unhappy. I can't go on. I simply can't go on. And I don't know what to do. ... You don't know what my life is like. I've been miserable with Lucius from the beginning. No woman could be happy with him. I wish he were dead. ... It's awful, but I do ... I'm desperate. I tell you, I'm desperate."

WHY IT LANDS Plot-critical: Anne's declaration that she wishes her husband dead, delivered to the narrator on the same day the narrator himself expressed a similar sentiment, is the chapter's most consequential statement and will bear directly on subsequent events.

I had got to this point in my meditations when a tap on my study window aroused me. ... She crossed the room in a breathless sort of way and dropped down on the sofa. I had the feeling that I had never really seen her before.

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: Len's admission that he has never truly seen Anne Protheroe before this moment is a quiet confession of the observational failure that runs through the chapter, he has misjudged Lawrence, misjudged Miss Marple's glance, and misjudged Anne, and it frames the chapter's central revelation as much as the studio scene does.

4 Chapter 4

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 4

The chapter opens on an evening dinner at the narrator's home, the vicarage, where Lawrence Redding has been invited. The meal is a domestic comedy of incompetence: the cook Mary alternates undercooking and overcooking, and a set of oysters cannot be opened for lack of the proper tool. Despite the social surface, the narrator watches Lawrence carefully, noting a distracted quality that Griselda and Dennis do not seem to detect. After dinner, Lawrence manoeuvres the narrator into the study, where he acknowledges that the narrator has discovered his secret relationship with Anne Protheroe. The narrator speaks plainly, urging Lawrence to leave St. Mary Mead for Anne's sake. Lawrence defends the relationship as honourable, speaks bitterly of Colonel Protheroe, and mentions that village gossip has so far attached itself to Lettice rather than Anne. He also characterises Lettice as vaguely posed, practically minded underneath, and harbouring a vindictive hatred of Anne. The conversation is interrupted by Griselda and Dennis, whose banter touches on the silver at Old Hall, Dr. Stone's suspicious ignorance of his own subject, and Lawrence's Mauser pistol. After Lawrence leaves, Dennis is visibly troubled by something he has heard but refuses to disclose. Griselda then relays two pieces of village gossip: Mrs. Lestrangle's unexplained evening outing, and the discovery that Dr. Stone and Miss Cram have adjacent but non-communicating rooms at the Blue Boar.

The following day (Thursday) opens badly for the narrator, who must adjudicate a parish quarrel over church decorations, reprove choir boys, smooth over the organist's offence, and manage a rebellion against Miss Hartnell. He encounters Colonel Protheroe, who holds forth on firmness and justice; the narrator responds with a quiet rebuke about mercy. Protheroe confirms he will call at the vicarage at six-fifteen instead of six. The narrator then meets Hawes, who appears ill. In the afternoon Lawrence returns to the vicarage, having spent a sleepless night, and announces he has decided to leave St. Mary Mead. He asks the narrator to look after Anne, says he will say goodbye to her that evening, and plans to depart the next day. The chapter ends with the narrator called away to a dying parishioner at Lower Farm, unable to return before six-thirty, and leaving word with Mary for Colonel Protheroe's expected visit.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 4

Griselda (Clement)

Role: Ally/supporting character; the narrator's wife. No physical description in this chapter. She is lively, socially at ease, and younger in spirit and apparent age than the narrator; he notes Dennis's closeness to her in age with a pang. She is the one who scolds the narrator for forgetting the dinner invitation. She is "bubbling with pleasure" when relaying village gossip. She goes to London on the cheap Thursday train. She had ordered the oysters and attempted to plan the menu, with poor results.

Dennis

Role: Minor/supporting character; appears to be a young male relative of the narrator, who calls him "Uncle Len." No physical description. He is gay and joking at dinner, participates in banter about Dr. Stone and Miss Cram, and mentions that Colonel Protheroe was showing the silver to Stone. After Lawrence leaves, he becomes visibly troubled, kicking furniture, frowning, and refusing to disclose something he has heard, calling gossip "absolutely rotten." This is noted as uncharacteristic of him.

Lawrence Redding

Role: Ally/significant secondary character. Described as approximately thirty years of age, dark-haired, with brilliant and almost startling blue eyes. Described as doing everything well, good at games, an excellent shot, a good amateur actor, a first-rate storyteller, capable of making any party go. Believed to have Irish blood. Not the typical idea of an artist, though believed to be a clever painter in the modern style. At dinner he appears a shade *distract* but carries things off well enough that Griselda and Dennis notice nothing. After dinner he is grave, anxious, and haggard. He acknowledges the narrator has discovered his secret, defends the relationship with Anne as honourable, speaks bitterly of Colonel Protheroe, and mentions his Mauser pistol as a war souvenir. He returns the following afternoon having had a sleepless night and announces his decision to leave. He asks the narrator to look after Anne, says he will say goodbye to her that evening, and plans to depart the next day. He expresses regret at not finishing Griselda's portrait.

Anne Protheroe

Role: Referenced/offstage. Not physically present in this chapter. Lawrence describes her as "one of the truest and most loyal women that ever lived." The narrator notes that to the best of his own observation, Anne had always behaved to her stepdaughter with kindness and fairness. Lawrence says he has no money and would take her away if he had any. The narrator has spoken to her previously (referenced as "that afternoon," implying a prior chapter).

Colonel Protheroe

Role: Antagonist/offstage for most of the chapter; appears briefly in Thursday section. No physical description beyond that he flourishes a stick and strides. He is slightly deaf and raises his voice accordingly. He is in high good-humour having sentenced three poachers. He holds forth loudly on firmness, law, and the irrelevance of a man's family circumstances when punishing wrongdoing. He confirms his appointment at the vicarage, changing the time from six to six-fifteen. Lawrence describes him (offstage) as blustering, mean, with a nasty temper, stirring up trouble everywhere. Lawrence also references "the first Mrs. Protheroe" as someone he met once, years ago, who looked "quite capable" of doing Protheroe in, described as "one of those calm dangerous women."

Lettice

Role: Referenced/offstage. Lawrence describes her as seeming always in a kind of dream, but underneath practically minded, he believes the vague manner is a pose. He says she has a funny vindictive streak and hates Anne, though Anne has always been a "perfect angel" to her. Village gossip has attached itself to Lettice rather than Anne in connection with Lawrence. The narrator notes he was himself surprised by the bitterness of Lettice's tone (in a prior scene, not this chapter).

Mary

Role: Minor functional character; the household servant. No physical description. She is responsible for the disastrous dinner, alternating undercooking and overcooking. She receives the narrator's message for Colonel Protheroe when he is called away.

Dr. Stone

Role: Referenced/offstage. Dennis mentions that Colonel Protheroe was showing the silver at Old Hall to Stone that day. Lawrence observes that Stone sometimes seems to know nothing about his own subject, which puzzles him. Dennis and Griselda reference a quarrel between Stone and Protheroe over a barrow, which has since been made up.

Miss Cram

Role: Referenced/offstage. Subject of gossip; she and Dr. Stone have adjacent but non-communicating rooms at the Blue Boar. Dennis composes a mocking verse about her.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: Referenced/offstage. Miss Wetherby has reported that she went out at a quarter past eight and had not returned. Her destination is unknown; it has been established (via Miss Hartnell, who lives next door to him) that she did not go to Dr. Haydock's.

Miss Wetherby

Role: Referenced/offstage. She telephones Griselda with the news about Mrs. Lestrangle.

Miss Hartnell

Role: Referenced/offstage. Lives next door to Dr. Haydock. Four of the narrator's poorer parishioners have declared open rebellion against her, and she comes to him "bursting with rage." She is also referenced as the subject of a joke about her clicking false teeth.

Hawes

Role: Minor functional character; appears briefly. No physical description beyond a "white strained face." He appears distinctly ill. He has been muddling or shelving matters in his province (implied to be a curate or parish assistant). He accepts the narrator's advice to go home to bed, though not very vehemently.

Dr. Haydock

Role: Referenced/offstage only. Mentioned as a point of reference in establishing where Mrs. Lestrangle did not go.

Archer

Role: Referenced/offstage. A poacher who has just been released and is reportedly vowing vengeance against Colonel Protheroe. Protheroe dismisses the threat.

Mr. Abbott

Role: Referenced/offstage. A parishioner at Lower Farm, reported to be dying, whose summons calls the narrator away at half-past five.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 4

The Vicarage

The narrator's home. Contains a study where private conversations take place. The household is run with evident domestic disorder; the furniture is described as already so shabby it can hardly be damaged further. Mary is the household servant.

Old Hall

The Protheroe family residence. Contains notable antique silver, specifically described as including trencher salts, a Charles II Tazza, and other pieces believed to be worth thousands of pounds.

The Blue Boar	A local inn or public house where Dr. Stone and Miss Cram are staying in adjacent rooms. The absence of a communicating door between their rooms is a subject of village gossip and disappointment.
Lower Farm	A farm approximately two miles from the vicarage, belonging to Mr. Abbott.
The Barrow	An archaeological site referenced in passing; Dr. Stone and Colonel Protheroe had quarrelled about it but have since made up. No further detail given in this chapter.
The Cheap Thursday Train	A train service to London available on Thursdays, used by Griselda. Implies a reduced-fare arrangement on that day.
Lawrence Redding's Shed	The narrator has been allowing Lawrence to use a shed (presumably on vicarage grounds) as a painting studio. Lawrence has been working on a portrait of Griselda, which he regrets leaving unfinished.
The Mauser Pistol	Lawrence owns a Mauser pistol kept as a souvenir of the war. Its existence is noted in the context of a joking conversation about burgling Old Hall, but the narrator records it as a fact.
The Clergy's Role and Social Position	The chapter establishes several aspects of the narrator's clerical life: he adjudicates parish disputes, manages choir boys, smooths over the organist, and is called to the dying. His presence is noted to have a "dampening effect" socially. His exchange with Colonel Protheroe establishes mercy as a core professional and theological value, set against Protheroe's doctrine of strict justice.
Colonel Protheroe as Magistrate	Protheroe holds the position of magistrate and has that day sentenced three poachers. He is slightly deaf. His philosophy of law is explicitly stated: no consideration of family circumstances, equal application regardless of profession or status.

CONFLICT

Chapter 4

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The primary external conflict is the illicit relationship between Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe, which the narrator is attempting to manage discreetly and morally: he urges Lawrence to leave, and by the chapter's end Lawrence has agreed. This resolves one strand while introducing new tension, Lawrence plans to say goodbye to Anne that evening, and the narrator is called away before Colonel Protheroe's appointment, leaving the evening's events unwitnessed. A secondary, quieter conflict is established between the narrator's value of mercy and Colonel Protheroe's doctrine of strict justice, foreshadowing a deeper antagonism. Dennis's unexplained distress about gossip introduces an unresolved thread.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 4

- Lawrence is described as approximately thirty years of age.
- The narrator references having spoken with Mrs. Protheroe "that afternoon" (prior to the dinner, in a scene not contained in this chapter).
- Lawrence's Mauser pistol is described as a souvenir of "the war" (no specific war named, but contextually the First World War).
- The narrator notes he was "surprised that afternoon" at the bitterness of Lettice's tone, same afternoon as the Mrs. Protheroe conversation.
- Mrs. Lestrangle went out at a quarter past eight (the evening of the dinner) and had not returned when Miss Wetherby telephoned.
- The following day is identified explicitly as **Thursday**.
- On Thursday, Colonel Protheroe changes his appointment from six o'clock to **six-fifteen**.
- Lawrence returns to the vicarage on Thursday afternoon; the narrator arrives home at **a quarter to four**.
- At **half-past five** on Thursday, the narrator receives a telephone call about Mr. Abbott.
- The narrator calculates he cannot return from Lower Farm (nearly two miles away) before **six-thirty**.
- Lawrence states he will say goodbye to Anne "this evening" (Thursday evening) and plans to pack up and leave the following day (Friday).
- Archer "came out yesterday" (i.e., was released the day before Thursday, so Wednesday).
- Griselda travels to London on the cheap Thursday train (Thursday daytime, returning unstated).

"My dear young man, you underestimate the detective instinct of village life. In St. Mary Mead everyone knows your most intimate affairs. There is no detective in England equal to a spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes St. Mary Mead's gossip culture as a structural force in the novel and is among the chapter's most marketable lines; the reference to an unnamed "spinster lady" carries strong thematic and potentially metatextual weight.

"If this were only a book," he said gloomily, "the old man would die, and a good riddance to everybody."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Lawrence, simultaneously darkly comic and foreshadowing; his casual wish for Protheroe's death is immediately significant in a murder mystery context.

"I was thinking," I said, "that when my time comes, I should be sorry if the only plea I had to offer was that of justice. Because it might mean that only justice would be meted out to me. ..."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically central: establishes mercy versus justice as a moral axis for the narrator and implicitly for the novel; also a quiet, pointed rebuke to Protheroe.

"What an absolutely rotten thing gossip is!"

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Dennis in this chapter, his uncharacteristic distress signals that something significant has been heard; the refusal to elaborate makes this a deliberate narrative withholding.

"Oh! I didn't mean I was going to stick him in the back with a knife, though I'd offer my best thanks to anyone else who did so. There's not a soul in the world who's got a good word to say for him."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Lawrence as a suspect with stated motive and a witnessed expression of violent sentiment toward Protheroe; critical for continuity in any murder investigation that follows.

"You'll look after Anne? She needs a friend."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Lawrence at the moment of his decision to leave; establishes the narrator's promise to Anne as a plot obligation and marks Lawrence's departure as emotionally resolved while leaving Anne's situation unresolved.

5 Chapter 5

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 5

The narrator (referred to as "Len" by his wife, and as "Clement" in the note found at the scene) returns to the Vicarage shortly before seven o'clock and encounters Lawrence Redding leaving through the gate in a state of extreme agitation. Redding makes a cryptic, almost hysterical remark about Protheroe before fleeing down the road toward the village. The narrator enters the Vicarage and learns from the maid, Mary, that Colonel Protheroe has been waiting in the study since a quarter past six, and that Redding had briefly joined him there before departing. Upon opening the study door, the narrator discovers Protheroe slumped dead across the writing table, shot through the head, with blood pooling and dripping onto the floor. He summons Dr. Haydock, who confirms the death and rules out suicide on account of the wound's position and the absence of a weapon. The police are called. Constable Hurst arrives first, followed by the energetic and overbearing Inspector Slack. Slack seizes on two pieces of evidence: a stopped clock showing 6:22 and an unfinished note on Vicarage notepaper headed "6:20," addressed to "Dear Clement," which he takes as proof that Protheroe was shot by an intruder through the open window while writing. The narrator repeatedly attempts to tell Slack something about the clock but is silenced. The chapter closes with the narrator's wife, Griselda, identifying the critical detail he was trying to convey: the study clock is always kept a quarter of an hour fast, meaning the true time of the apparent crime was only five minutes past six, before Protheroe had even arrived at the house.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 5

Lawrence Redding

Role: suspect / minor (present briefly, then offstage). Encountered leaving the Vicarage gate in a state of extreme physical distress, deathly white, shaking, twitching, eyes staring. Makes a wild, near-hysterical remark about Protheroe before fleeing toward the village. Mary confirms he was in the study with Protheroe for only a couple of minutes. The narrator initially considers and then rejects drunkenness as an explanation for his appearance. No physical description beyond his visible agitation. His prior admission of owning (or having knowledge of) a Mauser .25 pistol is recalled by the narrator when Haydock names that calibre. Motivation: unstated; the narrator declines to voice his suspicions to police.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: victim (deceased, present as a body). Found slumped across the narrator's writing table, shot through the head at close quarters, with no weapon present. Skin cold to the touch. Haydock estimates he has been dead approximately half an hour at the time of examination. Established as unpopular in the village but not typically the sort of person one murders. Had announced his appointment at the Vicarage that morning in the village street, loudly and publicly. Arrived at the Vicarage at a quarter past six according to Mary. Had begun writing a note addressed to "Dear Clement" headed "6:20" before being killed.

Mary

Role: minor (functional). The Vicarage maid. Confirms Protheroe's arrival time (quarter past six) and Redding's brief visit. Did not hear Redding leave. Is stationed in the kitchen at the far side of the house, which Haydock notes would have prevented her hearing anything in the study. Reappears to announce Griselda's return. Described as wiping her hands on her apron; her eyes are "round and agog with excitement" at the chapter's end.

Dr. Haydock

Role: ally / minor. Described as "a big, fine, strapping man with an honest, rugged face." Lives at the corner of the road. Responds quickly when fetched. Examines the body without visible emotion ("like a true doctor"). Rules out suicide based on wound position and absence of a weapon. Estimates death occurred approximately half an hour before his examination. Identifies the probable weapon as a pistol of small calibre, specifically a Mauser .25. Raises the significance of the false telephone call that drew the narrator away. Dismisses Inspector Slack privately as a "conceited ass" before departing to his surgery.

Constable Hurst

Role: minor (police). Arrives before the Inspector. Described as looking "very important but slightly worried." Directs a look of "cold suspicion" at the narrator. Takes notes methodically. Defers to Inspector Slack on arrival.

Inspector Slack

Role: minor (police, antagonistic in manner). Arrives by car from Much Benham, two miles away. Described as "a dark man, restless and energetic in manner, with black eyes that snapped ceaselessly." His manner is "rude and overbearing in the extreme." His name is noted by the narrator as a contradiction of his character. He seizes on the stopped clock and the unfinished note as the key evidence, constructs a rapid theory of the crime (intruder through the window), and repeatedly silences the narrator before he can correct the clock detail. He does not yet know the clock runs fast.

Griselda (the narrator's wife)

Role: minor (ally). Returns from a day trip to London approximately five minutes before the chapter ends. Described as "frightened, but excited." Immediately identifies the significance of the fast clock upon hearing the narrator's account, articulating the central puzzle that closes the chapter.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 5

The Study

Contains a writing table at which Protheroe is found dead. Has an open window through which Inspector Slack theorises the intruder entered. The writing table holds a pool of blood, an overturned clock, and the unfinished note on Vicarage notepaper.

The Study Clock

A specific and plot-critical object. It is habitually kept a quarter of an hour fast. This fact is known to the narrator and Griselda but is not communicated to Inspector Slack during the chapter. The clock was overturned when Protheroe fell forward and stopped at 6:22. Slack treats this as the time of death; Griselda's closing observation reveals the true time indicated would have been 6:07, before Protheroe had arrived.

Vicarage Notepaper

The unfinished note is written on paper headed with the Vicarage address. It is headed "6:20" in Protheroe's hand and reads: "Dear Clement, Sorry I cannot wait any longer, but I must ..." before trailing off. Inspector Slack interprets this as evidence that Protheroe was shot mid-sentence.

Much Benham	The nearest town with a police station, two miles from the village. Inspector Slack drives from there.
The Village	Unnamed in this chapter. Protheroe announced his appointment at the Vicarage that morning in the village street. Lawrence Redding flees toward the village after leaving the Vicarage gate.
The False Telephone Call	Earlier in the day (prior to this chapter), the narrator was summoned by telephone to attend a dying parishioner. On arrival, the parishioner's wife denied having telephoned, and the sick man was better than expected. Haydock identifies this as a deliberate ruse to remove the narrator from the Vicarage. This is presented as established fact within the chapter, not speculation.
The Mauser .25	A pistol of small calibre identified by Haydock as the probable murder weapon based on the wound. The narrator recalls "our conversation of the night before" and "Lawrence Redding's admission" in connection with this weapon, indicating Redding had previously acknowledged some relationship to a Mauser .25. The exact nature of that admission is not stated in this chapter.
Social / Institutional Context	The village operates with a local constable (Hurst) who defers to an Inspector based in the nearest town. The Vicarage is a Church of England residence; the narrator is a clergyman with parish duties including visiting the sick. Colonel Protheroe is a figure of local authority and social prominence, described as unpopular but not typically a murder target.

CONFLICT

Chapter 5

The primary conflict is external: the murder of Colonel Protheroe and the immediate question of who killed him and how. A secondary, situational conflict arises between the narrator and Inspector Slack, the narrator possesses a crucial corrective fact (the clock runs fast) that would undermine Slack's confident reconstruction of the crime, but Slack's overbearing manner prevents the narrator from delivering it. The chapter escalates rather than resolves: by its close, the police have a working theory that the narrator and Griselda already know to be built on a false premise, raising the stakes for the investigation that follows.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 5

- **"A quarter past six":** Time Colonel Protheroe arrived at the Vicarage, per Mary.
- **"A couple of minutes":** Duration of Lawrence Redding's stay in the study, per Mary's inference (she did not hear him leave).
- **6:20:** The time written at the head of Protheroe's unfinished note.
- **6:22:** The time shown on the stopped, overturned study clock, the time Inspector Slack takes as the moment of death.

- **"Half an hour":** Dr. Haydock's estimate of how long Protheroe had been dead at the time of examination. He qualifies this as approximate.
- **"Ten minutes to [seven]":** Approximate time Haydock examined the body, as reconstructed by Inspector Slack.
- **"A quarter to seven":** Approximate time the body was discovered, per Slack's reconstruction.
- **"Five minutes to seven":** Time Inspector Slack received word of the death.
- **"Five minutes past seven":** Time of Inspector Slack's arrival, per his own watch.
- **"A quarter-past seven":** The time shown when the chapter's immediate action concludes ("Hours seemed to have passed, yet it was only a quarter-past seven").
- **"About five minutes ago":** Time of Griselda's return home, per Mary, relative to the chapter's closing scene.
- **The clock runs fifteen minutes fast:** Griselda's revelation establishes that 6:22 on the study clock corresponds to 6:07 real time, before Protheroe had arrived at the Vicarage (arrival confirmed at a quarter past six real time).
- **"The night before":** Referenced as the occasion of a prior conversation between the narrator and Lawrence Redding in which Redding made an admission about a Mauser .25. This is a relative time reference to an event outside this chapter.
- **"This morning":** Protheroe announced his appointment at the Vicarage in the village street that morning.
- **"This afternoon":** The false telephone call and the narrator's visit to the supposed dying parishioner occurred earlier the same afternoon.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 5

"He looked like a man who was on the point of going mad. His eyes stared in a peculiar manner, he was deathly white, and he was shaking and twitching all over."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Lawrence Redding's extreme agitation at the moment he is leaving the scene of the murder, making him the chapter's primary implicit suspect.

"Protheroe," he said. He began to laugh. "Protheroe? You're going to see Protheroe? Oh! you'll see Protheroe all right. Oh! my God, yes!"

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining and thematically critical: Redding's hysterical response to the narrator's innocent remark is the chapter's most charged piece of dialogue and the clearest signal that he knows what the narrator is about to find.

"There was a pool of some dark fluid on the desk by his head, and it was slowly dripping on to the floor with a horrible drip, drip, drip."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's most marketable and atmospherically powerful image; the repetition of "drip, drip, drip" establishes the horror of the discovery with deliberate, almost metronomic effect.

"That's suggestive, very. You were being got out of the way."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical: Haydock's identification of the false telephone call as a deliberate ruse confirms the murder was premeditated and that the killer had knowledge of the narrator's movements and Protheroe's appointment.

"Never did a man more determinedly strive to contradict his name."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Inspector Slack; the narrator's dry irony establishes both Slack's relentless energy and the narrative's wry, observational tone.

"But, Len," she said, "that makes the whole thing perfectly extraordinary. Because when that clock said twenty past six it was really only five minutes past, and at five minutes past I don't suppose Colonel Protheroe had even arrived at the house."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing revelation and its most plot-critical line: Griselda articulates the impossibility that the stopped clock creates, dismantling the police's working theory and opening the central mystery of the novel.

6 Chapter 6

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 6

The chapter opens with the vicar and Griselda still puzzling over the mystery of the clock, having made no progress. The vicar, nursing a grievance against Inspector Slack's rudeness, resolves to withhold his information until he can produce it to maximum effect. They learn that Slack has departed, locking the study and forbidding entry. Griselda goes to Old Hall to offer comfort to Anne Protheroe, while the vicar cancels his Sunday School preparation class. Dennis arrives home from a tennis party, thrilled by the murder, and goes to search the garden for footprints.

Griselda returns with a report on Anne Protheroe: the widow was quiet but appeared not grief-stricken so much as terrified, asking repeatedly whether anyone was suspected. The morning brings a sensational development when Mary the maid announces that Lawrence Redding has walked into the police station, thrown down a pistol, and confessed to the murder. Griselda refuses to believe it; the vicar is more troubled, recalling Lawrence's wild appearance the previous night and noting that the confession explains the tampered clock.

Miss Marple arrives through the garden window, unaware of the arrest. When told, she surprises everyone by expressing gladness at Lawrence's self-surrender and insisting that the confession proves his innocence rather than his guilt, reasoning that a premeditated murderer would not fall into the agitation the vicar describes. She begins to probe the details of the note and the clock before being interrupted by the arrival of Lettice Protheroe, who drifts in looking for a yellow beret she left in the locked study, makes a casually callous remark about having sometimes wanted to murder her father herself, and departs to tell Anne about the arrest. Miss Marple reveals she deliberately stopped Griselda from speaking, believing Lettice is acting on a definite idea of her own. The chapter closes with the arrival of Colonel Melchett, the Chief Constable.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 6

Griselda (vicar's wife)

Role: ally. Emotional state: disbelieving and vehement. She goes to Old Hall to comfort Anne Protheroe and returns with a perceptive account of Anne's demeanour. She argues forcefully that Lawrence is innocent, pointing out that Lawrence knew the clock was kept fast and would never have made the mistake of setting it to 6:22. She is silenced mid-sentence by Miss Marple's foot on hers and later asks why. Her relationship with the vicar is warm and collaborative; she addresses him as "Len."

Inspector Slack

Role: antagonist (offstage). Has locked the study, issued orders that no one may enter, and departed without speaking to the vicar. He had visited Anne Protheroe, learned she last saw her husband in the village at about a quarter to six, and announced he would return the next day. He had also sent word he would call on Miss Marple but telephoned to cancel after the arrest. The vicar nurses a specific grievance against him for prior rudeness and is planning a moment of vindication.

Dennis

Role: minor. Described as a boy of sixteen. He has just returned from a tennis party and reacts to the murder with "acute satisfaction," treating it as a real-life detective story. He tries to get into the locked study, searches the garden for footprints, and finds one in a flower bed he believes the police have overlooked. The vicar reflects charitably that at sixteen, death means very little and a real murder mystery is "one of the best things in life." Dennis is out of the house before breakfast the next morning to follow developments. His relationship to the vicar and Griselda is that of a ward or young relative living in the vicarage.

Mary (the maid)

Role: minor. She delivers the news of Lawrence Redding's arrest with "a kind of gloating exultation," having heard it from the baker. She also announces Colonel Melchett's arrival and has placed him in the drawing room. She is noted for entering without proper ceremony and for never tidying anything. Griselda corrects her about knocking on doors.

Anne Protheroe

Role: secondary (offstage in this chapter). Griselda reports that Anne last saw her husband in the village at about a quarter to six and could offer no information to Slack. She was "very quiet" when told of the death but appeared not grief-stricken so much as "terrified," with "a queer, watchful look in her eyes," and asked repeatedly whether anyone was suspected. Griselda notes she had seemed to rather dislike her husband in life. The vicar is consciously trying to keep her name out of the investigation, implying knowledge of a motive he does not wish to disclose.

Lawrence Redding

Role: secondary (offstage). Has walked into the police station the previous night, thrown a pistol on the table, and said "I did it." The vicar recalls meeting him outside the gate the previous night when he looked "like a madman." Griselda insists he is innocent and argues he would never have made the clock error attributed to him. Miss Marple agrees he is innocent, reasoning from his agitated state and the act of self-surrender. His relationship to Lettice Protheroe is referenced: Griselda mentions a possible secret engagement and the quarrel over Lettice's bathing dress.

Miss Marple

Role: ally. Physical description: not given in this chapter beyond "faintly flushed." She arrives through the garden window, having been unaware of the arrest. She had already formed a conviction about who committed the murder but states she has "not one shadow of proof." She had been expecting a visit from Inspector Slack, who cancelled after the arrest. She expresses gladness at Lawrence's self-surrender and argues, to the vicar's surprise, that the confession proves innocence rather than guilt. She reasons that a premeditated murderer would not fall into the agitation the vicar describes. She begins to focus on the note and the clock as the more curious elements. She deliberately steps on Griselda's foot to prevent her speaking when Lettice is present, and afterwards explains that Lettice is acting on a definite idea of her own. Her manner is gentle, self-deprecating, and socially precise.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: secondary. She arrives through the garden window, nodding and murmuring "Morning," and drops into a chair. She is described as taking "a pride in letting no hint of distress or emotion escape her." She says she never really thought anyone would murder her father, that many people wanted to, and that she herself had sometimes wanted to. She has come ostensibly to retrieve a yellow beret she left in the locked study; when told she cannot enter, she asks about getting in through the window. She mentions the quarrel over her bathing dress as the likely cause of Lawrence's action, calling the whole thing "silly." She departs saying she will go home and tell Anne about the arrest. Miss Marple observes that she is not as vague as she pretends and is acting on a definite idea.

Colonel Melchett

Role: minor (arrives at chapter's end, not yet seen). Identified as Chief Constable of the county. Mary has placed him in the drawing room. He has come to see the vicar.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (deceased). Dennis remarks it is lucky it was "only old Protheroe, whom everyone disliked." Lettice says many people wanted to murder him and she had sometimes wanted to herself. Griselda notes Anne seemed to rather dislike him.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 6

The Vicarage study clock

Established detail carried forward from the previous chapter. The clock is kept a quarter of an hour fast. Lawrence Redding knew this custom, having joked about it: "Keeping the vicar up to time!" Griselda argues this means Lawrence would never have set the clock back to 6:22 as an alibi, because he would have known the correct time and set it to something plausible. The clock stopped at 6:22; the note found with the body was dated 6:20.

Colonel Protheroe's note

He was found shot through the back of the head while writing a note saying he could not wait any longer. The note was dated 6:20. The clock on the table was overturned and stopped at 6:22. These two details together constitute the puzzle the vicar and Griselda have been unable to resolve.

Old Hall

The Protheroe family home. Griselda visits it to comfort Anne. Inspector Slack had already been there to break the news and conduct a preliminary interview before departing.

The village

Anne Protheroe last saw her husband in the village at about a quarter to six.

The police station

Lawrence Redding went there himself the previous night, threw the pistol on the table, and confessed.

Sunday School preparation class

A weekly event at the Vicarage, scheduled for 7:45 on Sunday evenings. The vicar cancels it given the circumstances by telephoning the teachers.

Mourning customs

Lettice dismisses the idea of wearing mourning as "an awfully archaic idea," establishing a social norm she is consciously rejecting.

Criminal libel

Miss Marple references it as a reason to be careful about naming suspects without proof.

CONFLICT

Chapter 6

The chapter's primary conflict is interpretive: whether Lawrence Redding's confession indicates guilt or innocence. The vicar is inclined toward guilt, troubled by Lawrence's wild appearance the previous night and the clock evidence; Griselda and Miss Marple argue for innocence, with Miss Marple reasoning that a premeditated killer would not behave as Lawrence did. A secondary conflict is the vicar's withheld information about the clock and his planned vindication of Inspector Slack's rudeness. Both conflicts remain unresolved at chapter's end, escalating with the arrival of the Chief Constable.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 6

- Griselda visited Old Hall and returned "in about an hour's time."
- Inspector Slack visited Old Hall, spoke with Anne Protheroe, and announced he would return "on the morrow for a fuller interview."
- Anne Protheroe last saw her husband "in the village about a quarter to six" (the previous day).
- Lawrence Redding went to the police station and confessed "last night, last thing"
- Dennis was "up and about and out of the house long before breakfast" the morning after the murder.
- The breakfast scene, at which Mary delivers the news and Miss Marple and Lettice arrive, takes place the morning after the murder.
- Colonel Protheroe's note was dated 6:20.
- The clock on the table was overturned and stopped at 6:22.
- The Vicarage clock is kept a quarter of an hour fast.
- The Sunday School preparation class is held weekly at 7:45 (day not specified in this chapter, but the vicar rings to cancel it).
- Inspector Slack had sent word he would visit Miss Marple that morning but telephoned to cancel after the arrest.
- Dennis is identified as sixteen years old.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 6

"You don't know, my dear," I said mildly. "You've never done one."

WHY IT LANDS A moment of dry clerical wit that defines the narrator's voice and lightens the tension of the argument about whether a murderer would be careful about clocks.

"No, dear, I didn't mean that at all. I dare say everyone thinks it is somebody different. That is why it is so important to have proofs."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's first significant speech in the chapter, establishing her method and her distance from the crowd's assumptions; thematically central to the novel's interest in evidence over intuition.

"Oh!" said Miss Marple, with a deep sigh. "I am so glad, so very glad."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's reaction to learning Lawrence gave himself up, which surprises the vicar and signals her contrary reading of the confession; a character-defining moment that marks her as the sharpest intelligence in the room.

"I know that I am very often rather foolish and don't take in things as I should, but I really do not see your point."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's characteristic self-deprecating preamble before delivering a precise and devastating logical observation; establishes her voice and her habit of concealing acuity behind modesty.

"Lots of people wanted to, I'm sure. There are times when I'd have liked to do it myself."

WHY IT LANDS Lettice Protheroe on her father's murder, spoken with deliberate coolness; a character-defining line that is simultaneously shocking and revealing of her emotional detachment, and that Miss Marple later identifies as purposeful rather than vague.

"I don't think, you know, that that child is half so vague as she pretends to be. She's got a very definite idea in her head and she's acting upon it."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's assessment of Lettice after her departure, a worldbuilding-critical observation that reframes Lettice's entire appearance in the chapter and signals a line of investigation the novel will pursue.

7 Chapter 7

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 7

The chapter opens at the Vicarage, where Colonel Melchett, the local police authority, calls on the narrator (the vicar, Clement) the morning after the murder of Colonel Protheroe. Melchett relays the key development: Lawrence Redding walked into the police station the previous night at approximately ten o'clock, surrendered a pistol, and confessed to the killing. Redding's stated account is minimal, he claims he came to the Vicarage, found Protheroe there, they quarrelled, and he shot him, but he refuses to elaborate on the cause of the quarrel. Melchett privately asks Clement whether the trouble involved Protheroe's daughter, and Clement deflects without confirming or denying specifics.

Melchett and Clement then walk next door to the home of Dr. Haydock, the police surgeon, who has just returned from an overnight confinement case. Haydock produces the recovered bullet (.25 calibre) and confirms death was practically instantaneous. The conversation turns to why no one heard the shot, with Clement offering a structural explanation about the house's layout and closed doors, and Haydock raising the possibility of a silencer, a suggestion Melchett dismisses because Redding denied using one.

The chapter's central crisis emerges when Clement mentions that Redding must have shot Protheroe only minutes before Clement himself arrived at the house, recalling Redding's suspicious words at the gate. Haydock flatly contradicts this: based on the state of the body, specifically, that the blood had begun to congeal, Protheroe had been dead considerably longer than a few minutes. If Redding claims he shot Protheroe at a quarter to seven, Haydock insists, Redding is lying. The chapter ends with Melchett resolving to go to the police station to confront Redding directly.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 7

Clement (the narrator / vicar)

Not physically described in this chapter. He is the first-person narrator and host of the scene. He deflects Melchett's question about the quarrel's cause, stating he cannot say more "at the present juncture", indicating he holds information he is withholding. He contributes a structural explanation for why the shot was not heard, and he volunteers the detail about Redding's suspicious words at the gate, which inadvertently triggers the chapter's central revelation. His recollection of Miss Marple's words ("remembering Miss Marple's words") suggests he has been in prior conversation with her about the case. Role: protagonist / narrator.

Griselda

Referenced but not present. Clement's wife ("missus"). Melchett inquires whether the murder has upset her; Clement reports she has "taken it very well." Role: referenced / offstage.

Lawrence Redding

Not present in this chapter but central to all discussion. He surrendered to police the previous night at approximately ten o'clock, threw down a pistol, and stated: "Here I am. I did it." He claims he came to see Clement, found Protheroe there, they had words, and he shot him. He refuses to state the cause of the quarrel. He denied using a silencer when asked by Inspector Slack. His confession is undermined by Haydock's medical evidence by the chapter's end. Melchett notes he "always struck me as a decent young chap" and that he had previously been "forbidden the house." Role: suspect / offstage.

Dr. Haydock

The police surgeon and Clement's next-door neighbour. He has been up most of the night, first attending to the murder scene, then called away to a confinement case. He is described as appearing "much more jovial and good-humoured this morning," seeming "like a man who was decorously trying to subdue unusually good spirits", a detail the narrator flags as notable. He produces the recovered bullet (.25 calibre) and confirms death was practically instantaneous. He raises the silencer possibility. When Clement's timeline implies Protheroe was shot only minutes before Clement arrived, Haydock reacts with sudden vehemence, insisting it is "impossible" on medical grounds (blood had begun to congeal), and his demeanour changes markedly: "his face had changed. It had gone suddenly grey and old." His emotional shift is observed by Clement but not explained. Role: expert witness / ally (with noted behavioural ambiguity, inferred).

Colonel Protheroe

Deceased; not present. Referenced throughout as the murder victim. Melchett states plainly: "Not that I liked him. I didn't. Nobody did, for that matter." He was shot through the head while seated and writing. Role: victim / referenced.

Miss Marple

Not present. Referenced by Melchett, who wonders whether she heard the shot (her house or position is implied to be near the study window). Clement notes she visited the Vicarage earlier that morning and did not mention hearing anything, which he takes as evidence she did not. Clement also references "Miss Marple's words" as informing his thinking about the timeline, indicating prior off-page conversation. Role: referenced / offstage.

Inspector Slack

Not present. Referenced by Melchett as having searched the scene and questioned Redding about a silencer. Role: referenced / offstage.

Protheroe's daughter

Not named in this chapter. Referenced by Melchett in his private question to Clement about whether she was the cause of the quarrel ("did he seduce the daughter, or what?"). Role: referenced / offstage.

Haydock's servant

Unnamed. Opens the door and shows Melchett and Clement into the dining room. Role: minor / functional.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 7

Haydock's house	Described as "next door" to the Vicarage. Haydock is eating breakfast in the dining room when Clement and Melchett arrive.
The police station	Referenced as the location where Redding surrendered and is currently being held. Melchett resolves to go there at the chapter's end.
Point .25 calibre pistol	The murder weapon's calibre, confirmed by Haydock from the recovered bullet. Haydock states he will keep technical details for the inquest.
The inquest	Referenced as the formal proceeding at which Haydock will present his medical findings. Not yet held at this point in the narrative.
Shell shock / aftereffects of war	Raised by Melchett as a possible legal defence for Redding, a period-specific legal and social concept, suggesting the setting is post-World War I. Melchett frames it as viable "especially if no very adequate motive turns up."
The clock / altered time	Clement references that whoever shot Protheroe "alter[ed] the clock hands back to 6:20" as part of the sequence of events. This detail is stated as established fact within Clement's reasoning, though its source is not explained within this chapter.
Blood congealment as forensic indicator	Haydock's medical argument rests on the state of the blood at the scene, specifically that it "had begun to congeal", as evidence that Protheroe had been dead longer than a few minutes when Haydock examined the body. He states the minimum elapsed time as twenty minutes, with thirty to thirty-five minutes as his working estimate, and rules out anything less.

CONFLICT

Chapter 7

The chapter presents an external investigative conflict that sharpens into a forensic crisis. The apparent resolution of the murder, Redding's confession, is destabilised by Haydock's medical evidence, which makes Redding's stated timeline impossible. The stakes are significant: if Redding is lying about when he committed the murder, either he did not commit it at all or the circumstances are materially different from what he claims. The conflict escalates rather than resolves, ending with Melchett moving to confront Redding directly.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 7

- Redding claims he shot Protheroe at "a quarter to seven" (6:45).
- The clock hands were altered back to 6:20 (stated by Clement as an established fact of the case).

- Clement states he encountered Redding outside the gate "a few minutes before" he entered the house and found the body, implying the shooting occurred only minutes before his arrival.
- Haydock's medical estimate of time of death: a minimum of twenty minutes before he examined the body, with twenty-five, thirty, or thirty-five minutes all possible, but anything less ruled out on the grounds that the blood had begun to congeal.
- Haydock was "up most of the night", first at the murder scene, then called away to a confinement case.
- Miss Marple visited the Vicarage "just now" (i.e., earlier the same morning as this scene).
- The chapter takes place the morning after the murder.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 7

"Good morning, vicar. Nasty business, eh? Poor old Protheroe. Not that I liked him. I didn't. Nobody did, for that matter."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the victim's universal unpopularity in a single breath, efficiently disposing of a wide field of motive.

"I must say I was rather taken aback when I heard the fellow had marched in and given himself up."

WHY IT LANDS Captures the central puzzle of the chapter, a confession that, by the chapter's end, has become more suspicious than exculpatory.

"Here I am. I did it."

WHY IT LANDS Redding's reported words to police; the bluntness is character-defining and carries an ambiguity, bravado, guilt, or self-sacrifice, that the chapter immediately begins to complicate.

"It struck me that Haydock was looking much more jovial and good-humoured this morning. He seemed like a man who was decorously trying to subdue unusually good spirits."

WHY IT LANDS A quietly ominous character observation; Clement's narration flags Haydock's mood as incongruous without yet explaining it, planting suspicion.

"I tell you it's impossible. If Redding says he killed Protheroe at a quarter to seven, then Redding lies. Hang it all, I tell you I'm a doctor, and I know. The blood had begun to congeal."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's pivot: Haydock's vehement contradiction of Redding's confession, delivered with an emotional force, "he roared", that itself invites scrutiny.

"Anyway, there wouldn't have been time for a quarrel. To creep up, shoot him, alter the clock hands back to 6:20, and leave again would have taken him all his time."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical: Clement's summary of the physical sequence of the crime, establishing the altered clock as a known fact and the compressed timeline as a structural constraint on all theories of the murder.

8 Chapter 8

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 8

The chapter opens with the narrator (the Vicar, Mr. Clement) and Dr. Haydock traveling to the police station, where they confront Lawrence Redding, who has confessed to murdering Colonel Protheroe. Colonel Melchett questions Redding about the circumstances of the killing, specifically why he carried a pistol and why the study clock had been altered to show 6:22. Redding's answers are evasive and unconvincing; the narrator explicitly notes he does not believe Redding is telling the truth. The interrogation is interrupted when a constable delivers an urgent note to the Vicar from Anne Protheroe, begging him to come to her immediately. The narrator observes Redding's face as the note is handed over and sees an expression of anguish and despair, which leads him to infer that Redding's confession is a self-sacrificial act to protect Anne. Melchett instructs Inspector Slack to investigate Redding's movements earlier in the day, and the narrator discloses what he had previously witnessed at the studio. The group then travels to Old Hall, where they interview the Protheroe butler, who provides an account of the previous day's movements and reveals that a Mrs. Lestrangle visited Colonel Protheroe the evening before his death, a detail that surprises Melchett. The party then meets Anne Protheroe in her bedroom, where she calmly and bluntly confesses to shooting her husband, confirms she knew of Redding's false confession, and claims she retrieved the pistol from her husband's dressing-table drawer. The chapter ends with the narrator questioning the Protheroe valet, who states definitively that no pistol was kept in the dressing-table, establishing that Anne has lied about the weapon's origin.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 8

Dr. Haydock

Role: ally, minor. Travels with the narrator to the police station and to Old Hall. Asks Redding a pointed question during the interrogation, specifically where on the body Protheroe was shot, which exposes Redding's uncertainty. At Old Hall, he monitors Anne Protheroe's physical condition, feels her pulse, and advises Melchett that she should not be left alone as she might "do herself a mischief." His concern appears medical and protective rather than investigative.

Inspector Slack

Role: minor, law enforcement. Present at the police station. Receives Melchett's instruction to investigate Redding's movements earlier in the day. Does not speak directly in this chapter.

Lawrence Redding

Role: suspect / key figure. Pale, strained, but composed. Has made a written confession to murdering Colonel Protheroe. During questioning, he is evasive about why he carried a pistol and visibly confused and frightened when the altered clock is mentioned. When asked where on the body he shot Protheroe, he cannot answer with certainty. The narrator states outright that he does not believe Redding is telling the truth. When the note from Anne arrives, Redding's face shows "a terrible look of anguish and despair," which the narrator interprets as evidence that his confession is a self-sacrificial act to protect Anne. Motivation: stated by Redding as guilt; inferred by the narrator as love and self-sacrifice for Anne Protheroe.

Colonel Melchett

Role: authority figure / investigator. Leads the questioning of Redding and later of Anne and the butler. Nervous and snorting during the Redding interrogation. Takes the hint from the narrator's meaningful glance when Anne's note arrives. Pursues the interview with Anne gently but persistently. Surprised by the revelation of Mrs. Lestrangle's visit. Accepts Haydock's medical advice regarding Anne.

Anne Protheroe

Role: key suspect. Encountered in bed at Old Hall, pale with bright eyes and a look of "grim determination." Confesses calmly and bluntly to shooting her husband, stating she has hated him for a long time. Confirms she knew of Redding's false confession and calls it "frightfully noble of him, but very silly," attributing it to his being "very much in love" with her. Claims she took the pistol from her husband's dressing-table drawer, intending it originally for herself. States she went to the Vicarage window after six o'clock, saw her husband, and fired. Mentions that Miss Marple saw her and that they spoke briefly. Hesitates noticeably when asked whether she told Redding what she had done, the narrator flags this hesitation twice. Her claim about the pistol's origin is disproved by the valet at the chapter's end. Emotional state: controlled, dismissive of further questioning, physically unwell (nausea). Motivation: stated as long-standing hatred of her husband; the lie about the pistol introduces doubt about the full truth of her account.

Colonel Protheroe (deceased)

Role: victim, referenced/offstage. The subject of the investigation. Referenced through the butler's account of his movements the previous day: lunched at home, spent the afternoon in his study, had tea at four-thirty, departed for the village by car at five-thirty. Had a loud voice when angry. Had previously quarrelled with Redding and given orders that Redding was not to be admitted to the house again. Met privately with Mrs. Lestrangle the evening before his death. No pistol was kept in his dressing-table, according to his valet.

The Butler (unnamed)

Role: minor, functional. Employed at Old Hall. Provides a detailed account of the previous day's household movements. Reveals that Redding's last visit was on Tuesday, that the quarrel between Redding and Protheroe concerned a portrait Redding had been painting of Miss Lettice, and that Redding appeared "rather amused" when he left. Discloses the visit of Mrs. Lestrangle the evening before the murder.

Miss Lettice (Protheroe)

Role: referenced/offstage. Colonel Protheroe's daughter (relationship inferred from context; not explicitly stated as such in this chapter). Went out to a tennis party in the two-seater after luncheon. The quarrel between Redding and Colonel Protheroe is said to have concerned a portrait Redding had been painting of her.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: minor, newly introduced. A woman unknown to the butler who visited Old Hall the evening before the murder, asking specifically for Colonel Protheroe. She waited in the morning room and met with the colonel for approximately half an hour after dinner. The colonel let her out himself. Her visit is described as "curious" and "really very curious" by Melchett. No further information about her is provided in this chapter.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Anne Protheroe states that Miss Marple was in her garden and saw Anne entering or leaving the Vicarage, and that they spoke briefly.

Mr. Dennis Clement

Role: referenced/offstage. Visited Old Hall the afternoon before the murder. Relationship to the narrator implied by shared surname but not explicitly stated in this chapter.

Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. Was at Old Hall for some time the day before the murder.

Colonel Protheroe's valet (unnamed)

Role: minor, functional. Described as "thin" and "cadaverous-looking" Questioned by the narrator on impulse. States definitively that no pistol was kept in the colonel's dressing-table, that he would have seen it if so. This testimony directly contradicts Anne Protheroe's account.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 8

Old Hall

The Protheroe family residence. Staffed with at least a butler and a valet. Has a drawing-room, a study, a morning room, and upstairs bedrooms. The butler is described as "very correct" with "just the right amount of gloom in his bearing," suggesting a formal, upper-class household. The colonel had a car available for use.

The Vicarage

The crime scene, established in prior chapters. Referenced in this chapter as the location where Protheroe was shot. Has a study with a window accessible from outside. Anne states she approached via the window.

The Studio

Referenced by the narrator as the location where he previously witnessed something involving Anne Protheroe and Lawrence Redding, which he now discloses to Melchett. No further description is given in this chapter.

Social and Legal Procedures

The chapter depicts standard English investigative procedure of the period: a formal written statement, caution that the suspect need not answer questions, the suggestion of a solicitor, and the role of the county colonel (Melchett) as a figure of authority alongside the professional inspector (Slack). The class hierarchy of the household, butler, valet, and the deference shown to Melchett, reflects the social world of the novel.

The Altered Clock

The study clock at the Vicarage had its hands moved to show 6:22. This is treated as a significant clue by Melchett. Redding's reaction to being asked about it, a "look of fear" followed by a halting admission that he altered it, is noted as suspicious by the narrator.

The Pistol

Described as belonging to Colonel Protheroe. Anne claims she retrieved it from a drawer in his dressing-table. The valet's testimony establishes no such pistol was kept there, making the weapon's true origin an open question at the chapter's close.

Portrait of Miss Lettice

Lawrence Redding had been painting a portrait of Miss Lettice Protheroe. This portrait is identified by the butler as the cause of the quarrel between Redding and Colonel Protheroe, after which Protheroe barred Redding from the house.

CONFLICT

Chapter 8

The chapter contains layered external and internal conflict. Externally, the investigation is complicated by two competing confessions, Redding's and Anne Protheroe's, each of which the evidence suggests is false or incomplete. The primary dramatic tension is the question of who actually killed Colonel Protheroe and why both Redding and Anne appear willing to claim responsibility. Internally, the narrator is caught between pastoral loyalty to his parishioners and his duty to the truth, a tension resolved in this chapter when he discloses what he witnessed at the studio. The chapter escalates rather than resolves: Anne's confession introduces new contradictions, and the discovery of her lie about the pistol deepens the mystery at the chapter's close.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 8

- After luncheon: Mrs. Protheroe went to lie down; Colonel Protheroe went to his study; Miss Lettice went out to a tennis party in the two-seater.
- Four-thirty: Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe had tea in the drawing-room.
- Five-thirty: Car ordered to take them to the village.
- After five-thirty: Mr. Clement (the narrator) rang up Old Hall; the butler told him they had started.
- Tuesday afternoon: Redding's last visit to Old Hall (the quarrel with Protheroe occurred on this occasion; the murder takes place on a subsequent day, making Tuesday at minimum two days prior, though the exact gap is not stated in this chapter).
- The day before the murder: Mr. Dennis Clement visited in the afternoon; Dr. Stone was present for some time.
- The evening before the murder: Mrs. Lestrangle visited, asked for Colonel Protheroe, waited in the morning room, met with him for approximately half an hour after dinner. The colonel let her out himself.
- Time of Anne Protheroe's arrival at the Vicarage: "after six, quarter, twenty past, something like that", Anne's own estimate, imprecise.
- The clock in the Vicarage study was altered to show 6:22.
- Lawrence Redding's written confession states he arrived at the Vicarage at "approximately a quarter to seven."
- No specific date is given for the present action of the chapter.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 8

"You know I don't like the look of this. I don't like it. There's something here we don't understand."

WHY IT LANDS Haydock's opening remark establishes the chapter's governing mood of unease and signals to the reader that the apparent facts of the case are not to be trusted.

"I've nothing to hide. I killed Protheroe."

WHY IT LANDS Redding's flat declaration, delivered as an interruption, is the chapter's first dramatic irony: the narrator's subsequent observations make clear the statement is almost certainly false, and its very forcefulness reads as performance rather than confession.

"Please, please, come to me. I don't know what to do. It is all too awful. I want to tell someone. Please come immediately and bring anyone you like with you., Anne Protheroe."

WHY IT LANDS The note functions as the chapter's pivot, redirecting the investigation from Redding to Anne, and its desperate register contrasts sharply with the composed woman the reader meets moments later.

"I remembered Anne Protheroe sitting on my sofa and saying: 'I'm a desperate woman,' and my heart grew heavy within me. I saw now the possible reason for Lawrence Redding's heroic self-accusation."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's moment of inference, marked here as inferred, connects earlier events to the present and reveals his emotional investment in the case; it is also the first explicit articulation of the self-sacrifice theory.

"It's quite true. I suppose I've said it rather bluntly, but I never can go into hysterics over anything. I've hated him for a long time, and yesterday I shot him."

WHY IT LANDS Anne's confession is character-defining: her self-aware composure, her pre-emptive acknowledgment of her own bluntness, and the flat statement of long-standing hatred together establish her as a figure of formidable control, and raise the question of whether that control is concealing further deception.

"Mrs. Protheroe had lied about the pistol. Why?"

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing lines, the narrator's two-sentence discovery and question, crystallise the mystery the chapter has been building toward and leave the reader with an unresolved contradiction that drives the narrative forward.

9 Chapter 9

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 9

Colonel Melchett, the Chief Constable, arrives at Miss Marple's home accompanied by the vicar (the narrator, Clement) to question her about what she observed the previous evening from her garden. Miss Marple, eager and precise, leads them outside to demonstrate the geography of the lane, the Vicarage, and the studio she lets to Mr. Redding. She provides a detailed, time-anchored account: Mrs. Protheroe passed her garden just after a quarter past six, entered the Vicarage by the back gate, returned almost immediately when she found the colonel absent, and proceeded to the studio. Mr. Redding arrived shortly after from the village, went directly to the studio, and the two remained inside for approximately ten minutes before emerging and walking together along the lane, where they were joined by Dr. Stone and, likely, Miss Cram.

Miss Marple then astonishes both men by calmly anticipating that Mrs. Protheroe has confessed to the murder. She dismisses the confession as false, arguing that Mrs. Protheroe carried no handbag and had nowhere to conceal a pistol. She also challenges the significance of the overturned clock stopped at 6:22, prompting Melchett to learn for the first time that the vicar had information about the clock that Inspector Slack had refused to hear. Miss Marple advises that if each suspect is told the other is not believed, both may speak more freely. When Melchett insists Redding and Mrs. Protheroe are the only people with motive, Miss Marple quietly counts on her fingers and produces at least seven alternative suspects in St. Mary Mead, leaving the Chief Constable nearly apoplectic.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 9

Colonel Melchett (Chief Constable)

Described as adopting a "bluff military manner which he had an idea was attractive to elderly ladies." He is persistent (pressing Miss Marple on the possibility of a concealed pistol), prone to frustration ("I shall go into a lunatic asylum"), and ultimately left flustered by Miss Marple's revelation of seven suspects. He declines the offered cherry brandy on principle ("Nothing till lunch time, that's my motto"). His stated objective is to gather witness testimony and assess the credibility of Mrs. Protheroe's confession. Role: authority figure, investigator.

Clement (the vicar/narrator)

Narrates in first person. He introduces Melchett to Miss Marple and offers a candid pre-visit assessment of her: dependable on observed facts, but possessed of "a powerful imagination" who "systematically thinks the worst of everyone." He is drawn into the conversation when the clock evidence surfaces, Melchett reproaches him for not having told Inspector Slack, and Clement defends himself by noting Slack "wouldn't let me." His inferred role is that of a moderating presence and witness to the investigation. Role: narrator, minor participant.

Mrs. Protheroe (Anne Protheroe)

Does not appear in the chapter but is central to it. Miss Marple reports she passed the garden just after a quarter past six, admired the roses, said she was calling for her husband, entered the Vicarage by the back gate, returned almost immediately, and went to the studio. She and Redding emerged approximately ten minutes later, appearing happy and at ease. She has apparently confessed to the murder, claiming she shot her husband at twenty minutes past six with a pistol she brought herself. Miss Marple flatly disbelieves this confession. Role: offstage suspect.

Mr. Redding (Lawrence Redding)

Does not appear in the chapter but is described by Miss Marple's testimony. He arrived along the lane from the village, paused at the Vicarage gate and "looked all round", he did not see Miss Marple because she was bent over pulling up a dandelion. He went directly to the studio without approaching the house. He and Mrs. Protheroe emerged together after about ten minutes, "smiling and talking" and appearing "very happy to be together." Melchett identifies him as one of only two people with motive. Role: offstage suspect.

Dr. Stone

Mentioned briefly. He came down the path from the Hall, climbed over the stile, and joined Redding and Mrs. Protheroe as they walked toward the village. No further description or characterization provided in this chapter. Role: minor, referenced.

Miss Cram

Tentatively identified by Miss Marple at the end of the lane, recognized by her short skirts. Miss Marple is not certain it was her but thinks so. Role: minor, referenced.

Lettice

Referenced by Miss Marple in passing: "I think dear Lettice thought so, too. She's really a very sharp girl. Not always very scrupulous, I'm afraid." No further identification or context provided within this chapter. Role: referenced/offstage.

Inspector Slack

Not present. Referenced by Clement as the officer who refused to hear his information about the clock the previous night. Role: referenced/offstage.

Colonel Protheroe

The murder victim. Referenced throughout as the subject of the investigation. Mrs. Protheroe claims to have shot him at twenty minutes past six. Role: referenced/offstage (deceased).

The diminutive maid

Unnamed. Admits the visitors and shows them into the drawing-room. Role: minor functional.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 9

The lane	Runs along the bottom of Miss Marple's garden. Mrs. Protheroe came along it from the village. Mr. Redding also arrived along it from the village. At the lane's end, the group was joined by Miss Cram (tentatively).
The Vicarage and its back gate	Accessible from the lane. Mrs. Protheroe entered through the back gate and crossed the garden toward the house, then returned when she found the colonel absent.
The studio	A building adjacent to or within the Vicarage grounds, let by the vicar (Clement) to Mr. Redding for use as an artist's studio. Mrs. Protheroe went there after finding the Vicarage empty; Redding went directly there on arrival. Both remained inside approximately ten minutes.
The path to the Hall and the stile	A path opposite the lane, with a stile, leads to "the Hall." Dr. Stone came down this path and climbed over the stile to join Redding and Mrs. Protheroe.
St. Mary Mead	The village in which the story is set. Melchett's incredulity at the idea of seven suspects, "Seven people? In St. Mary Mead?", establishes it as a small, ostensibly quiet community.
The church clock	Used as a time-keeping reference by Miss Marple. She anchors her testimony to it: the quarter-hour chime (6:15) and the half-hour chime (6:30) bracket the events she describes.
The overturned clock stopped at 6:22	Previously known to Clement but not yet communicated to Melchett. Its significance to the investigation is implied but not fully explained within this chapter. Melchett references it as corroborating Mrs. Protheroe's claimed time of the shooting.
Cherry brandy	Miss Marple offers it to her guests, describing it as her own making from "a receipt of my grandmother's." Melchett declines on principle. Functions as a small piece of domestic characterization.
The police station	Mentioned in the chapter's opening sentence as the place where Melchett left a message before coming to Miss Marple's. No further detail.

CONFLICT

Chapter 9

The chapter's primary conflict is investigative and epistemological: Colonel Melchett arrives inclined to credit Mrs. Protheroe's confession and the physical evidence of the stopped clock, while Miss Marple systematically dismantles both. The external conflict is the murder investigation; the internal conflict belongs to Melchett, whose professional confidence is repeatedly punctured by a woman he arrived prepared to patronize. The chapter escalates rather than resolves: the confession is discredited, the clock evidence is complicated, and Miss Marple's revelation of seven possible suspects widens the investigation dramatically rather than narrowing it.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 9

- Mrs. Protheroe passed Miss Marple's garden **just after a quarter past six** (6:15), confirmed by the church clock chiming the quarter.
- Mrs. Protheroe entered the Vicarage by the back gate and returned "almost immediately", no precise duration given.
- Mr. Redding arrived at the Vicarage gate shortly after Mrs. Protheroe went to the studio, no precise interval stated.
- Redding and Mrs. Protheroe remained in the studio for **approximately ten minutes**, emerging after the church clock chimed the half-hour (6:30).
- A shot was heard by Miss Marple "**quite five or ten minutes**" after Mrs. Protheroe went to the studio, placing it roughly between 6:20 and 6:25, and appeared to come from the woods.
- Mrs. Protheroe's confession states she shot her husband at **twenty minutes past six** (6:20).
- The overturned clock in the investigation points to **6:22** as the time of death.
- All events described by Miss Marple occurred "**yesterday evening**" relative to the chapter's present action. No calendar date is given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 9

"I think she is quite dependable. That is, in so far as she is talking of what she has actually seen. Beyond that, of course, when you get on to what she thinks, well, that is another matter. She has a powerful imagination and systematically thinks the worst of everyone."

WHY IT LANDS Clement's pre-visit assessment of Miss Marple establishes the dramatic irony that will run through the chapter: the man vouching for her reliability does not yet understand how right she will prove to be.

"As a matter of fact, he didn't see me. Because, you see, just at that minute I was bending right over, trying to get up one of those nasty dandelions, you know. So difficult."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's explanation of why Redding did not spot her is delivered with perfect innocence, but the detail, that she was invisible at the precise moment he "looked all round", is the chapter's most quietly devastating piece of testimony.

"My dear Colonel Melchett, you know what young women are nowadays. Not ashamed to show exactly how the creator made them. She hadn't so much as a handkerchief in the top of her stocking."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's refutation of the concealed-pistol theory is both her sharpest logical move and her most marketable line, comic, precise, and entirely characteristic of her manner of deploying propriety as a forensic instrument.

"If you were to tell Mr. Redding what Mrs. Protheroe has done and then explain that you don't really believe it is her. And then if you were to go to Mrs. Protheroe and tell her that Mr. Redding is all right, why then, they might each of them tell you the truth."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's investigative suggestion reveals her understanding of the suspects' psychology, each is confessing to protect the other, and positions her as the chapter's true detective intelligence despite holding no official role.

"Oh! yes, indeed. Why, one, two, three, four, five, six, yes, and a possible seven. I can think of at least seven people who might be very glad to have Colonel Protheroe out of the way."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing revelation: Miss Marple's count of seven suspects in a village Melchett considers too small for serious wickedness is the chapter's structural climax and its most potent hook for the reader.

"A nice honourable upright soldier like you doesn't know about these things, Colonel Melchett."

WHY IT LANDS The line that nearly causes Melchett apoplexy; it crystallizes Miss Marple's method, the velvet-wrapped demolition of male authority, and is the chapter's most purely character-defining moment for her.

10 Chapter 10

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 10

The chapter opens with the narrator (the Vicar, referred to as "Len" by his wife Griselda) and Colonel Melchett departing from Miss Marple's house. Melchett is dismissive of Miss Marple's capabilities, though he concedes her value as a witness, particularly in confirming that Mrs. Protheroe carried no pistol. The two men briefly inspect the studio, a rough shed with a skylight and no windows, before Melchett announces he will visit the Vicarage with the inspector while the narrator heads to the police station.

Returning home, the narrator finds Griselda entertaining Miss Gladys Cram, Dr. Stone's secretary, who has arrived ostensibly to volunteer with the Guides but is transparently motivated by curiosity about the murder. Miss Cram gossips freely: she expresses disbelief that Lawrence Redding gave himself up, speculates about Lettice Protheroe's unhappiness at home with her stepmother, and characterises Dr. Stone as so absorbed in his archaeological work that he forgets his meals. She departs after learning that Redding's confession has not been accepted by the police.

The narrator then recounts the morning's events to Griselda, who connects the revelation that Lawrence Redding was involved with Anne (not Lettice) Protheroe to hints Miss Marple had dropped the previous day. The narrator questions the maid Mary about whether she heard a shot, not the one that killed Colonel Protheroe, but a separate shot from the direction of the wood. Mary confirms she heard such a shot, estimating it occurred ten to fifteen minutes before Redding arrived. Griselda offers a practical explanation for why witnesses assumed the shot came from the wood rather than the house. The chapter closes with Mary announcing that Colonel Melchett and the inspector have returned and are waiting in the study.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 10

Colonel Melchett

Role: ally (authority figure). Opens the chapter dismissing Miss Marple as a "wizened-up old maid" who has "hardly been out of this village all her life," yet grudgingly acknowledges her value as a witness. He inspects the studio with the narrator, then departs for the Vicarage with the inspector. His emotional state is impatient and somewhat condescending. Objective (stated): to conduct the official investigation. He reappears at the chapter's close, summoning the narrator to the study.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Discussed but not present. Melchett disparages her; the narrator defends her, asserting that if Miss Marple says Mrs. Protheroe had no pistol, it can be taken as fact. Griselda later suggests Miss Marple had already been hinting at the Anne–Lawrence connection "yesterday."

Griselda (Mrs. Clement)

Role: ally. The narrator's wife. She is entertaining Miss Cram when the narrator returns. Griselda is characterised as sharp ("plain speaking"), not given to cattiness (she compliments Lettice Protheroe's figure without malice), and practically minded about household economics. She draws the connection between the morning's revelations and Miss Marple's earlier hints. Her emotional state is lively and curious.

Miss Gladys Cram

Role: minor. Dr. Stone's secretary. She arrives at the Vicarage claiming to offer help with the Guides, though both Griselda and the narrator are certain curiosity about the murder is her real motive. Physical description: legs in "particularly shiny pink stockings," wearing "pink striped silk knickers," "golden shingled head." She laughs uproariously, showing "every tooth she possessed." She is voluble, good-humoured, and unguarded, gossiping about Lettice Protheroe's unhappiness at home and about Dr. Stone's absorption in his work. She is startled to learn Redding gave himself up and dismisses the act as foolish. Her stated objective is to help with the Guides; her inferred objective is to gather information about the murder. She mentions that Dr. Stone is "a bit under the weather this morning" and not working

Lawrence Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. Miss Cram expresses surprise and scorn that he gave himself up to the police ("Well, of all the poor fish!"), describing him as "just like a movie star" with "such a nice smile." The narrator confirms to her that the police are not satisfied with Redding's story but declines to explain why someone might falsely confess.

Mrs. Anne Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Griselda identifies her as the person Lawrence Redding "was after all along," distinguishing her from Lettice. The narrator confirms this with averted eyes.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Miss Cram describes her as "too high and mighty," says she "fancies herself the country," and would not demean herself to notice a working girl. Miss Cram also mentions having heard Lettice speak of earning her own living, attributing this to unhappiness at home with her stepmother. Griselda notes she would make a good mannequin given her "lovely figure."

Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. Miss Cram's employer, described as an archaeologist entirely absorbed in his work, he would "forget his meals" if not for her. He is "a bit under the weather this morning" and not working. Miss Cram characterises him as preferring ancient artefacts to contemporary sensations: "he'd a hundred times rather look at a nasty old bronze knife out of those humps of ground than he would see the knife Crippen cut up his wife with."

Mary

Role: minor. The Vicarage maid. She announces Miss Cram's presence, turns away newspaper reporters, and is questioned by the narrator about the shot. She confirms hearing "a queer sort of bang" from the direction of the wood, estimating it occurred ten to fifteen minutes before Redding arrived, though she cannot be more precise because her alarm clock "loses a good three-quarters every day." She does not use "sir" or "ma'am." Griselda explains that Mary's manners may be worse than usual because Colonel Protheroe had her young man, Archer, jailed for poaching.

Archer

Role: referenced/offstage. Mary's young man, jailed by Colonel Protheroe for poaching. Mentioned by Griselda to explain Mary's lack of sympathy over the colonel's death.

Inspector Slack

Role: referenced/offstage. The narrator directs newspaper reporters to him at the police station. He accompanies Melchett back to the Vicarage at the chapter's close.

Newspaper reporters (unnamed)

Role: minor/functional. Two men arrive at the Vicarage seeking information. Mary turns them away with difficulty, describing them as "persistent" and unwilling to "take no for an answer."

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 10

The studio

Described as "a mere rough shed with a skylight." It has no windows; "the door was the only means of entrance or egress." Melchett and the narrator inspect it to satisfy themselves on this point, presumably to establish or rule out access routes relevant to the murder.

The Vicarage

The narrator's home. Contains a drawing room (where Griselda entertains Miss Cram), a study (where Melchett and the inspector wait at the chapter's close), and a kitchen on the side of the house with a window facing away from the study, a detail Griselda uses to explain why Mary would not have recognised a shot fired inside the house as distinct from one in the wood.

The wood / "the barrow"

A shot is reported to have been heard coming from the direction of the wood. Dr. Stone's archaeological excavation ("the barrow") is located nearby; Miss Cram refers to "those humps of ground" from which Stone extracts ancient bronze knives.

The Guides

A local organisation (Girl Guides, implied by context) for which the Vicarage has been seeking volunteer helpers, announced the previous Sunday. Miss Cram uses this as her stated pretext for calling.

Household economics of the Vicarage

Griselda explains the logic of retaining an unskilled maid: because Mary cannot cook and has poor manners, no one else will employ her, keeping her wages low and ensuring her loyalty. This is presented as a deliberate, if unorthodox, domestic strategy.

Colonel Protheroe's role as magistrate (inferred from context)

Referenced obliquely, Griselda states that Protheroe "jailed her young man" (Mary's beau, Archer) for poaching, establishing Protheroe's authority in the community and a source of local resentment against him.

Crippen

Referenced by Miss Cram in comparison to Dr. Stone's archaeological bronze knife, "the knife Crippen cut up his wife with", used to illustrate Stone's preference for ancient over contemporary crime. (Dr. Crippen was a real historical figure; this is a period cultural reference embedded in the text.)

CONFLICT

Chapter 10

The chapter's primary conflict is investigative and external: the police and the narrator are working to establish the true timeline and circumstances of Colonel Protheroe's murder, complicated by Redding's apparently false confession and the ambiguity of witness testimony. A secondary, quieter conflict is social: the narrator and Griselda must manage Miss Cram's intrusive curiosity without revealing information that could compromise the investigation. The shot-in-the-wood question is partially resolved, Mary confirms hearing it, ten to fifteen minutes before Redding arrived, but the broader mystery escalates as Melchett's return to the study signals a new development.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 10

- The shot Mary heard from the direction of the wood occurred "well after teatime" on the evening of the murder.
- Mary estimates the shot occurred "ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, not longer than that" before Lawrence Redding arrived at the Vicarage.
- Mary's alarm clock "loses a good three-quarters every day," making her time estimates unreliable.
- Miss Marple made hints about the Anne–Lawrence connection "yesterday" (the day of the murder), according to Griselda.
- Dr. Stone is described as "not up to doing any work" on the morning of this chapter, "a bit under the weather."
- No specific dates or character ages are stated in this chapter.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 10

"If Miss Marple says she had no pistol with her, you can take it for granted that it is so. If there was the least possibility of such a thing, Miss Marple would have been on to it like a knife."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Miss Marple's reliability as a witness and the narrator's unqualified trust in her observational powers, a character-defining endorsement that also carries weight for the investigation's direction.

"A murder? I said. In this quiet one-horse village, for quiet it is, you must admit, not so much as a picture house, and as for Talkies!"

WHY IT LANDS Miss Cram's exclamation economically characterises St. Mary Mead as a sleepy, culturally isolated backwater, grounding the reader in the village's atmosphere through an outsider's voice.

"He'd a hundred times rather look at a nasty old bronze knife out of those humps of ground than he would see the knife Crippen cut up his wife with, supposing he had a chance to."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Dr. Stone, his absorption in the ancient past over the sensational present, and thematically resonant in a novel preoccupied with the relationship between violence, objects, and human attention.

"If once we got her smartened up at all, she'd leave. Naturally. And get higher wages. But as long as Mary can't cook and has those awful manners, well, we're safe, nobody else would have her."

WHY IT LANDS Reveals Griselda's practical intelligence beneath her apparently haphazard housekeeping, and provides quiet comic characterisation of the Clements' domestic circumstances.

"It's queer," I said, "that everyone says the shot came from the woods." "I don't think it's queer at all," said Griselda. "You see, one so often hears shots in the wood. So naturally, when you do hear a shot, you just assume as a matter of course that it is in the wood."

WHY IT LANDS Pivotal exchange for the investigation's logic: Griselda's common-sense explanation accounts for the witness testimony and implicitly redirects suspicion toward the possibility that the shot was fired inside the house, a key piece of reasoning delivered in domestic, undramatic terms.

11 Chapter 11

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 11

The chapter opens at the Vicarage, where the narrator (the Vicar, Len) arrives to find Colonel Melchett and Inspector Slack in disagreement over the guilt of Lawrence Redding. Slack maintains that Redding's own confession, combined with the ownership of the murder weapon and the now-established motive (his relationship with Mrs. Protheroe), makes the case straightforward. Melchett is unconvinced, and the Vicar corroborates the medical evidence by recalling that he touched Protheroe's body and found it cold, confirming death occurred no later than 6:30, before Redding could have arrived. Slack reluctantly concedes the point but turns his frustration on the Vicar for what he characterizes as withholding information about the clock. The Vicar defends himself, explaining he attempted to raise the matter three times and was ignored. Melchett arranges for Redding to be brought in and for Dr. Haydock to bring Mrs. Protheroe, asking the Vicar to return when Redding arrives to use his influence on the young man.

The Vicar then finds Griselda and Miss Marple in conversation. Miss Marple offers a disquisition on intuition as pattern recognition drawn from experience, then ranges through a series of seemingly unrelated village anecdotes. The Vicar presses her on her earlier claim of seven suspects; she confirms it was true but declines to name them. Griselda reacts with sudden, barely suppressed emotion when the subject of suspects is raised, though she does not explain why.

The chapter's most significant development is a collaborative reanalysis of Colonel Protheroe's note. Miss Marple points out that the time written on the letter, 6:20, is inconsistent with Protheroe's known willingness to wait until 6:30. The Vicar then theorizes that the "6:20" was added after the fact by the murderer, who also altered the clock to 6:22 to manufacture an alibi. Griselda extends this, suggesting the manipulation was not merely about the alibi but was a deliberate attempt to frame Anne Protheroe, who was known to have been at the Vicarage at that precise time. The chapter ends on Griselda's chilling conclusion: someone hated Anne Protheroe very much.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 11

Colonel Melchett

Role: ally, authority figure. Physical description: none provided in this chapter. Emotional state: flushed and annoyed at the chapter's opening, in disagreement with Slack. Actions: argues for Redding's innocence; accepts the Vicar's corroborating evidence; tactfully redirects the argument away from the clock dispute; arranges for Redding and Mrs. Protheroe to be brought in; asks the Vicar to return and use his influence on Redding. Objective (stated): to establish the true facts of the case and obtain truthful accounts from both Redding and Mrs. Protheroe.

Inspector Slack

Role: ally (investigative authority, though obstructive in manner). Emotional state: sulky at the chapter's opening; contemptuous of medical evidence; grudging in conceding the timeline point; irritable toward the Vicar over the clock. Actions: presents a detailed account of Redding's verified movements; dismisses Dr. Haydock's medical evidence; concedes when the Vicar's testimony is added to Melchett's argument; accuses the Vicar of obstructing justice over the clock; telephones the station to arrange Redding's transfer. Objective (inferred): to close the case efficiently, with Redding as the guilty party. Notable: expresses open contempt for women's reasoning ("She's a woman, and women act in that silly way") and for doctors.

Lawrence Redding

Role: suspect, offstage in this chapter. Referenced as having confessed to the murder, owning the pistol used, and having a confirmed motive (his relationship with Mrs. Protheroe). His movements are reconstructed by Slack: in the village near the Blue Boar at 6:10; along the back lane; at the studio with Mrs. Protheroe until just after 6:30; with Dr. Stone at the Blue Boar until 6:40; then to the Vicarage via the front entrance. Melchett notes his eagerness to confess is "a little unnatural." Objective (inferred): unclear, his confession is treated by Melchett and the Vicar as suspect rather than reliable.

Mrs. Anne Protheroe

Role: suspect, offstage in this chapter. Referenced as having made a false confession, confirmed by Miss Hartnell to have been in good spirits and showing nothing on her mind while at Miss Hartnell's between approximately 6:30 and 7:00. Griselda argues at the chapter's close that the manipulation of the clock and note was designed specifically to frame her, and that someone must hate her deeply. Dr. Haydock is bringing her to the Vicarage.

Griselda (the Vicar's wife)

Role: ally. Emotional state: engaged and analytical for most of the chapter; suddenly and uncharacteristically distressed when the subject of suspects is raised, she colours, nearly cries, and clenches her fists, crying "People are hateful, hateful. The things they say!" before composing herself. The cause of this reaction is not explained in this chapter. Actions: participates in the reanalysis of the note; suggests the clock may have been pre-altered (then rejects her own idea); draws the chapter's concluding inference that the crime was designed to frame Anne Protheroe out of hatred. Relationship: married to the Vicar; on familiar terms with Miss Marple.

Miss Marple

Role: ally, analytical. Emotional state: calm, dreamy, gently authoritative. Actions: offers a theory of intuition as pattern recognition from experience; recounts several village anecdotes as potential analogues to the case; confirms she has seven suspects in mind but declines to name them; identifies the key inconsistency in the note, that Protheroe would not have written it at 6:20 given his known willingness to wait until 6:30; notes that Protheroe was rather deaf, which would explain why he did not hear the murderer enter; recalls hearing a shot that she now believes may have been different from ordinary gunshots, though she struggles to articulate how. Departs at the chapter's end. Objective (stated): to reason toward the truth by analogy with past experience.

Dr. Haydock

Role: minor, offstage. Referenced as the source of the medical evidence placing death no later than 6:30. Melchett has telephoned him to bring Mrs. Protheroe to the Vicarage.

Dr. Stone

Role: minor, offstage. Referenced as having corroborated Redding's alibi, he was with Redding and Mrs. Protheroe when they left the studio, stood talking with them near the post office, and then had a drink with Redding at the Blue Boar until 6:40.

Miss Hartnell

Role: minor, offstage. Referenced as having confirmed Mrs. Protheroe's alibi, Mrs. Protheroe visited her to borrow a gardening magazine and remained until just before 7:00, appearing in good spirits with nothing on her mind.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. The Vicar names her as the only suspect he can think of, on the grounds that she probably inherits money on her father's death, but immediately dismisses the idea as absurd.

Mary (the Vicar's maid)

Role: minor, referenced. Noted by Miss Marple as having told Colonel Protheroe that the Vicar would not be in until half-past six at the earliest, the fact that establishes the inconsistency of the 6:20 note.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: victim, offstage (deceased). Referenced throughout. Noted to have been rather deaf. The Vicar recalls touching his body and finding it cold.

Major Hargreaves

Role: referenced only, in Miss Marple's anecdote. Described as a churchwarden and highly respected man who secretly kept a second establishment with a former housemaid and five children.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 11

The Blue Boar

A public house in the village. Redding was near it at 6:10 and returned there with Dr. Stone for a drink until 6:40.

The back lane

A lane running behind the Vicarage properties, used by Redding to reach the studio. Referenced as the route observed by "the old lady next door" (Miss Marple, though not named here by Slack). On his return trip to the Vicarage, Redding used the front road instead.

The studio in the garden

The location where Redding kept his appointment with Mrs. Protheroe. They left together just after 6:30.

Miss Hartnell's house

Location where Mrs. Protheroe went to borrow a gardening magazine, remaining until just before 7:00.

The post office

Where Redding, Mrs. Protheroe, and Dr. Stone stood talking for a few minutes after leaving the studio.

The Vicarage clock

A clock kept a quarter of an hour fast, as the Vicar explains, "to induce punctuality." Its fast-running state was central to the earlier confusion about the timeline. The Vicar confirms it had not been altered when he left, having compared it with his watch. The chapter's new theory holds that the murderer altered the clock to read 6:22 after the fact.

Colonel Protheroe's note

A letter found at the scene, written by Protheroe to say he "couldn't wait any longer," bearing the time "6:20" at the top. Miss Marple's key observation is that the printed "6:20" appears to be on a different scale to the rest of the letter (the Vicar's recollection), suggesting it was added separately. The theory advanced in this chapter is that the note was written around 6:30 when Protheroe genuinely grew impatient, and that the murderer subsequently added "6:20" and altered the clock to match, in order to manufacture an alibi and/or frame Anne Protheroe.

The pistol	The murder weapon, established to belong to Lawrence Redding. Referenced but not physically present in this chapter's scenes.
Miss Wetherby's gill of picked shrimps	Referenced in Griselda's anecdote about Miss Marple's past detective work, a previous case Miss Marple solved by analogy with something unrelated (a sack of coals). Functions to establish Miss Marple's method and reputation within the village community.
The Choir Boys' Outing fund	Referenced in Miss Marple's anecdote as money stolen by an organist whose wife was in debt. Noted as occurring "before your time, vicar," establishing that the Vicar has not been in the parish indefinitely.
Village social geography (implied)	The chapter's reconstruction of movements presupposes a compact village in which the Blue Boar, the post office, Miss Hartnell's house, and the Vicarage are all within a few minutes' walk of one another.

CONFLICT

Chapter 11

The chapter contains two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict between Melchett and Slack over Redding's guilt is resolved early when the Vicar's testimony about the cold body confirms the medical timeline and eliminates Redding as the shooter. A secondary interpersonal conflict flares briefly when Slack accuses the Vicar of obstruction over the clock; the Vicar pushes back, and Melchett defuses the exchange. The chapter's deeper and more consequential conflict is analytical: the question of who actually committed the murder, and why the note was timed as it was. This conflict escalates rather than resolves, ending with Griselda's disturbing inference that the crime was engineered specifically to destroy Anne Protheroe, introducing the possibility of a hatred-driven frame-up as the murder's true motive.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 11

- **After 6:10 p.m.:** Redding proceeds along the back lane (observed by "the old lady next door") to the studio in the garden.
- **Just after 6:30 p.m.:** Redding and Mrs. Protheroe leave the studio together; they proceed along the lane to the village and are joined by Dr. Stone.
- **A few minutes after 6:30 p.m.:** Redding, Mrs. Protheroe, and Dr. Stone stand talking near the post office.
- **After the post office stop:** Mrs. Protheroe goes into Miss Hartnell's to borrow a gardening magazine.
- **Just before 7:00 p.m.:** Mrs. Protheroe exclaims at the lateness of the hour and leaves Miss Hartnell's.

- **6:40 p.m.:** Redding leaves the Blue Boar (having had a drink there with Dr. Stone after the post office).
- **After 6:40 p.m.:** Redding goes rapidly along the village street and down the road to the Vicarage, asks for the Vicar, is told Colonel Protheroe is there, goes in.
- **6:20 p.m.:** The time printed at the top of Protheroe's note, now theorized to have been added by the murderer after the fact.
- **6:22 p.m.:** The time to which the Vicarage clock was altered, now theorized to have been set by the murderer.
- **No later than 6:30 p.m.:** Dr. Haydock's established outside limit for time of death, corroborated by the Vicar's recollection that the body was cold to the touch.
- **Approximately 6:30–6:35 p.m.:** The Vicar's revised estimate of the actual time of death, based on the reasoning that Protheroe would not have grown impatient enough to write the note before 6:30, given Mary's message that the Vicar would not return until half-past six at the earliest.
- **"Before your time, vicar":** The Choir Boys' Outing theft is placed at an unspecified earlier period, before the current Vicar's tenure in the parish.
- **Quarter of an hour fast:** The margin by which the Vicarage clock was set ahead, as a punctuality measure.
- **"About a quarter of an hour":** The estimated time before Redding and Mrs. Protheroe are expected to arrive at the Vicarage for questioning

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 11

"Intuition is like reading a word without having to spell it out. A child can't do that because it has had so little experience. But a grown-up person knows the word because they've seen it often before."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's articulation of her detective method, thematically central to the novel's treatment of experience and pattern recognition as tools of detection, and a character-defining statement of her analytical philosophy.

"At twenty minutes past six? Your maid, Mary, had already told him that you wouldn't be in till half-past six at the earliest, and he appeared to be quite willing to wait until then. And yet at twenty past six he sits down and says he 'can't wait any longer.' "

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's pivotal observation, Miss Marple identifies the logical inconsistency in the note's timestamp that unlocks the entire theory of the manufactured alibi; worldbuilding-critical and plot-turning.

"I tried to tell you on three separate occasions. And each time you shut me up and refused to listen."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for the Vicar, one of the few moments he asserts himself directly against Slack's bullying manner; also carries light comic irony that shades the novel's treatment of institutional investigative authority.

"Well, of course, if that's so. But there it was, a beautiful case. Mr. Redding only too anxious to be hanged, so to speak."

WHY IT LANDS Inspector Slack's grudging concession, simultaneously comic and revealing of his preference for a tidy case over a true one; captures the novel's gentle satire of official police procedure.

"Len, I've been thinking. How badly someone must have hated Anne Protheroe!"

WHY IT LANDS Griselda's closing inference, thematically significant as it reframes the murder from a crime of passion or convenience into one of calculated hatred, and raises the emotional stakes of the investigation considerably.

"Supposing it wasn't dated. Supposing that round about 6:30 Colonel Protheroe got impatient and sat down to say he couldn't wait any longer. And as he was sitting there writing, someone came in through the window, "

WHY IT LANDS The Vicar's reconstruction of the murder, the chapter's central plot revelation, presented in the collaborative, tentative voice that characterizes the drawing-room detection scenes; marketable as an example of the novel's puzzle-box mechanics.

12

Chapter 12

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 12

The chapter opens with the narrator (the vicar, Clement) present in the study as Lawrence Redding is questioned by Colonel Melchett and Inspector Slack. Melchett informs Lawrence that Anne Protheroe has also confessed to the murder, and that neither confession is believed, as Dr. Haydock has established that the murder could not have occurred at the time Lawrence claimed. Relieved that Anne is not suspected, Lawrence gives a full account of his movements: he met Anne at the studio at a quarter past six to say goodbye, parted from her when Dr. Stone joined them, went to the Blue Boar with Stone for a drink, then walked to the Vicarage intending to speak with the vicar. Finding Protheroe alone in the study, he discovered the colonel already dead, found his own pistol on the floor beside the body, and immediately leaped to the conclusion that Anne had taken it and committed the murder. He pocketed the pistol and left, encountered the vicar at the gate, and eventually turned himself in out of a sense of moral responsibility.

Anne Protheroe is then brought in by Dr. Haydock and gives her own account: she had come along the back lane and into the Vicarage garden to check whether her husband was still there, was briefly detained by Miss Marple, then crept up to the study window, glanced in, saw the room apparently empty, and hurried to the studio. Inspector Slack demonstrates, using the vicar as a stand-in, that Protheroe's body at the writing-desk would have been out of Anne's sightline from the window. Anne is then dismissed.

The investigators discuss the note (Miss Marple's theory that the date was written in different ink is confirmed by Slack), the pistol (only Lawrence's fingerprints remain), and the timing of the shot (Mary the maid heard one shot, shortly after half-past six, fixed by the arrival of the fish delivery). Melchett resolves not to call in Scotland Yard, expressing confidence in Slack. The group sets out for Mrs. Price Ridley's house, accompanied briefly by Dennis, who embarrasses the vicar by repeating his remark that anyone who murdered Protheroe would be doing the world a service. They arrive at Mrs. Price Ridley's to find she has just left for the police station, prompting Melchett to joke that if she too has come to confess, he will go off his head.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 12

Lawrence Redding

Role: suspect/ally. Described as looking "haggard" and "suspicious" on arrival. Emotional arc: begins defensive and evasive, then visibly shaken by news of Anne's confession, then relieved and remorseful once cleared. Gives a full voluntary account of his movements. Reveals he found Protheroe dead, picked up his own pistol from the floor, pocketed it, and fled, motivated (stated) by the belief that Anne had used it. Expresses guilt: "If Anne had done this ghastly thing, I was, at least, morally responsible." Apologises to Anne on her arrival: "Forgive me, Anne. It was abominable of me to think what I did." Relationship: romantically involved with Anne Protheroe; had promised the vicar to leave the area; acquainted with Dr. Stone; hosted a tea party at his cottage recently attended by Lettice Protheroe, Dennis, and others.

Colonel Melchett (Chief Constable)

Role: authority/investigator. Greets Lawrence "with something approaching cordiality." Conducts the primary questioning of both Lawrence and Anne. Gives Lawrence his word of honour that Anne is not suspected. Resolves firmly not to call in Scotland Yard, expressing confidence in Slack: "Slack's a smart man. He's a very smart man. He's a kind of ferret." Expresses a growing intuition that the case is more complex than it appears: "there's something behind it." Ends the chapter with a dry joke about Mrs. Price Ridley potentially confessing.

Inspector Slack

Role: investigator. Described by Clement as someone he has "taken such a dislike to" that even Slack's success fails to appeal to him. Conducts supplementary questioning of Anne and interviews Mary the maid. Confirms Miss Marple's ink theory upon examining the note. Reports Mary's testimony about the shot's timing. Dismisses Dennis's footprint theory curtly. Notes with a "regret" that Mrs. Protheroe is probably not the murderer: "It's a pity!" Described as emerging from his interview with Mary looking "hot," calling her "a tartar." Described by Melchett as a "ferret."

Anne Protheroe

Role: suspect/witness. Enters with Dr. Haydock. Startled to see Lawrence. Gives a full account of her movements: came along the back lane, was stopped briefly by Miss Marple, crept to the study window, saw the room apparently empty (not realising Protheroe's body was at the desk, out of her sightline), and went to the studio. Confirms she knew of Lawrence's pistol and had seen it on a shelf in his cottage, but had not been to the cottage in approximately three weeks. Admits she and Lawrence met in the woods after he painted Lettice. Becomes distressed when pressed: "It's so awful, having to tell you all these things." Cleared of suspicion on grounds of timing and the demonstration of her sightline. Relationship: wife of the deceased Colonel Protheroe; romantically involved with Lawrence Redding; acquainted with Miss Marple; goes to see Griselda after the interview.

Dr. Haydock

Role: ally/authority. Brings Anne Protheroe into the study. Has previously established (offstage) that the murder could not have occurred at the time Lawrence claimed, this is the medical evidence that clears Lawrence. Intervenes on Anne's behalf when questioning becomes distressing: "I really think, Melchett, that Mrs. Protheroe has had enough." Described as "softhearted." Accompanies Anne and Lawrence out of the room.

Colonel Protheroe (deceased)

Role: victim, referenced/offstage. Referenced throughout as the murder victim. Lawrence describes finding him "sitting at the writing table, just as you found him." Anne's demonstration confirms his body was at the writing-desk, out of sightline from the window. Not physically present; his position in the room is reconstructed during the chapter.

Miss Marple

Role: minor/referenced. Not present in the chapter but referenced twice. Anne confirms Miss Marple stopped her in the garden and they exchanged a few words; Anne claimed she was going to call for her husband. Clement privately affirms Miss Marple's reliability: "Miss Marple is not the type of elderly lady who makes mistakes. She has got an uncanny knack of being always right." Her theory about the note (that the date was written in different ink) is confirmed by Slack.

Mary (the maid)

Role: minor/functional, offstage during Slack's interview. Described by Slack as "a tartar" who "stood right up to me" and does not like the police. Provides the key timing evidence: she heard one shot, shortly after the fish delivery boy arrived, which Slack estimates as barely after half-past six. Previously told the vicar that Lawrence had called and that Protheroe was waiting in the study.

Dennis

Role: minor. Clement's nephew. Runs up from the village to join the group. Raises a footprint theory (dismissed by Slack as the gardener's). Produces two burnt matches found by the Vicarage gate. Embarrasses Clement by repeating his remark that "anyone who murdered Colonel Protheroe would be doing the world a service." Described as "exceedingly tiresome" by Clement. Denied permission to accompany the group to Mrs. Price Ridley's.

Dr. Stone

Role: minor/referenced. Mentioned by Lawrence as having joined him and Anne almost immediately after they left the studio, which ended their farewell meeting. Lawrence then went with Stone to the Blue Boar for a drink.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: minor/referenced. Mentioned as having attended Lawrence's tea party at his cottage "the day before yesterday." Also mentioned as the subject of Lawrence's painting, which provided a pretext for him and Anne to meet in the woods.

Griselda

Role: minor/referenced. Clement's wife. Confirmed to be in the drawing-room; Anne goes to see her after the interview.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Role: minor, referenced and briefly sought. Described by Clement as having "remarkably keen" hearing and as a source of village scandal through eavesdropping. The group goes to her house to ask whether she heard anything; they find she has just left for the police station, prompting the chapter's closing joke.

Mrs. Archer

Role: minor/referenced. The woman who "does for" Lawrence at his cottage each morning. Mentioned as a possible witness to when the pistol was last seen; Lawrence doubts "conscientious dusting is her strong point."

The fish delivery boy

Role: unnamed/functional. Referenced in Slack's account of Mary's testimony. His late arrival and Mary's scolding of him provide the approximate time anchor for the shot (barely after half-past six).

The pretty parlourmaid (at Mrs. Price Ridley's)

Role: unnamed/functional. Answers the door and informs the group that Mrs. Price Ridley has gone to the police station.

The studio	A separate building, apparently on or near the Vicarage grounds, where Lawrence and Anne met at a quarter past six. Lawrence was painting Lettice Protheroe there.
The Blue Boar	A local establishment (implied to be a pub) where Lawrence and Dr. Stone went for a drink after leaving the studio.
Lawrence Redding's cottage	Lawrence's residence, described as casually kept, with a sitting-room containing bookshelves cluttered with "a litter of odds and ends," among which the pistol was stored. Unlocked habitually; Lawrence states no one locks their house in the area. Recently the site of a tea party attended by Lettice Protheroe, Dennis, and "their crowd," as well as occasional visits from "the old Pussies" (unnamed village women). Cleaned each morning by Mrs. Archer.
The back lane and Vicarage garden	The route Anne took to approach the study window without being seen from the front. Miss Marple's garden adjoins or overlooks this route, as Miss Marple was able to observe and speak with Anne as she passed.
The Vicarage gate	Where Lawrence encountered Clement after leaving the study. Where Dennis found two burnt matches.
Mrs. Price Ridley's house	Located up the road from the Vicarage, with a "neat front door." Mrs. Price Ridley is established as a keen-eared gossip, making her a potentially valuable witness to sounds from the Vicarage.
The police station	Referenced at the chapter's close as Mrs. Price Ridley's destination.
Downshire	Named by Colonel Melchett as the county or region in which the investigation is taking place: "We'll get to the bottom of this here in Downshire." Melchett's jurisdiction; he explicitly declines to call in Scotland Yard.
Scotland Yard	Referenced as the national detective body that Melchett chooses not to involve, asserting local competence.
The note	A document found on the blotter, partially concealed by Protheroe's body. Examined for fingerprints (none found on the note itself). Miss Marple's theory, confirmed by Slack, is that the date on the note was written in different ink from the rest, suggesting it was altered or fabricated. Slack specifies: "these figures are written in different ink. That date was written with a fountain pen or I'll eat my boots!"
The pistol	Lawrence's firearm, kept carelessly on a bookshelf in his cottage. Found on the floor beside Protheroe's body. Lawrence's fingerprints are the only ones recoverable on it, though Slack acknowledges there may have been others before Lawrence handled and pocketed it. The pistol is the physical object around which both false confessions were constructed.
The clock	Found overturned on the writing-table. Lawrence confirms he did not touch it. Its significance to the investigation is implied but not resolved in this chapter.

The fish delivery

A recurring domestic detail used as a time anchor. Mary's scolding of the delivery boy, who arrived late and stated it was "barely half-past six," places the shot she heard shortly after that time.

CONFLICT

Chapter 12

The chapter's primary conflict is investigative and external: the authorities must disentangle two false confessions and reconstruct the true sequence of events surrounding Protheroe's murder. Both Lawrence and Anne confessed out of misplaced protectiveness of each other, and the chapter resolves this mutual deception by clearing both. A secondary, quieter conflict is epistemological, the investigators are confronted with physical evidence (the clock, the note, the pistol, the timing of the shot) that does not cohere into a clear account, a tension Melchett articulates directly: "there's something behind it." By chapter's end, both confessors are cleared but no new suspect is named, leaving the central mystery escalated rather than resolved.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 12

- **Shortly after the studio meeting:** Dr. Stone joined Lawrence and Anne almost immediately after they left the studio.
- **After parting from Stone:** Lawrence went to the Blue Boar with Stone for a drink, then walked toward home, changed his mind at the corner of the road, and went to the Vicarage instead.
- **Barely after half-past six:** The fish delivery boy arrived at the Vicarage; Mary scolded him; the shot was heard shortly after this. This is the timing anchor established by Slack through Mary's testimony.
- **Day before yesterday:** Lawrence believes he last saw the pistol on the bookshelf when he pushed it aside to find an old pipe. He is not entirely certain, it may have been the day before that.
- **Day before yesterday (same day as pistol last seen):** Lawrence hosted a tea party at his cottage attended by Lettice Protheroe, Dennis, and "their crowd."
- **Approximately three weeks ago:** The last time Anne Protheroe visited Lawrence's cottage, when she and her husband had tea there with him.
- **The afternoon of the murder:** Anne and her husband drove into the village together; he mentioned casually he was going to see the vicar; Anne did her shopping, then came along the back lane to check whether her husband was still at the Vicarage.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 12

"I've been a fool. An absolute fool. How could I have thought for one minute that she did it."

WHY IT LANDS Lawrence's self-recrimination upon learning Anne is not suspected; character-defining moment of remorse and the collapse of his false confession.

"I picked it up, and at once saw that it was my pistol. That gave me a turn. My pistol! And then, straightaway I leaped to one conclusion."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the chain of reasoning that drove Lawrence's false confession and reveals the pistol as the pivot of the entire misunderstanding.

"Miss Marple is not the type of elderly lady who makes mistakes. She has got an uncanny knack of being always right."

WHY IT LANDS Clement's private endorsement of Miss Marple; thematically significant as it positions her as the chapter's most reliable witness and foreshadows her centrality to the investigation.

"My word, I believe the old lady's right. Look here, sir, don't you see?, these figures are written in different ink. That date was written with a fountain pen or I'll eat my boots!"

WHY IT LANDS Slack's confirmation of Miss Marple's ink theory; worldbuilding-critical, as it establishes that the note was tampered with and the stated time of death may be fabricated.

"Do you know, Clement, I've a feeling that this is going to turn out a much more intricate and difficult business than any of us think. Dash it all, there's something behind it. We're only beginning, Clement. Mark my words, we're only beginning."

WHY IT LANDS Melchett's statement of the chapter's, and the novel's, central dramatic tension; thematically significant as an explicit acknowledgement that the surface facts do not cohere, and marketable as a summary of the mystery's scope.

"If she's gone to confess to the crime, too, I really shall go off my head."

WHY IT LANDS Melchett's closing line; tonal marker of the absurdist accumulation of false confessions, and a hook ending that propels narrative momentum into the next chapter.

13 Chapter 13

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

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SUMMARY

Chapter 13

The narrator and Colonel Melchett arrive at the police station to find Mrs. Price Ridley in full complaint to a bewildered constable. A brief confusion ensues: the investigators assumed she had come forward with evidence related to the murder, but she has in fact come to report a threatening and abusive anonymous telephone call she received the previous evening at approximately half-past six. The caller identified themselves as "The Avenger," accused her of being a "wicked scandal-mongering old woman," threatened her with Scotland Yard action for libel, and laughed before hanging up. Mrs. Price Ridley also mentions, almost in passing, that she heard a loud shot in the woods shortly after the call, which she attributed to her rattled nerves. Inspector Slack immediately recognizes the significance of this detail: it constitutes a third witness to the shot, and combined with the fake telephone call that lured the vicar away from the Vicarage, it sharpens the investigation's focus. Slack outlines the next investigative steps, tracing both telephone calls and establishing the movements of everyone in the village and at Old Hall between six and seven o'clock that evening. The chapter closes with the narrator noting it is nearly lunchtime and inviting Melchett to eat with him; Melchett declines in favour of the Blue Boar, and the narrator reflects wryly that this is probably the wiser choice given the maid Mary's likely temperamental state after her police interview.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 13

Colonel Melchett

Role: ally/authority figure. Chief Constable. Described as a wise man who understands that an irate middle-aged lady must be allowed to exhaust herself before she will listen. He manages Mrs. Price Ridley with practiced diplomacy, lifting his hat, biting his moustache to conceal a smile at her account of the threatening call, and keeps the interview on track with targeted questions. He mutters "No such luck" under his breath at Mrs. Price Ridley's suggestion she might be the next victim, then quickly reassumes a grave expression. Declines the narrator's lunch invitation in favour of the Blue Boar. Emotional state: professionally composed, occasionally amused.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Role: minor/witness. A middle-aged woman of the village, described as wearing a "Matron's Hat", a style sold in the nearby town of Much Benham, designed to perch on a superstructure of hair and overweighted with large bows of ribbon. Her hat bow is trembling with indignation on arrival. She came to the police station not to report anything connected to the murder but to complain about an anonymous threatening telephone call received the previous evening at approximately half-past six. The caller called her a "wicked scandal-mongering old woman," threatened her with Scotland Yard action for libel, warned her to hold her tongue, identified themselves as "The Avenger," and laughed before hanging up. She also heard a shot in the woods shortly after, which she attributed to her nervous state. She is reluctant to repeat the caller's exact words but ultimately does so when the desire for vengeance overcomes her desire for reticence. She addresses herself pointedly to Melchett rather than the narrator, suggesting residual ill-feeling toward the narrator over an unspecified incident involving a pound note. She departs with ominous self-importance, suggesting she may be the next victim. Emotional state: indignant, self-dramatising, aggrieved.

Inspector Slack

Role: ally/investigator. Present at the police station. Nods slowly when Melchett looks to him after Mrs. Price Ridley's departure, confirming the significance of the shot detail. Immediately identifies the investigative priorities: tracing the fake telephone call that lured the vicar away, and establishing the movements of everyone in the village and at Old Hall between six and seven. He formally notes the narrator's movements as part of this process. Described as believing in hard work. Emotional state: alert, methodical, energised by the new leads.

The Police Constable

Role: minor. A somewhat bewildered-looking constable who was receiving Mrs. Price Ridley's complaint when the others arrived. He clarifies in a "ruminative bass" that the matter is one of obscene language on the telephone. No name given; functional role only.

Griselda (Mrs. Clement)

Role: referenced/offstage. The narrator's wife. Mentioned only in response to Inspector Slack's questions: she was in London on the evening in question and arrived back on the 6:50 train. Also referenced in passing as someone who is "always threatening to get a matron's hat."

Mary

Role: referenced/offstage. The maid at the Vicarage. Already interviewed by Inspector Slack prior to this chapter. Referenced at the close as likely to be in a temperamental state following her police interview, which the narrator offers as a reason Melchett's choice of the Blue Boar for lunch is the wiser one.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned by Inspector Slack as someone he intends to interview next. Noted as having visited Protheroe the night before he was killed; Slack describes this as "queer." No further detail given in this chapter.

Mrs. Abbott

Role: referenced/offstage. The narrator states he assumed the fake telephone call that lured him away from the Vicarage was from Mrs. Abbott, though he did not specifically recognise the voice as hers.

Mr. Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. Inspector Slack notes that the business of "Mr. Redding" delayed the investigation and caused him not to pursue certain leads, implying Redding was previously considered a suspect. No further detail given in this chapter.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (the murder victim). Mrs. Price Ridley mentions him by name, noting he had been going to look into "very strange things" happening in the village and asking rhetorically whether she will be the next victim. This is the only reference to him in this chapter.

Clara

Role: referenced/offstage. Unnamed beyond her first name; apparently Mrs. Price Ridley's servant. Mentioned only as having brought Mrs. Price Ridley a glass of damson gin after the upsetting telephone call.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 13

Much Benham

Described as the "adjacent town" to the village. Noted as the place where "Hats for Matrons" are sold as a speciality. Establishes the village's proximity to a larger nearby town.

"Hats for Matrons"

A style of hat sold in Much Benham. Described as perching on a superstructure of hair and overweighted with large bows of ribbon. Used as a social-class and character marker for Mrs. Price Ridley.

Old Hall

A location referenced as the residence of persons whose movements Inspector Slack intends to investigate. Described as having woods adjacent to or associated with it. The footpath through Old Hall woods is noted as the shortest route between the Vicarage and the narrator's destination, though not the route he took.

The Vicarage

The narrator's home. Referenced in relation to the footpath that comes out opposite the Vicarage gate, and as the location where the fake telephone call was received. The maid Mary is associated with it.

The Blue Boar

A local establishment, apparently an inn or public house, where Colonel Melchett chooses to have lunch. Described as giving "a first-rate meal of the joint and two-vegetable type."

The Footpath Across the Fields

The route the narrator took both to and from his destination on the evening in question. Described as coming out opposite the Vicarage gate. Approximately two miles in length whichever way one goes.

The Telephone Exchange

Referenced as the mechanism by which Mrs. Price Ridley attempted to trace the anonymous call. The exchange was unable or unwilling to identify the number; Mrs. Price Ridley describes the exchange staff as "thoroughly rude and unsympathetic." Establishes that telephone calls in this setting can be made anonymously and that tracing them through the exchange is unreliable.

Rates and Taxes / Scotland Yard

Referenced in dialogue as social and institutional touchstones. Mrs. Price Ridley invokes rates and taxes as the basis for police accountability; the anonymous caller invokes Scotland Yard as a threat. Both function as markers of the social world in which the novel is set.

Damson Gin

A domestic restorative. Mrs. Price Ridley's servant Clara brings her a glass after the upsetting telephone call. Functions as a period and class detail.

"The Avenger"

The name given by the anonymous telephone caller as their identity. Presented as a deliberate piece of theatre intended to frighten Mrs. Price Ridley. Inspector Slack treats the call as connected to the broader case, specifically as a warning to a known gossip, rather than as an isolated prank.

CONFLICT

Chapter 13

The chapter's primary conflict is investigative and external: the murder inquiry has been complicated by a false lead (Mr. Redding's apparent guilt) and must now be reoriented around new evidence. Mrs. Price Ridley's account introduces two significant data points, the anonymous threatening call and the shot heard in the woods at approximately half-past six, that Inspector Slack recognises as potentially decisive. The chapter also carries a secondary social conflict: Mrs. Price Ridley's indignation and self-importance must be managed diplomatically before useful information can be extracted. Both conflicts are partially resolved by chapter's end, with Slack naming clear next investigative steps, though the central mystery remains open.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 13

- The shot in the woods was heard by Mrs. Price Ridley shortly after the telephone call, i.e., also at approximately half-past six.
- The fake telephone call that lured the narrator away from the Vicarage came through at approximately half-past five.
- The narrator's walk to his destination and back was nearly two miles each way.
- Griselda (Mrs. Clement) arrived back from London on the 6:50 train on the evening in question.
- Inspector Slack states the relevant investigative window is between six and seven o'clock on the evening in question.
- The chapter takes place at nearly lunchtime (as noted in the closing paragraph).
- Mrs. Lestrangle visited Protheroe "the night before he was killed", referenced as a prior event, not dated precisely in this chapter.
- The incident of "the pound note" between the narrator and Mrs. Price Ridley is referenced as a past event; no date or detail given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 13

"A struggle began in Mrs. Price Ridley's ample black bosom. The desire for reticence fought against a desire for vengeance. Vengeance triumphed."

WHY IT LANDS A precise and comic character beat that captures both Mrs. Price Ridley's self-importance and the narrator's dry observational wit.

"You are a wicked scandal-mongering old woman! But this time you've gone too far. Scotland Yard are after you for libel. Unless you hold your tongue in future, it will be the worse for you, in more ways than one."

WHY IT LANDS The verbatim content of the anonymous threatening call; worldbuilding-critical, as it establishes the caller's method, tone, and apparent knowledge of Mrs. Price Ridley's reputation in the village.

"I gasped, 'Who are you?' faintly, like that, and the voice answered, 'The Avenger.' I gave a little shriek."

WHY IT LANDS Introduces the alias "The Avenger," which is the caller's chosen identity and a key plot detail for the investigation.

"It was a degenerate voice. I can only describe it as a kind of perverted voice. Now gruff, now squeaky. Really a very peculiar voice."

WHY IT LANDS Mrs. Price Ridley's description of the caller's voice; character-defining in its prudish imprecision, and investigatively significant as a description of deliberate vocal disguise.

"This business of Mr. Redding's has delayed us. But we've got several starting points. Thinking Mr. Redding was guilty, I didn't bother to look into them. But that's all changed now."

WHY IT LANDS Inspector Slack's summary of the investigation's reorientation; establishes that a prior suspect has been cleared and marks the structural turning point of the inquiry.

"Very strange things have been happening in this village lately. Colonel Protheroe was going to look into them, and what happened to him, poor man? Perhaps I shall be the next?"

WHY IT LANDS Mrs. Price Ridley's parting remark; thematically significant in linking the murder victim to a pattern of village disturbance, and marketable as a line that captures the novel's atmosphere of provincial menace.

14 Chapter 14

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 14

The narrator (referred to as "Clement" by Haydock) is walking home when he is briefly detained by Miss Hartnell, who complains about the ingratitude of the poor. He is then intercepted by Dr. Haydock, who invites him inside. In Haydock's surgery, Clement shares that the time of the shot has been fixed, which Haydock receives with relief, it clears both Anne Protheroe and Lawrence Redding, yet paradoxically Haydock appears more troubled, not less. Haydock then raises the subject of Hawes, revealing that Hawes suffered from Encephalitis Lethargica approximately a year ago, a disease he says can fundamentally alter a person's character. This disclosure leads Haydock into an extended philosophical monologue arguing that crime is a medical condition rather than a moral failing, that punishment is a barbaric relic, and that the future belongs to medical treatment of criminal behavior. He cites specific cases, a young murderer named Neil from Oxfordshire and a girl named Lily Rose from Cornwall, to support his thesis. Clement, struck by Haydock's intensity, asks him directly whether, if he knew who the murderer was, he would turn that person in. Haydock reacts with sudden anger and suspicion before composing himself and giving an evasive, troubled answer. The conversation shifts to lighter ground, Clement's nephew Dennis and his future prospects, before Clement realizes he is late for lunch. At the lunch table, Dennis reports that Lettice Protheroe is genuinely worried despite her outward composure, and the family discusses Inspector Slack's methods and the telephone call that lured Clement away. The chapter ends with Mary delivering two items simultaneously: a request from Hawes to see Clement, and a written note from Estelle Lestrangle urgently requesting his visit that afternoon.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 14

Miss Hartnell

Detains Clement on his way home. Described as speaking in a "deep bass voice." Her complaint is that the poor do not want her in their homes; Clement's sympathies are with the poor. She plays no further role in the chapter. Role: minor.

Dr. Haydock

Overtakes Clement in his car and invites him in. Described as looking "harried and perplexed" and later as sitting with "a strange look of weariness." He is fond of both Anne Protheroe and Lawrence Redding, yet their exoneration deepens rather than relieves his distress, motivation inferred as suggesting he suspects someone else he is reluctant to expose. He delivers a sustained philosophical argument that crime is a medical rather than moral phenomenon, citing glandular secretion, adolescent crime statistics, and specific criminal cases. When Clement asks whether he would shield a murderer he knew, Haydock reacts with anger and suspicion before retreating into evasion: "If I suspected, if I knew, I should do my duty, Clement. At least, I hope so." He is described by Clement as an intelligent man who does not usually "air his theories abroad." Role: ally, with ambiguous undertones.

Anne Protheroe

Referenced but not present. The fixing of the shot's time has cleared her of suspicion. Haydock states he likes her. Role: referenced/offstage.

Lawrence Redding

Referenced but not present. Also cleared by the fixed time of the shot. Haydock states he likes him. Role: referenced/offstage.

Hawes

Referenced in conversation and appears at the chapter's end, having asked to see Clement. Haydock reveals Hawes had Encephalitis Lethargica approximately a year ago and recovered, though Haydock notes the disease can permanently alter character. He is described as not having told Clement about the illness himself. Role: minor/present at chapter's end.

Griselda

Clement's wife. Present at lunch. She is described as "not too fond of Lettice Protheroe" and responds to Dennis's defense of Lettice with cool, clipped replies ("Don't you?" / "Lots of people don't wear mourning"). She asks Clement directly what he thinks the truth is, and raises the question of whether Inspector Slack can trace the telephone call. Role: ally/minor.

Dennis

Clement's nephew, described as "just sixteen." He is enthusiastic about the investigation, spending his time looking for footprints and cigarette ash, and finds the story of Mrs. Price Ridley's telephone fright highly amusing, suggesting a second dose. He also defends Lettice Protheroe, reporting she is "very worried" despite not showing it. He asks Clement directly why he was scolded for joking about wishing Protheroe dead. Haydock describes him as "a fine-looking boy." He has failed the Navy entrance and wants to go into the Merchant Service. Role: minor.

Lettice Protheroe

Referenced but not present. Dennis reports she is "very worried" about the situation and "thinks something ought to be done about it," though she does not show her worry to most people. Griselda's coolness toward her is noted. Role: referenced/offstage.

Inspector Slack

Referenced but not present. Clement describes him as lacking a sense of humor, having attained his position through "hard work and zealous attention to duty," and as someone Clement has disliked "from the first moment." Clement believes Slack will be thorough if not successful. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Referenced but not present. Dennis laughs at the account of her being frightened by a telephone call and describes her as having "the worst tongue in the place." Role: referenced/offstage.

Mary

The household servant. Delivers both Hawes's verbal request and Estelle Lestrangle's written note to Clement at the chapter's end. Role: minor/functional.

Estelle Lestrangle

Does not appear but sends a handwritten note requesting Clement visit her that afternoon as early as possible, stating she is "in great trouble" and would like his advice. Role: referenced/offstage.

Neil (the "Oxfordshire murderer")

Cited by Haydock as a case study. Described as a "nice lad, never given any trouble of any kind" who killed five girls before being suspected. Haydock uses him to illustrate his thesis about adolescent crime and glandular causation. Role: referenced/offstage (illustrative case).

Lily Rose

Cited by Haydock as a case study. Described as "the little Cornish girl" who killed her uncle by hitting him with a coal hammer when he docked her sweets, then killed her elder sister a fortnight later over a trifling annoyance. Haydock notes she was not hanged but sent to a home, and doubts she will recover, noting "the only thing she cares about is seeing the pigs killed." Role: referenced/offstage (illustrative case).

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 14

Haydock's surgery

The scene with Haydock takes place in his surgery, described minimally: Haydock throws his hat on a chair, opens the door into the room, and sinks into "a shabby leather chair." The shabbiness of the furniture is the only physical detail offered.

Encephalitis Lethargica ("sleepy sickness")

A real disease referenced by its medical name and its common name. Haydock states Hawes contracted it "about a year ago" and recovered "as far as one ever recovers." Haydock characterizes it as having "a queer moral effect" such that "the whole character may change after it." This is presented as medical fact within the world of the novel, not speculation.

Haydock's criminological philosophy

An extended worldbuilding element in the sense that it establishes the intellectual and moral framework through which at least one character interprets the murder. Key tenets as stated by Haydock: (1) Crime is caused by glandular secretion, biological, not moral, in origin. (2) Capital punishment and criminal punishment generally are barbaric, analogous to burning witches. (3) The correct response to crime is medical treatment or, in extreme cases, humane removal from society, but not punishment or shame. (4) Adolescent crime is statistically significant and gland-related. (5) Suicide peaks at ages fifteen to sixteen, and self-murder and murder of others exist on a continuum. (6) Haydock predicts a future in which crime has been "cured" medically.

The Vicarage household

Clement's domestic world is sketched: he has a wife (Griselda), a nephew (Dennis) staying with him, and a servant (Mary). The family sits down to lunch together. Dennis's future is discussed, he failed the Navy entrance examination and wishes to enter the Merchant Service; Clement cannot afford a university education for him.

Old Hall

Referenced as the Protheroe family residence, where Inspector Slack is said to be going that afternoon. No further description is given in this chapter.

The telephone call / the Abbotts

Referenced as a prior event, a call that took Clement away, which Inspector Slack is attempting to trace through Exchange records. The Abbotts are mentioned only as the destination Clement was lured to; no further detail is given in this chapter.

Estelle Lestrangle's note

Reproduced in the text as a primary document. Written in a formal register ("Dear Mr. Clement."), signed with full name, and requesting an urgent afternoon visit. The note establishes that Lestrangle is in "great trouble" and seeks Clement's advice specifically.

CONFLICT

Chapter 14

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict, who murdered Colonel Protheroe, advances obliquely: the fixing of the shot's time exonerates Anne Protheroe and Lawrence Redding, narrowing the field, while the chapter ends with two new threads (Hawes's illness and Lestrangle's distress) opening simultaneously. The more immediate conflict is internal and interpersonal: Haydock's philosophical monologue about crime as disease barely conceals a personal crisis, and his explosive reaction to Clement's hypothetical about shielding a murderer strongly implies he possesses knowledge he has not disclosed. The conflict does not resolve; it escalates by the chapter's end as Clement is pulled in two new directions.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 14

- The fixing of the time of the shot is established as having occurred earlier the same morning (referenced as "this morning" in Clement's observation about Haydock's changed demeanor).
- Dennis spent "most of the morning" with Lettice Protheroe.
- Clement arrives home "nearly half an hour late for lunch."
- Inspector Slack is described as going to Old Hall "this afternoon."
- Estelle Lestrangle's note requests Clement visit "this afternoon as early as possible."
- Clement tells Mary he will call on Lestrangle "in about half an hour."
- Lily Rose killed her uncle, then "a fortnight later" killed her elder sister (internal timeline of Haydock's cited case, not the novel's present).
- Dennis is "just sixteen" years old.
- Suicide is stated to be "commonest" between ages fifteen and sixteen (Haydock's statistical claim).

"The crux of the matter seemed to be that The Poor did not want Miss Hartnell in their houses. My sympathies were entirely on their side. I am debarred by my social standing from expressing my prejudices in the forceful manner they do."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Clement's wry, self-aware narrative voice and the chapter's opening class comedy; also marketable as a sample of the novel's dry wit.

"It's a strange disease, has a queer moral effect. The whole character may change after it."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical: introduces Encephalitis Lethargica as a plot-relevant condition affecting Hawes, with direct implications for character and culpability.

"Clement, I believe the time will come when we'll be horrified to think of the long centuries in which we've punished people for disease, which they can't help, poor devils. You don't hang a man for having tuberculosis."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically central: encapsulates Haydock's philosophy of crime-as-illness, which reframes the moral stakes of the murder investigation and raises the question of whether the killer deserves punishment.

"If I suspected, if I knew, I should do my duty, Clement. At least, I hope so."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining and suspense-generating: the qualification "At least, I hope so" transforms what should be a reassuring statement into a confession of uncertainty, strongly implying Haydock knows or suspects more than he has said.

"That question comes to every man some time in his life, I suppose, Clement. And every man has to decide in his own way."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: Haydock's evasion of Clement's direct question about duty elevates the exchange from plot mechanics to a statement about moral individualism; also functions as foreshadowing.

"No," I said, "he does not. He is a highly successful man in his profession."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for both Clement and Inspector Slack: Clement's backhanded assessment, confirming Slack's competence while withholding any warmth, efficiently establishes the relationship between the two men and Clement's dry register.

15 Chapter 15

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 15

The chapter opens with the narrator (a vicar named Clement) receiving a visit from his curate, Hawes, whose visibly deteriorating physical condition, shaking hands and facial twitching, alarms Clement despite Hawes's insistence that he is perfectly well. The conversation quickly turns to the murder of Colonel Protheroe. Hawes presses Clement with unusual intensity about the state of the police investigation, whether Redding has been cleared, whether the police suspect anyone, and whether Clement has any private knowledge of a motive. Hawes raises the subject of a man named Archer, a poacher whom Protheroe had publicly threatened the previous morning, and urges Clement to report this to Inspector Slack. Clement is reluctant, unwilling to help build a case against a man he considers likely innocent, and deflects responsibility back to Hawes, who proves curiously unwilling to go to the police himself. Clement arranges for Hawes to cover two parish duties that afternoon and dismisses him.

Clement then walks to the home of Mrs. LeStrange, whom he knows had a private interview with Protheroe the night before his death. He hopes she may shed light on the murder. He is admitted immediately and Mrs. LeStrange begins to speak, slowly and carefully, about being in a "peculiar position" and wanting his advice, while making clear that what is past cannot be undone. Before she can say more, Inspector Slack arrives and demands to be seen. Mrs. LeStrange asks Clement to stay. Slack questions her about her whereabouts between six and seven the previous evening; she states she was at home, alone, her maid having the afternoon off. She confirms she did not answer the door to Miss Hartnell, who rang repeatedly. Slack then presses her about her visit to Protheroe at Old Hall the night before his death; she refuses to reveal the nature of that interview, insisting it has no bearing on the crime. She remains composed and unyielding throughout. Slack departs with a warning. Mrs. LeStrange then dismisses Clement, telling him it is too late for advice, she has already chosen her course.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 15

Hawes

Role: minor/ally (curate). Physical description: hands shaking, face twitching nervously. Emotional state: visibly unwell, nervous, and agitated in a manner Clement finds "queer." His behaviour in the chapter is characterised by persistent, probing questions about the murder investigation, who is suspected, whether Clement has private knowledge of a motive, whether Clement will report Archer, combined with a conspicuous unwillingness to take any action himself. His stated reason for the visit is to express sorrow that the murder occurred at the Vicarage. Clement infers (stated as inference in the text: "I supposed") that illness explains his strange manner, referencing what "Haydock had said about his illness." He leaves having arranged to cover the Mother's Union service and the District Visitors meeting. His repeated, circling questions about motive and Clement's private knowledge are noted by Clement as unusual.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: ally/person of interest. Physical description: wears a dress of "dead black material" that shows off "the extraordinary fairness of her skin"; her face is described as "curiously dead" except for her eyes, which are "burningly alive" and carry "a watchful look" in this chapter. Emotional state: composed, controlled, and deliberate. She speaks "very slowly and thoughtfully, seeming to weigh each word." She is calm under Slack's pressure, at moments openly amused by him, and unyielding throughout. She had sought to speak to Clement previously but decided against it; she now acknowledges she was wrong to hold back. She refuses to reveal the nature of her visit to Protheroe at Old Hall, insisting it has no bearing on the crime. At the chapter's close she dismisses Clement, saying it is too late for advice and that she has "chosen her part." Her motivation for the visit to Protheroe is not revealed; her motivation for silence is not stated and cannot be inferred from this chapter alone. Relationship to Protheroe: she was acquainted with him but had not seen him for several years; she did not wish to encounter Mrs. or Miss Protheroe, which is why she called at an unusual hour.

Inspector Slack

Role: antagonist (investigative). No physical description in this chapter. Emotional state: brisk, increasingly frustrated, and finally baffled by Mrs. Lestrangle's composure. He scowls upon seeing Clement, and Clement notes plainly that "Slack does not like me." He questions Mrs. Lestrangle about her alibi for the six-to-seven window and about her visit to Protheroe, bangs his fist on a table, and departs with a warning when she refuses to cooperate. His stated objective is to establish the truth of the murder. He is described as departing and "extricating himself with dignity."

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (murder victim). Not present; discussed throughout. Described as having had "a very loud voice" and a reputation on the Bench for severity. He had publicly threatened Archer the previous morning in the village street. He had a private interview with Mrs. Lestrangle the night before his death at Old Hall. He is described as "not a popular man."

Archer

Role: referenced/offstage (suspect). Described by Clement as "an inveterate poacher, one of those cheerful ne'er-do-wells that are to be found in any parish." He was sentenced (presumably by Protheroe on the Bench) and made some form of threatening statement at that time. Protheroe had threatened to show Archer "what vengeance was worth next time he caught him." Clement is careful to note that the threats, strictly speaking, were Protheroe's, not Archer's. Archer's current state of mind after release from prison is unknown to Clement.

Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only as having been briefly suspected and then cleared after making "a foolish statement." No further detail given in this chapter.

Haydock

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only as having previously said something to Clement about Hawes's illness. Not present.

Miss Hartnell

Role: referenced/offstage. Described by Mrs. Lestrange as an "elderly woman" who "bores me dreadfully" and as "particularly boring." She called at Mrs. Lestrange's house around six o'clock, rang the bell at least half a dozen times, and received no answer. Used by Slack as a potential witness to contradict Mrs. Lestrange's alibi; Mrs. Lestrange neutralises this by confirming she was home but chose not to answer.

Hilda

Role: minor (unnamed function, named in dialogue). Mrs. Lestrange's maid. She admits Clement and later Slack. She had the afternoon off on the day of the murder, which means she cannot corroborate Mrs. Lestrange's alibi.

Mrs. Protheroe / Miss Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Mrs. Lestrange states she did not wish to see either of them, which is why she called at an unusual hour. No further detail given in this chapter.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 15

Old Hall

The residence of Colonel Protheroe. Mrs. Lestrange visited him there the night before his death. Not described physically in this chapter.

Mrs. Lestrange's drawing-room

Described as a "little drawing-room." Mrs. Lestrange wears black; the room contains at least one table (on which Slack bangs his fist) and chairs. The hall table at the Vicarage is mentioned in passing as holding the *Guardian* and the *Church Times*, unopened.

The village

An English village parish. The village street is referenced as the location where Protheroe publicly threatened Archer the previous morning, within earshot of multiple people. The social texture of the village is established: callers ring at doors, the Mother's Union and District Visitors meetings are parish fixtures, and gossip travels quickly enough that Clement expects the police will hear of Archer's threats through ordinary channels.

The Bench / local magistracy

Colonel Protheroe sat on the Bench and had a reputation for severity in sentencing. He sentenced Archer for poaching. This is the mechanism by which Protheroe accumulated enemies.

Inspector Slack / the police investigation

Slack is the inspector in charge of the Protheroe murder case. He is conducting alibi interviews, framed as routine ("just as a matter of form"). The investigation has already cleared Redding. An inquest is forthcoming, at which Mrs. Lestrange will be required to give evidence.

Parish duties referenced

Mother's Union service; District Visitors meeting. These establish the rhythms of an active Church of England parish and are used to show that Clement has ongoing responsibilities he is delegating to Hawes.

CONFLICT

Chapter 15

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The first is internal: Clement is morally torn between a civic duty to report Archer as a potential suspect and his pastoral reluctance to help build a case against a man who may be innocent. This conflict does not resolve, Clement deflects responsibility to Hawes, who refuses to act. The second is external: Inspector Slack attempts to break Mrs. Lestrangle's composure and extract information about her alibi and her visit to Protheroe. She resists completely, and Slack departs having gained nothing. Both conflicts end in stasis rather than resolution, with the investigation no further forward and Mrs. Lestrangle having "chosen her part" in silence.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 15

- The previous morning: Protheroe publicly threatened Archer in the village street, overheard by Hawes and others. Clement was present. Hawes quotes Clement's own words back to him from this occasion.
- The night before Protheroe's death: Mrs. Lestrangle visited Protheroe at Old Hall.
- The day of the murder, early afternoon: Mrs. Lestrangle was out for a walk.
- The day of the murder, before five o'clock: Mrs. Lestrangle returned home.
- The day of the murder, approximately six o'clock: Miss Hartnell called at Mrs. Lestrangle's house and rang the bell "at least half a dozen times" without answer.
- The murder window established by Slack: between 6 and 7 p.m. the previous evening
- Archer's imprisonment: referenced as past; he has already been released. Duration of sentence not stated.
- Mrs. Lestrangle had not seen Protheroe "for several years" prior to the night of her visit to Old Hall.
- No specific calendar dates are given in this chapter.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 15

"I assure you, sir, I never felt better. Never in my life."

WHY IT LANDS Hawes's denial of his obvious illness; establishes his unreliability as a witness to his own state and, by extension, raises questions about his reliability throughout the chapter.

"I had nothing of the sort," I said shortly. I rather dislike Hawes's tendency to mysticism. There is a touch of the visionary about him.

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for both Clement, pragmatic, resistant to mysticism, and Hawes, whose "visionary" quality is flagged as a trait Clement finds suspect.

"Don't you," I said wearily. "You're a young man. You're zealous in the cause of right. When you get to my age, you'll find that you like to give people the benefit of the doubt."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: articulates Clement's moral philosophy and the generational and temperamental divide between him and Hawes; also carries the chapter's central ethical tension about Archer.

There was something curiously dead about her face. Only the eyes were burningly alive.

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and character-defining: establishes Mrs. Lestrangle's physical and psychological signature, the contrast between surface stillness and interior intensity, which governs her behaviour throughout the chapter.

"Most people, most men, at any rate, are out for their own hand."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Mrs. Lestrangle: reveals a habitual bitterness toward men and a history of being used rather than helped; contextualises why Clement's offer of genuine assistance matters to her.

"I have chosen my part."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically and dramatically significant: Mrs. Lestrangle's closing words, repeated twice for emphasis, signal a deliberate decision to remain silent regardless of consequence; marketable as a line that encapsulates the chapter's unresolved tension and her enigmatic character.

16

Chapter 16

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 16

The narrator (a vicar, referred to as "padre" by Lawrence Redding and as "Mr. Clement" by Anne Protheroe) exits a house and encounters Dr. Haydock on the doorstep, who asks whether Inspector Slack has been civil during his questioning of an unnamed woman. The narrator catches up with Slack in the village street, and the inspector shares his working theory that the woman, identified as Mrs. Lestrangle, was blackmailing Colonel Protheroe, which would explain her secretive visit to him. Slack also reveals that the colonel's butler, Reeves, was dismissed after Protheroe grew angry that Reeves had admitted Mrs. Lestrangle, and that Reeves has since given notice. Slack then interviews the chauffeur, Manning, who establishes that he drove Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe to the village at 5:30, left Mrs. Protheroe by the church at a quarter past six, and drove straight home. Lettice Protheroe is also briefly questioned; she confirms she spent the afternoon playing tennis at Much Benham and returned around 7:30. The narrator visits Old Hall, waits for Anne Protheroe, and discusses funeral arrangements with her. Anne raises the question of why she did not hear the shot if her husband was killed immediately after she left him; the narrator explains the police believe the shot was fired later and that the "6:20" on the note may have been added by the murderer. The narrator then enters the woods behind the Vicarage to investigate whether the murderer could have approached through the undergrowth, where he encounters Lawrence Redding on the same errand. Together they visit Miss Marple, who confirms she saw no suspicious persons pass along the lane but did observe Dr. Stone and Miss Cram using the path earlier in the afternoon. Miss Marple also shares that Inspector Slack has been pressing her to fix the timing of the gunshot relative to Lawrence and Mrs. Protheroe's departure from the studio, and that her growing impression is that it was fired after they left. The two men return to the woods to trace possible routes to the Vicarage wall, where they discover Inspector Slack has already conducted the same search and reached a definitive conclusion: there is no sign of anyone having crossed the wall, and the murderer must have entered through the Vicarage's front door.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 16

Inspector Slack

A police inspector leading the murder investigation. Described as a man who has never learned civility, though he is energetic and not without intelligence. Dislikes the narrator but is willing to use him as an information source. Advances the blackmail theory regarding Mrs. Lestrangle and Colonel Protheroe. Has already interviewed Reeves and is proceeding to question the chauffeur and maids. Independently investigates the wall approach to the Vicarage and reaches the same conclusion as the narrator and Lawrence before them. Role: antagonist (in terms of friction with the narrator) / investigative authority.

Dr. Haydock

Appears briefly on the doorstep of the house the narrator is leaving. Concerned about whether Slack has been civil to the woman being questioned (implied to be Mrs. Lestrangle). Described by Anne Protheroe as "wonderfully kind" and as looking "very sad," an observation the narrator had never previously made. Role: ally / minor.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Does not appear directly in this chapter but is extensively discussed. Described as a "smart, well-dressed lady" who came to live in the village under unexplained circumstances. Slack theorizes she was blackmailing Colonel Protheroe, citing her secretive visit to him after dinner on Wednesday night, her avoidance of Mrs. and Miss Protheroe, and her refusal to explain her purpose. The narrator visited her earlier (referenced but not depicted in this chapter). Role: referenced/offstage.

Reeves (the butler)

Does not speak at length but is present when the narrator waits in the drawing room at Old Hall. Described as having a "cold and respectful" voice and an "impassive demeanour." Was dismissed by Colonel Protheroe for admitting Mrs. Lestrangle without permission; responded by giving notice, saying he had been thinking of leaving anyway. Slack notes his "soapy, oily manner" with suspicion. The narrator wonders what Reeves knows behind his mask of the good servant. Role: minor / suspect (per Slack).

Manning (the chauffeur)

A young man, described as "not more than twenty-five or six years of age," inclined to be awed by Inspector Slack. Provides key testimony: drove Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe to the village at 5:30, left Mrs. Protheroe by the church at a quarter past six, and drove straight home via the South Lodge. States the colonel mentioned needing to see the vet about one of the horses. Role: minor / witness.

Lettice Protheroe

Arrives to collect the Fiat motor car. Questioned briefly by Slack about her movements; confirms she spent the afternoon playing tennis with the Hartley Napiers at Much Benham and returned around 7:30, which she describes as arriving "in the middle of the shemozzle." Characterised as deliberately vague about times ("I never know the time of anything"). The narrator observes that she likes to be thought "a bit wanting" but is not. Role: minor / suspect (by circumstance).

Anne Protheroe

Widow of Colonel Protheroe. Was lying down when the narrator arrives at Old Hall but had expressed a wish to see him. Praises Dr. Haydock's kindness and notes he looks sad. Raises the central question of why she did not hear the shot if her husband was killed immediately after she left. Asks whether Lawrence Redding is still suspected and is told he is "definitely cleared." Emotional state: grieving, anxious, seeking reassurance. Role: ally / witness.

Lawrence Redding

Encountered in the woods carrying a large stone intended as a gift for Miss Marple, to gain her goodwill and question her about what she may have observed. Motivated explicitly by his desire to clear the case for Anne Protheroe's sake. Expresses low confidence in Slack's abilities. Independently conceived the same plan as the narrator to search the woods for a hidden approach to the Vicarage. Has already followed one trail in the undergrowth and found it led nowhere. Agrees to attempt questioning the women servants at Old Hall that evening. Role: ally / amateur investigator.

Miss Marple

Encountered working in her garden. Receives Lawrence's rock gift graciously. Confirms she saw no suspicious persons pass along the lane but did observe Dr. Stone and Miss Cram using the path toward the barrow a little after two o'clock, and that Dr. Stone returned that way. States her growing impression that the gunshot was fired after Lawrence and Mrs. Protheroe left the studio. Suggests Lawrence try the women servants for information about Mrs. Lestrangle's visit. Demonstrates her characteristic habit of suspecting everybody. The narrator notes with unease that she somehow already knew he had visited Mrs. Lestrangle. Role: ally / investigative resource.

Dr. Stone

Referenced but not present. Observed by Miss Marple going toward the barrow with Miss Cram a little after two o'clock and returning via the path, at which point he joined Lawrence and Mrs. Protheroe. Lawrence notes there has never been any real reason to suspect him. Role: referenced/offstage.

Miss Cram

Referenced only as having accompanied Dr. Stone toward the barrow a little after two o'clock. Role: referenced/offstage.

The Hartley Napiers

Referenced only as the hosts of the tennis party Lettice attended at Much Benham. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Referenced by Inspector Slack as a potential obstacle to the front-door theory: the upper storey side windows of her house overlook most of the Vicarage wall, but the front-door approach avoids this line of sight. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Clement

Referenced by Inspector Slack as having been in London at the time of the murder, establishing that the Vicarage was known to be largely unoccupied. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mr. Dennis

Referenced by Inspector Slack as having been at a tennis party at the time of the murder. Role: referenced/offstage.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 16

Old Hall

The Protheroe family residence. Has at least two entrances: the South Lodge and the North Lodge. Contains a drawing room with electric lights and blinds kept down (in mourning). Has a stable (the colonel had horses). Accessed from the Vicarage via a private path through the woods.

The Vicarage

The narrator's home. Has a front door that stands open and cannot be seen from the kitchen. Bordered on one side by a high wall topped with fragments of broken bottles. A public footpath runs directly opposite the Vicarage gate, connecting to the woods.

The private path / the wood	A path running through a wood connecting the Vicarage to Old Hall, passing a stile near Miss Marple's garden. The wood is described as thick with tangled undergrowth. The path is used by Dr. Stone and Miss Cram to reach "the barrow" (an archaeological site, implied from context).
The barrow	An archaeological site accessible via the path through the wood, associated with Dr. Stone and Miss Cram's work. Not further described in this chapter.
Miss Marple's garden	Adjoins the path via a stile. Miss Marple was visible from the path working in the garden, consistent with her ability to observe passers-by. She cultivates Japanese gardens and prizes interesting rocks and stones for them.
The studio	A location (not in this chapter described in detail) where Lawrence Redding and Mrs. Protheroe were together at the time the shot was heard. The sound of the shot would have been "deadened" inside it, per Lawrence's inference.
Much Benham	A location outside the village where the Hartley Napiers live and where Lettice attended a tennis party.
The Fiat	A two-seater motor car belonging to or used by Lettice Protheroe, kept at Old Hall.
Colonel Protheroe's note / the 6:20 inscription	A note found at the scene bearing the time "6:20," which the police now believe may have been added by the murderer rather than written by Protheroe himself. The narrator observes the handwriting was "a somewhat illegible scrawl, not so precise as Protheroe's writing usually was." Anne Protheroe confirms that none of it looked like his handwriting.
The churchwarden institution	Inspector Slack references Colonel Protheroe's role as churchwarden in the context of his blackmail theory, noting that a churchwarden leading a double life would not be without precedent.
Miss Marple's "seven suspects"	Referenced by the narrator in passing as something Miss Marple has previously articulated. The narrator wonders who they could be. Not elaborated upon in this chapter.
G. K. Chesterton	Referenced by the narrator when Lawrence proposes that a "natural" figure such as a postman or milkman might have passed unnoticed, an idea the narrator attributes to Chesterton's fiction (specifically the Father Brown conceit of the invisible tradesman). Lawrence does not deny the influence.

CONFLICT

Chapter 16

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. Externally, the narrator, Lawrence Redding, and Inspector Slack are all independently investigating the same question: how did the murderer reach Colonel Protheroe's study? The search of the woods and the Vicarage wall ends with Slack's authoritative conclusion that the murderer entered through the front door, closing off the hidden-approach theory and escalating the puzzle. Internally, the narrator navigates a tension between his instinct to investigate and his awareness that Slack is already ahead of him, producing a mild but persistent undercurrent of professional rivalry and wounded pride. Neither conflict resolves cleanly: the front-door conclusion raises more questions than it answers, and the identity of the murderer remains entirely open.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 16

- Manning left Mrs. Protheroe by the church at **a quarter past six exactly**.
- Lettice Protheroe returned to Old Hall at approximately **7:30** ("about seven-thirty," confirmed by the narrator; Lettice herself cannot fix the time).
- Dr. Stone and Miss Cram went toward the barrow via the path **a little after two o'clock** the previous afternoon.
- Mrs. Lestrangle visited Colonel Protheroe **after dinner on Wednesday night** (two days before the murder, if the murder occurred on Friday).
- The inquest is scheduled for **tomorrow, Saturday**.
- The funeral is expected to be arranged for **Tuesday**.
- Manning is described as **not more than twenty-five or six years of age** (the only character age given in this chapter).
- The narrator's search of the second trail in the undergrowth covers approximately **ten or twelve yards** before signs of disturbance peter out (first trail, already checked by Lawrence).
- Inspector Slack states he has been searching the wall area for **over an hour** before the narrator and Lawrence arrive.

"Civility, to my mind, is an art which Inspector Slack has never learnt."

WHY IT LANDS A character-defining line that establishes the narrator's dry, ironic voice and his settled low opinion of Slack, while economically characterising Slack himself.

"If you ask me, I say 'blackmail.' Seems funny, when you think of what Colonel Protheroe was always supposed to be. But there, you never can tell. He wouldn't be the first churchwarden who'd led a double life."

WHY IT LANDS Slack's blackmail theory, which drives the chapter's investigative thrust and echoes Miss Marple's earlier observations on the same subject; also carries thematic weight about the gap between public reputation and private life.

"There is nothing so inhuman as the mask of the good servant."

WHY IT LANDS A thematically resonant observation by the narrator on Reeves, touching the novel's broader concern with concealment, hidden knowledge, and the limits of what can be known about another person.

"Ah! I always find it prudent to suspect everybody just a little. What I say is, you really never know, do you?"

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's statement of her investigative philosophy; character-defining, thematically central to the novel's approach to suspicion and knowledge, and highly marketable as a distillation of her worldview.

"How did the murderer come to the study? First way, along the lane and through the gate, second way, by the front door, third way, is there a third way?"

WHY IT LANDS Lawrence's articulation of the chapter's central structural question; establishes the logical framework the investigation is working within and makes the eventual answer, the front door, land with greater force.

"Whoever murdered Colonel Protheroe didn't come this way to do it! There's not a sign either on this side of the wall, nor the other. Whoever murdered Colonel Protheroe came through the front door. There's no other way he could have come."

WHY IT LANDS Inspector Slack's conclusion closes the chapter's investigative thread and reframes the entire mystery; worldbuilding-critical in that it establishes the physical constraints of the crime scene and eliminates a major line of inquiry.

17 Chapter 17

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 17

The chapter opens with Inspector Slack's morning visit to the narrator, a clergyman referred to as Mr. Clement. Slack reports that the mysterious telephone call that lured Clement away from his home on the day of the murder was traced to the North Lodge of Old Hall, an empty building with a wiped telephone receiver, confirming the call was a deliberate, premeditated act by someone familiar with the property. Slack then accounts for the movements of Mrs. Protheroe, Miss Protheroe, and the household staff on the afternoon of the murder, effectively clearing each of them. He reveals a second surprising discovery: a telephone call made to Mrs. Price Ridley at 6:30 that same evening was traced to Lawrence Redding's cottage, despite Redding having a confirmed alibi. Slack theorizes that both calls were made by the same person and that the use of Redding's cottage, combined with the use of Redding's pistol, represents a deliberate effort to frame him. He further deduces that the murderer did not know about the recent quarrel between Redding and Colonel Protheroe, which had ended Redding's regular visits to Old Hall.

Clement plies Slack with vintage port, loosening the inspector's tongue. Slack reveals that his primary suspect is Mrs. Lestrangle, who visited Colonel Protheroe the night before the murder. He constructs a blackmail theory: that she had previously extorted Protheroe, returned to do so again, and killed him when he threatened to go to the law. Clement resists this theory on grounds of Mrs. Lestrangle's character, though he privately concedes he could more easily believe her capable of murder than of blackmail. Slack then has a sudden insight, the second telephone call may have been designed to create an alibi for Mrs. Lestrangle by establishing a pattern the police would connect to the first call.

The chapter closes with Clement visiting Miss Marple at her home, where she is in a flurry of preparation for her nephew Raymond West's visit. After some domestic distraction, she reveals the chapter's final and most striking detail: the previous night, at midnight, she observed Gladys Cram entering the nearby wood carrying a suitcase, and returning shortly afterward without it.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 17

Mr. Clement (narrator)

Role: protagonist. A clergyman and the first-person narrator. He receives Slack, asks probing questions, and deliberately uses vintage port to encourage the inspector to speak freely, an act he describes as "cruel abuse of the vintage port" but accepts as necessary. He resists Slack's blackmail theory regarding Mrs. Lestrangle on grounds of her "personal refinement" and "lady"-like character, though he privately admits she could be capable of murder. He then visits Miss Marple at her request. His stated objective in this chapter is to gather information and understand the progress of the investigation.

Mrs. Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Fully accounted for on the afternoon of the murder: at home until 5:30, confirmed by half a dozen servants; then drove with Colonel Protheroe to the village; did errands at the grocer's and fish shop; walked down the back lane where Miss Marple observed her; carried no handbag. Cleared as the person who made the telephone call from the North Lodge.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (murder victim). On the afternoon of the murder, he drove to the village with Mrs. Protheroe and visited Quinton the vet about one of his horses. Referenced as the victim of the murder under investigation and as the man Mrs. Lestrangle visited the night before his death.

Miss Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Confirmed to have been at Much Benham at 5:30 on the afternoon of the murder. Cleared. Previously painted by Lawrence Redding at Old Hall on most afternoons, a routine the murderer apparently did not know had ended.

Lawrence Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. His cottage was used to place the 6:30 telephone call to Mrs. Price Ridley. He has a confirmed alibi for that time: he was on his way to the Blue Boar with Dr. Stone, in full view of the village. His pistol is also implicated in the murder. Slack identifies the pattern, cottage, pistol, and now the telephone, as a deliberate effort to frame him. His former habit of riding his motor bicycle through the North Gate to Old Hall to paint Miss Protheroe is cited as the reason the first call was placed from the North Lodge rather than his cottage.

Miss Marple

Role: ally. Appears in the second half of the chapter. She is described as being in "a fluster", "very pink and slightly incoherent", due to the imminent arrival of her nephew. She is distracted by domestic preparations but eventually delivers her key information: she observed Gladys Cram entering the wood with a suitcase at midnight and returning without it. Her earlier observation that Mrs. Protheroe carried no handbag is confirmed by Slack as accurate. Clement notes, "She usually is," when Slack acknowledges she was right, suggesting an established pattern of Miss Marple's reliability. Her stated objective in summoning Clement is to report a "Peculiar Thing" she witnessed.

Griselda

Role: minor. Clement's wife. Delivers Miss Marple's note to Clement and relays the summons. She mentions her own obligation ("my old women coming in two minutes"), expresses distaste for old women's habit of showing her their bad legs, and notes with relief that the afternoon inquest means Clement will not have to attend the Boys' Club Cricket Match. She does not accompany Clement to Miss Marple's.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement's next-door neighbor. She received a telephone call at 6:30 that was traced to Redding's cottage. She had previously made a fuss about this call. Slack describes her as having "kicked up a fuss" the previous morning.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: referenced/offstage, primary suspect (per Slack). Visited Colonel Protheroe the night before the murder. Slack's blackmail theory: she had previously extorted Protheroe, returned to do so again, and killed him when he threatened legal action. Clement resists the blackmail characterization, calling her "a lady" and citing "personal refinement," but concedes he could believe her capable of murder. Slack counters that "that woman is the kind who could stick a knife into you without turning a hair." Slack notes she cannot have simultaneously telephoned Mrs. Price Ridley and shot Protheroe, which prompts his alibi theory. Her social status is described by Clement as that of a *déclassée*.

Dr. Stone

Role: minor. Confirmed by Slack to have been at the barrow or mound with Miss Cram from approximately 2:30 the previous afternoon. He returned alone. He says he did not hear any shot but "admits he's absentminded." He was with Redding on the way to the Blue Boar at 6:30, providing Redding's alibi. Described as "pleasant as could be" when Slack interviewed him.

Gladys Cram (Miss Cram)

Role: minor/suspect-adjacent. Was at the barrow with Dr. Stone in the afternoon and returned later than he did. Miss Marple observed her entering the wood at midnight carrying a suitcase and returning shortly afterward without it. No explanation is offered in this chapter.

Raymond West

Role: referenced/offstage. Miss Marple's nephew, described as an author. He is arriving that day. Miss Marple notes he writes "very clever books" but that "people are not really nearly so unpleasant as he makes out." He gets up very late and smokes a pipe. His visit is the source of Miss Marple's domestic distraction.

The butler (unnamed)

Role: referenced/offstage. Slack notes he has "got his eye on" the butler because of the butler having given notice, but does not think he knows anything about the murder.

The charwoman at Redding's cottage (unnamed)

Role: referenced/offstage. She cleaned Redding's cottage the morning after the murder, inadvertently wiping any fingerprints from the telephone receiver. Slack describes her with frustration as "a stupid old fool" who cannot remember when she last saw the pistol.

Quinton

Role: referenced/offstage. The village vet. Colonel Protheroe visited him on the afternoon of the murder to discuss one of his horses.

Emily

Role: minor. Miss Marple's maid. Addressed briefly by Miss Marple regarding the correct sheets to air for Raymond West's visit.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

The North Lodge / North Gate

A lodge building at the northern entrance to Old Hall. Empty at the time of the murder. A rear window was open, providing access. The telephone inside was used to place the call luring Clement away. The receiver was wiped clean of fingerprints. Lawrence Redding's habitual route to Old Hall, by motor bicycle through the North Gate, is cited as the reason the murderer chose this location for the first call.

Lawrence Redding's cottage

A separate dwelling used by Redding. The telephone inside was used at 6:30 to call Mrs. Price Ridley. The charwoman who "does for" Redding cleaned the cottage the following morning, destroying any fingerprint evidence. The cottage is apparently accessible enough that someone entered and used the telephone without detection.

The barrow / mound	An archaeological site (described variously as "that mound, or barrow, or whatever you call it") where Dr. Stone and Miss Cram spent the afternoon of the murder from approximately 2:30 onward. Its proximity to events is implied but not specified in this chapter.
The wood	The location into which Miss Marple observed Gladys Cram walking at midnight with a suitcase. She returned without it. No further detail about the wood's location or character is given in this chapter.
The Blue Boar	A local establishment (implied to be a pub or inn) where Redding was heading at 6:30 with Dr. Stone, providing his alibi.
Much Benham	A nearby location where Miss Protheroe was confirmed to be at 5:30 on the afternoon of the murder. Clement notes his nephew was also there.
The Vicarage	Clement's home, where the murder took place and where Slack conducts his morning visit. Clement offers Slack port from his cellar.
The village	The setting for the novel. Mrs. Protheroe ran errands at a grocer's and a fish shop on the afternoon of the murder. The back lane connects the village to Old Hall.
Vintage port	Clement possesses "very fine old vintage port," which he uses deliberately to loosen Slack's professional reserve. The port is described as effective: "Such is the effect of that particular port." Clement serves two glasses. He describes using it this way as "cruel abuse of the vintage port."
The inquest	Scheduled for the afternoon of this chapter. Referenced by Griselda as a reason Clement will be spared the Boys' Club Cricket Match.
Blackmail law (as described by Slack)	Slack explains that the law has recently changed to make prosecuting blackmail easier: "Every facility is given nowadays to people prosecuting for blackmail, names are not allowed to be reported in the press." This is presented as a motive for Mrs. Lestrangle to silence Protheroe before he could use the law against her.
The Boys' Club Cricket Match	A local event Clement was apparently expected to attend, mentioned only in passing by Griselda.

CONFLICT

Chapter 17

The chapter's primary conflict is external and investigative: the effort to identify Colonel Protheroe's murderer. The chapter advances this conflict by eliminating several suspects through alibi verification and by introducing two new lines of inquiry, the deliberate framing of Lawrence Redding through the use of his cottage and pistol, and the emergence of Mrs. Lestrangle as Slack's prime suspect under a blackmail theory. A secondary, quieter conflict is Clement's resistance to Slack's characterization of Mrs. Lestrangle, rooted in his own judgment of her character. The chapter does not resolve the central conflict; instead it escalates it by adding the unexplained midnight behavior of Gladys Cram.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 17

- **5:30 p.m. (day of the murder):** Mrs. Protheroe was confirmed at home until this time, witnessed by half a dozen servants. The car came round at this time to drive Colonel Protheroe and Mrs. Protheroe to the village.
- **Afternoon of the murder, approximately 2:30 p.m.:** Dr. Stone and Miss Cram went up to the barrow and stayed there all afternoon. Dr. Stone returned alone; Miss Cram returned later.
- **6:30 p.m. (day of the murder):** The telephone call to Mrs. Price Ridley was placed from Redding's cottage. At this same time, Redding was on his way to the Blue Boar with Dr. Stone, in full view of the village, his confirmed alibi.
- **The night before the murder:** Mrs. Lestrangle visited Colonel Protheroe.
- **Midnight (the previous night, i.e., the night before this chapter):** Miss Marple observed Gladys Cram entering the wood with a suitcase. Cram returned "quite a short time afterwards" without the suitcase.
- **"Yesterday morning":** Mrs. Price Ridley made her complaint about the telephone call. The charwoman cleaned Redding's cottage, destroying fingerprint evidence.
- **Raymond West's arrival:** Expected "today" (the day of this chapter). Miss Marple is preparing for his visit.
- **The inquest:** Scheduled for "this afternoon" (the afternoon of this chapter's day).
- **"In time":** Clement's opening observation that Slack "may" eventually forget "the incident of the clock", an unspecified prior event, with no timeline given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 17

"It also shows that the murderer was well acquainted with Old Hall and its surroundings."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the key deduction that the murderer is an insider, someone with specific local knowledge, narrowing the field of suspects.

"You see the significance? Mr. Redding's house used to telephone from. Mr. Redding's pistol. All throwing suspicion on Mr. Redding."

WHY IT LANDS Slack's articulation of the framing pattern; worldbuilding-critical in establishing the murderer's deliberate strategy and Redding's position as a constructed suspect.

"The murderer is someone who didn't know about the quarrel and that Mr. Redding wasn't going up to Old Hall any more."

WHY IT LANDS Character- and plot-defining; this deduction is the chapter's most significant investigative breakthrough, narrowing the murderer's identity by what they did not know.

"I don't agree with you, inspector. Mrs. Lestrangle doesn't seem to me to be a potential blackmailer. She's, well, it's an old-fashioned word, but she's a, lady."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Clement, reveals his class assumptions and moral framework, and thematically significant as a moment where the narrator's judgment may be tested against the truth.

"Curiously enough, I could believe Mrs. Lestrangle guilty of murder much more easily than I could believe her capable of blackmail."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically rich and marketable; Clement's private admission complicates his public defense of Mrs. Lestrangle and signals that his instincts about her are more nuanced than his stated position.

"She didn't, at any rate. Because quite a short time afterwards she came back, and she hadn't got the suitcase with her."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's delivery of the chapter's closing revelation; the flat, precise observation is characteristic of her method and leaves the chapter on a note of unresolved mystery that drives forward momentum.

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Chapter 18

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 18

The chapter opens on a Saturday afternoon as the inquest into Colonel Protheroe's murder is held at the Blue Boar inn. The narrator, Mr. Clement (the vicar), observes villagers speculating about his own possible guilt as he arrives. The coroner, Dr. Roberts of Much Benham, presides. Key witnesses give evidence in sequence: Lawrence Redding identifies the murder weapon as his pistol, last seen in his cottage on the Tuesday before the murder; Mrs. Protheroe testifies she last saw her husband at a quarter to six and visited the Vicarage around a quarter past six via the back lane and garden gate; Mr. Clement describes his appointment with Protheroe and his summons to the Abbots; Dr. Haydock establishes time of death as between 6:20 and 6:35, ruling out suicide; Inspector Slack presents the unfinished letter and the clock, allowing the inquest to settle on 6:22 as the working time of death; the maid Mary testifies she heard no shot; Mrs. Lestrangle is excused by medical certificate; and Mrs. Archer, Lawrence Redding's charwoman, confirms the pistol was present in his sitting-room at lunchtime on the day of the murder. The verdict is "Murder by Person or Persons Unknown." Fleeing journalists afterward, Clement takes refuge with Dr. Stone and Miss Cram in the Blue Boar. Stone delivers a lengthy monologue on his archaeological work and his contempt for the late Colonel Protheroe, before Miss Cram reminds him of his train. Clement accompanies Stone to the station, during which Stone makes remarks disparaging Lawrence Redding and hinting at his own attachment to Miss Cram. At the station, Clement briefly collides with Raymond West (Miss Marple's nephew, arriving in the village) and then walks back with the local chemist, Cherubim, who reveals that the 6:50 train on the Thursday of the murder ran thirty minutes late, arriving at twenty past seven, a detail with potential bearing on the case's timeline.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 18

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (deceased). The murder victim around whom all testimony revolves. Described by Dr. Stone as "an opinionated boor" who had read a few books and set himself up as an authority against Stone's professional expertise. Clement notes that Protheroe was slightly deaf and spoke in a loud voice, making his appointment at the Vicarage common knowledge. His will and the question of who inherits Old Hall are raised but unresolved.

Lawrence Redding

Role: witness/suspect (present and referenced). Gives evidence identifying the murder weapon as his pistol, which he believes he last saw on the Tuesday before the murder. His cottage door was habitually unlocked. Clement observes journalists besieging his cottage after the inquest. Dr. Stone describes him as "dangerous" and implies he is habitually attentive to women, which Clement infers is connected to Stone's concern about Miss Cram.

Mrs. Protheroe (Anne Protheroe)

Role: witness. Testifies she last saw her husband at approximately a quarter to six in the village street, visited the Vicarage at about a quarter past six via the back lane and garden gate, heard no voices in the study, and knew of no enemy with a grudge against her husband. She tells Clement afterward that she was instructed by the police to suggest a slightly earlier time than 6:20 for her visit, indicating the police are managing what the inquest reveals.

Dr. Haydock

Role: witness/ally. Gives the critical medical evidence: time of death between 6:20 and 6:35, with 6:35 as the absolute outside limit; rules out suicide definitively. Also signs the medical certificate excusing Mrs. Lestrangle from attending.

Inspector Slack

Role: witness/minor. Gives discreet, abridged evidence. Presents the unfinished letter (timed 6:20) and the clock. The police are described as "giving nothing away."

Colonel Melchett

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement infers that Melchett and the coroner are working in agreement to control what the inquest discloses.

Mary (the Vicarage maid)

Role: witness/minor. Testifies that Colonel Protheroe arrived at a quarter past six exactly (she heard the church chime after showing him into the study). She did not look at the clock directly. She heard no shot and is described as "truculent", resistant and defensive on the stand.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: referenced/offstage. Subpoenaed but excused by a medical certificate signed by Dr. Haydock on grounds of illness.

Mrs. Archer

Role: witness/minor. Lawrence Redding's charwoman ("the one who 'did for' Lawrence Redding"). Identifies the pistol as the one kept in Redding's sitting-room "over against the bookcase." States she last saw it at lunchtime on the day of the murder, quarter to one. Clement notes she is now more definite than she was when Inspector Slack first questioned her.

Dr. Roberts

Role: minor. The coroner, from the town of Much Benham. Described as clearing his throat, adjusting his eyeglasses, and looking important. Sums up "in a negative manner, but with a good deal of firmness."

Dr. Stone

Role: minor. An archaeologist staying at the Blue Boar, engaged in excavating a barrow on or near Colonel Protheroe's land. Physically described: small, round bald head, round rosy face, very strong glasses. Enthusiastic to the point of obliviousness about his work, long barrows, round barrows, stone age, bronze age, paleolithic, neolithic, kistvaens, and cromlechs. Holds a strong negative opinion of Protheroe ("an opinionated boor"). Departing for London for two days: to visit his mother on Sunday and meet with lawyers on Monday, returning Tuesday. Expresses concern about whether Mrs. Protheroe will allow the barrow excavation to continue. Makes remarks about Redding that Clement reads as jealousy over Miss Cram's attention. His affection for Miss Cram is openly displayed.

Miss Cram (Gladys Cram)

Role: minor. Dr. Stone's assistant, working at a typewriter in his sitting-room at the Blue Boar. Described as a young woman with a "broad smile of welcome." Attended the inquest and found it disappointing, "tame" and not "spicy." Manages Stone practically (reminds him of his train, notes he would be lost without her). Stone describes her as "a wonderful girl" with "the heart of a child." Clement infers she is clever in her own way and that she and Stone may be headed toward marriage. Stone implies she is "not too happy at home." Clement infers from Stone's remarks about Redding that Redding has paid attention to Miss Cram.

Raymond West

Role: minor. Miss Marple's nephew. Described as "a rather exquisite young man" who prides himself on poise and detachment. Arrives at the station just as Clement and Stone are rushing in; they collide with him. He departs before Clement can speak with him.

Cherubim

Role: minor. The local chemist, whose name Clement notes with mild amusement. Walking back from the station with Clement, he asks about the inquest verdict and then delivers a lengthy complaint about the train service. Crucially, he reveals that on the Thursday of the murder he had attended a meeting of the Pharmaceutical Society, and the 6:50 train ran thirty minutes late, not arriving until twenty past seven. He had intended to write a complaint to the company but the murder put it out of his head.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement thinks of her when Stone makes remarks about his relationship with Miss Cram, noting that "several well-known parallels would have occurred to Miss Marple, had she been there."

Mary Adams, Mary Hill

Role: minor/unnamed villagers. Voices overheard by Clement outside the inquest, speculating about his guilt and commenting on Mary Hill's airs from being "in service there."

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

St. Mary Mead

The village in which the novel is set. Established in this chapter as having had no murder for at least fifteen years prior to Protheroe's death. The village has a church whose chimes are audible from the Vicarage. The Vicarage study is the scene of the murder.

Much Benham

The adjoining town from which the coroner, Dr. Roberts, comes.

The Vicarage

The narrator's home and the site of the murder. Referenced in testimony: Protheroe arrived at a quarter past six, was shown into the study by Mary, and Mrs. Protheroe entered via the back lane and garden gate.

Lawrence Redding's cottage

Described as standing "in an isolated position with no other houses near it," located on the route between the Blue Boar and the station. The door was habitually unlocked. The pistol was kept on a shelf / "over against the bookcase" in the sitting-room.

Old Hall	Colonel Protheroe's residence, referenced in connection with the barrow excavation and the question of inheritance. Clement speculates Protheroe may have left it to Lettice.
The barrow (archaeological site)	An earthwork on or near Old Hall's land being excavated by Dr. Stone. Stone's work involves long barrows, round barrows, and spans stone age, bronze age, paleolithic, and neolithic periods. He references kistvaens and cromlechs as part of his field. The excavation is contingent on the landowner's permission, now uncertain following Protheroe's death.
The inquest process	Conducted by a coroner (here Dr. Roberts). Witnesses are called sequentially; a medical certificate can excuse a witness. The police (Inspector Slack, Colonel Melchett) appear to coordinate with the coroner to control what is disclosed. The verdict form used is "Murder by Person or Persons Unknown."
The 6:50 train	A train service running through the local station. On the Thursday of the murder it ran thirty minutes late, arriving at twenty past seven. This is established by Cherubim as a matter he noticed because he was on it, returning from a Pharmaceutical Society meeting.
The press	A "small army of young men with bright, alert faces" described as having a "superficial resemblance to each other," who have been haunting the Vicarage for several days and are present in force at the inquest and at Redding's cottage. Their presence is treated as an intrusion to be escaped.
The Pharmaceutical Society	Referenced as the professional body whose meeting Cherubim attended in town on the Thursday of the murder.

CONFLICT

Chapter 18

The chapter's primary conflict is external and institutional: the inquest is the legal mechanism by which the community attempts to establish the facts of Protheroe's murder, but the police are actively managing what is disclosed, and the verdict, "Murder by Person or Persons Unknown", resolves nothing. A secondary, quieter conflict emerges in the chapter's final movement: Cherubim's apparently incidental complaint about the 6:50 train introduces a potential contradiction in the established timeline, raising the possibility that the accepted sequence of events on the evening of the murder may be wrong. This conflict does not resolve; it escalates by implication.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 18

- Colonel Protheroe arrived at the Vicarage at **a quarter past six** (Mary heard the church chime after showing him in).
- Mrs. Protheroe last saw her husband at approximately **a quarter to six** in the village street.
- Mrs. Protheroe visited the Vicarage at approximately **a quarter past six**.

- Dr. Haydock's estimated time of death: **6:20 to 6:30, with 6:35 as the absolute outside limit.**
- The unfinished letter found at the scene is timed **6:20.**
- The working time of death assumed by the inquest: **6:22.**
- Anne Protheroe was instructed by police to suggest a time **slightly earlier than 6:20** for her visit.
- Lawrence Redding last saw the pistol on **Tuesday**, two days before the murder (placing the murder on **Thursday**).
- Mrs. Archer last saw the pistol in Redding's sitting-room at **quarter to one on the day of the murder** (Thursday lunchtime).
- The murder occurred on a **Thursday** (confirmed by Cherubim's reference to "the day of the murder" and "last Thursday").
- The **6:50 train** on the Thursday of the murder ran **thirty minutes late**, arriving at **twenty past seven.**
- Cherubim had attended a **Pharmaceutical Society meeting** in town on that Thursday.
- Dr. Stone is departing for London for **two days**: visiting his mother on **Sunday**, meeting with lawyers on **Monday**, returning on **Tuesday**.
- St. Mary Mead has had **no murder for at least fifteen years** prior to Protheroe's death.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 18

"There had been no murder in St. Mary Mead for at least fifteen years. And to have someone like Colonel Protheroe murdered actually in the Vicarage study is such a feast of sensation as rarely falls to the lot of a village population."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the rarity and magnitude of the event within the village's social world, and sets the tone of communal excitement that frames the inquest scene.

"There's vicar. Looks pale, don't he? I wonder if he had a hand in it. 'Twas done at Vicarage, after all."

WHY IT LANDS Captures the village gossip dynamic and the narrator's own precarious position as a suspect in local opinion, despite his alibi.

"It was his opinion that the deceased had been shot at approximately 6:20 to 6:30, certainly not later than 6:35. That was the outside limit. He was positive and emphatic on that point."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the medical time-of-death window that anchors the entire case's timeline and against which all other testimony is measured.

"An opinionated boor," he said with heat. "Yes, yes, I know he is dead, and one should speak no ill of the dead. But death does not alter facts."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Dr. Stone, his passion overrides social convention, and provides a rare unguarded negative portrait of the victim from someone with a stated grievance against him.

"Half an hour exactly! What do you think of that? Ten minutes I don't mind. But if the train doesn't get in till twenty past seven, well, you can't get home before half-past."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and potentially plot-critical: establishes that the 6:50 train on the evening of the murder arrived thirty minutes late, a fact that may bear on the movements or alibi of any character who used it.

"The police were giving nothing away."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: a concise statement of the gap between the official, managed version of events presented at the inquest and the fuller picture the narrator is piecing together, the central tension of the investigative narrative.

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Chapter 19

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 19

The narrator (the padre/vicar) accompanies Lawrence Redding to Lawrence's cottage, where the two men discuss the murder investigation. Lawrence voices his fear that the crime was an "inside job", someone who had been in his house and knew where his pistol was kept. The narrator deflects this by noting that the village of St. Mary Mead is so thoroughly observant of its residents' habits that such knowledge need not imply intimacy. The conversation touches on Mrs. Archer's sudden certainty that the pistol was in its place at midday on Thursday, and on the state of the pistol itself (unloaded, but with a full box of cartridges nearby; found loaded in all six chambers with one shot fired).

Lawrence then recounts what happened the previous night when, acting on Miss Marple's advice, he went to Old Hall and, with Anne's help, interviewed the parlourmaid Rose and, through her, the kitchenmaid Gladys. Rose reveals that Gladys had overheard a heated argument between Colonel Protheroe and Mrs. Lestrangle the night before his death. Gladys's account, relayed in full, describes Protheroe refusing some demand of Mrs. Lestrangle's, forbidding her to see "her" (presumably Mrs. Protheroe), and repeatedly saying "I don't believe it" in connection with something "Haydock" had said. Most dramatically, Gladys claims to have heard Mrs. Lestrangle say: "By this time tomorrow night, you may be dead." Lawrence himself doubts the precision of this last detail, suspecting it may have been embellished after the murder. The chapter closes with the narrator reflecting on Dr. Haydock's apparent efforts to shield Mrs. Lestrangle, and acknowledging, with self-aware irony, that his own reluctance to suspect her is rooted in her beauty and charm.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 19

The Narrator (the padre/vicar)

POV character. Observes Lawrence's living conditions, asks pointed questions about the pistol and Mrs. Archer, and at the chapter's close reflects privately on Mrs. Lestrangle and Dr. Haydock. His self-deprecating admission that he resists suspecting Mrs. Lestrangle because she is beautiful is a moment of explicit self-awareness. Role: protagonist/narrator.

Miss Marple

Referenced/offstage. Described as "rather unpopular" for knowing "a thing or two." Her advice prompted Lawrence's visit to Old Hall. Role: referenced ally.

Anne (Protheroe)

Appears briefly and functionally at Old Hall, she facilitates Lawrence's interview with Rose by introducing him and then leaving the room. No physical description or emotional state given. Role: minor/functional.

Rose (parlourmaid at Old Hall)

Named character, appears in Lawrence's recounted narrative. Described as "a pretty girl of twenty-five" with "a limpid gaze." Initially maintains perfect servant composure ("polite, anxious to assist, and completely uninterested"), but is flustered when Lawrence breaks decorum by asking whether the servants have discussed the murder among themselves. She softens when Lawrence appeals to her personally and emotionally. She acts as the intermediary who arranges the meeting with Gladys. Role: minor/functional.

Gladys (kitchenmaid at Old Hall)

Named character (also called "Gladdie"), appears in Lawrence's recounted narrative. Described as "more like a shivering rabbit than anything human." She had overheard the argument between Colonel Protheroe and Mrs. Lestrangle through the study window while meeting a friend outside, a transgression she fears will reach Mrs. Pratt's ears. She is the source of the chapter's most significant piece of testimony. Lawrence infers (stated as his own suspicion) that her account, while broadly true, has been embellished since the murder, particularly the final quoted remark. Role: minor/functional witness.

Mrs. Pratt (cook at Old Hall)

Referenced/offstage. Mentioned as the authority figure whose disapproval both Rose and Gladys fear. No physical description. Role: referenced minor.

Mrs. Simmons (housekeeper at Old Hall)

Referenced/offstage. Rose reports that Mrs. Simmons gave it as her opinion that Mrs. Lestrangle was "a regular bad lot." Role: referenced minor.

Colonel Protheroe

Referenced/offstage (deceased). His character is developed through Gladys's account of his argument with Mrs. Lestrangle: he spoke very loudly, was furious at Mrs. Lestrangle's arrival ("After all these years"), refused her demands utterly, and forbade her to see someone (inferred to be Mrs. Protheroe). He is also noted to have been a churchwarden who handed round the plate and read lessons on Sundays, a detail Gladys uses to express her surprise at his apparent hidden life. Role: referenced (deceased victim).

Mrs. Lestrangle

Referenced/offstage. The subject of the chapter's central revelation. She visited Colonel Protheroe the night before his death; the visit was heated. She wanted him to do something he refused; she apparently wanted to speak to Mrs. Protheroe, which he forbade. Gladys reports her final words as: "By this time tomorrow night, you may be dead." Described by the narrator as "a curious woman, a woman of very strong magnetic charm." Role: referenced suspect.

Dr. Haydock

Referenced/offstage. Colonel Protheroe is reported to have said "Whatever Haydock says, I don't believe it" during the argument with Mrs. Lestrangle. The narrator notes that Haydock previously shielded Mrs. Lestrangle from giving evidence at the inquest and has tried to protect her from the police. The narrator wonders how far that protection would extend, even to shielding her from suspicion of murder. Role: referenced; significance escalating

Mrs. Archer

Referenced/offstage. Described by Lawrence as "practically a half-wit." The narrator corrects this, explaining that apparent stupidity is "the camouflage of the poor" and that Mrs. Archer likely has all her wits about her. She has recently become certain that the pistol was in its proper place at midday on Thursday; the reason for her new certainty is unknown to Lawrence. Role: referenced minor.

Inspector Slack

Referenced/offstage, by name only. Rose dismisses him contemptuously: "Slack, he calls himself." Role: referenced.

Gladys's unnamed friend

Referenced/offstage. The person Gladys had "stepped out to speak to" when she overheard the argument, the reason she cannot come forward officially without risking Mrs. Pratt's displeasure. Role: referenced/unnamed functional.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 19

St. Mary Mead (village)

Established in this chapter as a place of intense, granular communal surveillance of its residents' private habits. The narrator states that if Lawrence changes his shaving cream, "it will be a topic of conversation," and that the village "probably knows exactly where you keep your toothbrush and what kind of tooth powder you use." The narrator attributes this to the scarcity of external stimulation: "Nothing exciting ever happens here." This is the mechanism by which the village's knowledge of the pistol's location need not imply criminal intimacy.

Old Hall

The Protheroe residence. Contains a study with a window accessible from outside (through which Gladys overheard the argument). Has a servants' hall, a housekeeper's room, a kitchen, and a shrubbery. Staffed by at least: a parlourmaid (Rose), a kitchenmaid (Gladys), a housekeeper (Mrs. Simmons), and a cook (Mrs. Pratt). The domestic hierarchy is clearly delineated, Rose is horrified at the suggestion that Lawrence come to the kitchen directly, and Gladys fears the cook's authority over her movements.

The pistol

Lawrence's own weapon, kept in his cottage. It was unloaded when in his possession, with a box of cartridges beside it. When found (or used), it was loaded in all six chambers with one shot fired. The question of who loaded it and when is unresolved. Mrs. Archer has stated the pistol was in its proper place at midday on Thursday.

The inquest

Referenced as a prior event. Lawrence had expected to be censured by the coroner for keeping an unloaded pistol with cartridges accessible. Dr. Haydock is noted to have shielded Mrs. Lestrangle from giving evidence at the inquest.

Churchwardenship as social role

Colonel Protheroe's role as churchwarden, handing round the plate, reading lessons on Sundays, is used by Gladys (and her friend) as a marker of public respectability that makes his apparent secret all the more surprising. The narrator's earlier reference to "Miss Marple's churchwarden with his separate establishment" suggests this is a recurring motif in the novel's moral landscape, though that prior reference is not developed within this chapter.

CONFLICT

Chapter 19

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict is the murder investigation: Lawrence fears permanent suspicion and is actively working to uncover the truth, while the evidence, the "inside job" theory, Mrs. Lestrange's threatening words, Haydock's protective behavior, points in multiple directions without resolution. The internal conflict belongs to the narrator, who closes the chapter by acknowledging that his reluctance to suspect Mrs. Lestrange is not rational but aesthetic, rooted in her beauty and charm, and that this bias may be distorting his judgment. Neither conflict resolves; both escalate, with Gladys's testimony adding urgency and new suspects to the investigation.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 19

- **"The night before he died":** The time of Mrs. Lestrange's visit to Colonel Protheroe at Old Hall, the argument Gladys overheard.
- **"Last night":** Lawrence's visit to Old Hall to interview Rose and Gladys occurred the night before this conversation with the narrator (i.e., one night prior to the chapter's present action).
- **"By this time tomorrow night, you may be dead":** Mrs. Lestrange's reported words to Colonel Protheroe during their argument, a prospective statement made the night before his death, which (if accurate) implies foreknowledge or intent.
- **"After all these years":** Colonel Protheroe's reported phrase during the argument, implying a long prior history between himself and Mrs. Lestrange. No specific duration given.
- **Sundays:** Referenced as the days Colonel Protheroe performed his churchwarden duties (handing round the plate, reading lessons). No specific date given.
- No character ages are stated in this chapter.
- No specific calendar dates are given in this chapter.

"Case of stable door when the steed is gone, eh? It is rather like that. You know, padre, there's something about all this business that I don't like. It's too much of, how shall I put it, an inside job. Someone knew about that pistol of mine. That means that the murderer, whoever he was, must have actually been in this house, perhaps even had a drink with me."

WHY IT LANDS Lawrence's articulation of the "inside job" theory, the chapter's central investigative premise and a statement of his personal violation and fear.

"Not necessarily. The whole village of St. Mary Mead probably knows exactly where you keep your toothbrush and what kind of tooth powder you use."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's counter-argument, which simultaneously establishes St. Mary Mead's defining characteristic, its all-pervasive communal surveillance, and widens the field of possible suspects.

"That's merely the camouflage of the poor. They take refuge behind a mask of stupidity. You'll probably find that the old lady has all her wits about her."

WHY IT LANDS A thematically significant observation about class, perception, and concealment, one of the novel's recurring preoccupations, and a quiet defense of figures like Mrs. Archer and, by extension, Miss Marple.

"By this time tomorrow night, you may be dead,' she said. Wicked the way she said it. As soon as I heard the news, 'There,' I said to Rose. 'There!'"

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's most dramatic revelation, Gladys's account of Mrs. LeStrange's parting words to Colonel Protheroe, which, if accurate, constitutes either a threat or a prophecy, and which Lawrence himself suspects may have been shaped by hindsight.

"Unless the real murderer is discovered, I shall be suspected of the crime to the day of my death."

WHY IT LANDS Lawrence's statement of personal stakes, the emotional engine driving his investigation and a marker of how seriously he understands his position.

"Something in me said, 'It can't be her!' Why? And an imp in my brain replied: 'Because she's a very beautiful and attractive woman. That's why.' There is, as Miss Marple would say, a lot of human nature in all of us."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's self-aware admission of bias, thematically significant as a moment of ironic self-knowledge, and notable for its invocation of Miss Marple as a moral and psychological authority even in her absence.

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Chapter 20

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 20

The narrator (Len/the vicar) returns to the Vicarage to find his wife Griselda in distress over their maid Mary's intention to leave. Mary's grievance centres on an encounter with Lettice Protheroe, who had been found in the vicar's study claiming to search for a lost yellow beret and who made a pointed remark about the quality of Mary's housework. After Len is pushed by Griselda into the kitchen to speak with Mary, he manages, largely through patient listening and mild flattery, to persuade her to stay. Back in the hall, Len relays the substance of Mary's complaint to Griselda and Dennis, who notes that Lettice could not have left the beret in the study on the day she claimed, as she was wearing it for tennis the following day. A brief conversation follows about Lettice's attractiveness, Lawrence Redding's romantic indifference to her, and Griselda's theory that Lettice may in fact have feelings for Lawrence. Len then enters his study alone, confronting the lingering psychological weight of the murder scene, Protheroe's chair, the pen, the blood stain soaked through the rug. While steeling himself against the impulse to abandon the room, his eye is caught by a small bright-blue object lodged between the floor and the desk. He picks it up and conceals it from Griselda when she enters to relay an invitation from Miss Marple. After Griselda leaves, he opens his hand to reveal a blue lapis lazuli earring set in seed pearls, an unusual piece he recognises, though the chapter ends before he names its owner.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 20

Griselda (Len's wife)

Role: ally/supporting. Emotional state: distressed at the start over Mary's notice, energetic and decisive in pushing Len toward the kitchen, delighted and admiring when he succeeds. She is characterised as quick, socially perceptive, and confident in her opinions, particularly in her analysis of Lawrence Redding's romantic psychology and her silent dismissal of Dennis's naïve reading of Lettice's feelings. She enters the study at the chapter's close to relay Miss Marple's invitation, unaware that Len is concealing something. Her relationship with Len is affectionate and lightly sparring.

Mary (the maid)

Role: minor/functional. Physical detail: peeling potatoes at the sink when Len enters. Emotional state: aggrieved, self-righteous, and prone to extended complaint, though ultimately placable. Her grievances are threefold: Lettice Protheroe's intrusion into the study and implied criticism of her dusting; the indignity of appearing at the inquest; and a general resentment of Colonel Protheroe as a magistrate who sent poachers to jail. She is characterised as a poor housekeeper by Len's private assessment, though he does not say so to her face. She stays. Her testimony about Lettice's visit to the study, the stated reason for searching, the remark about dusting, the exit through the windows, is the chapter's primary plot-relevant disclosure.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (her visit to the study is recounted by Mary; she does not appear directly). Characterised through others' accounts as careless with possessions, habitually losing things, capable of casual cruelty in social interactions, and possessed of considerable personal attractiveness ("S.A.", sex appeal). Dennis regards her with uncritical admiration; Griselda is more analytical; Mary resents her. Dennis's observation that Lettice was wearing the yellow beret for tennis on Thursday directly contradicts Lettice's stated reason for entering the study (searching for a beret she claimed to have left there), establishing that her account was false. Her relationship to the murder investigation is implicitly heightened by this contradiction and by the discovery of the earring at the chapter's close.

Dennis

Role: minor/supporting Characterised as young, romantically credulous, and devoted to Lettice. He provides the key factual detail that undermines Lettice's alibi for entering the study (the beret was on her head on Thursday). He accepts Lettice's self-reported indifference to Lawrence Redding at face value, a reading Griselda silently dismisses. His affection for Lettice is described as producing "affectionate pride and admiration" in his account of her losing things.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only in Griselda's relay of a social invitation, Miss Marple wishes Len and Griselda to come over after dinner to entertain her nephew. No further characterisation in this chapter.

Raymond West (Miss Marple's nephew)

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only as the stated reason for Miss Marple's invitation; Len makes a teasing remark about Griselda's ability to entertain him.

Lawrence Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. Discussed in the context of his romantic psychology, Griselda argues he is drawn to a restrained, diffident type (identified as Anne) and is untouched by Lettice's charm, though she suggests he may have "made use of Lettice" without realising she had feelings for him.

Anne

Role: referenced/offstage (surname not given in this chapter). Identified by Griselda as the woman Lawrence Redding loves and the only woman who could hold him. Described as belonging to a "Quaker type, very restrained and diffident" whom "everybody calls cold."

Colonel Protheroe (deceased)

Role: referenced/offstage. Recalled by Len in the study, "red faced, hearty, self-righteous", and resented by Mary as a magistrate who jailed poachers. His presence is felt through the physical traces in the study: the chair, the pen, the blood stain.

Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned briefly as an example of Lettice's attractiveness extending even to "bald-headed archaeologists"; he had invited her to see "the barrow."

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 20

The Baize Door	A standard period domestic architectural feature separating the servants' quarters (kitchen) from the main house. Mentioned as the threshold through which Griselda pushes Len.
The Blue Boar	A local establishment (implied to be a pub) where Mary had been during the time Lettice entered the study. Establishes that Mary was absent from the Vicarage when Lettice's visit occurred.
The Hall (local manor)	Referenced by Mary as Lettice Protheroe's home ("She's not loved up at the Hall"). Establishes that Lettice is not well regarded by the domestic staff there, "Never a please or a thank you, and everything scattered right and left."
The Barrow	An archaeological site referenced in connection with Dr. Stone, who invited Lettice to visit it. Establishes that an active archaeological excavation is taking place in or near the village.
The Inquest	A formal legal proceeding that has already taken place (prior to this chapter) in connection with Protheroe's murder. Mary was required to appear and found the experience distressing and socially humiliating ("Standing up before twelve men, a respectable girl like me!"). The jury of twelve is noted.
S.A. (Sex Appeal)	Period slang used by Dennis and adopted by Griselda in their discussion of Lettice's and Lawrence's respective attractiveness. Used without irony by Dennis; Griselda deploys it analytically.
The Lapis Lazuli Earring	A blue lapis lazuli earring set in seed pearls, described as "rather an unusual jewel." Found by Len between the floor and the desk in the study, a room that had been locked by police until the previous night. Its presence in the study is the chapter's central mystery-plot revelation. Len states he knows "very well where I had seen it last" but does not name the owner within the chapter.

CONFLICT

Chapter 20

The chapter contains two distinct conflicts. The first, the domestic dispute over Mary's notice, is external and comic in register; it is resolved by chapter's end through Len's patient management of Mary's grievances. The second, and more consequential, is the investigative conflict advanced by two discoveries: Lettice Protheroe's stated reason for entering the study is exposed as false by Dennis's offhand remark about the beret, and a piece of jewellery of known provenance is found concealed in the murder room. Both discoveries escalate rather than resolve, as Len withholds the earring and the chapter closes on his private recognition of its significance.
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TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 20

Lettice Protheroe was wearing the yellow beret "for tennis on Thursday," which Dennis states directly. This contradicts her claim to Mary that she had left the beret in the study "the other day," implying her visit occurred after Thursday or that the beret story was fabricated.
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- Mary had been at the Blue Boar when Lettice entered the study, establishing that Lettice's visit occurred during Mary's absence.
- Mary states she "done the room on Thursday morning" and did not find a hat then, providing a terminus post quem for when the room was last cleaned before the police locked it.
- The inquest has already taken place prior to this chapter (referenced in the past tense by Mary).
- Miss Marple's invitation is for "tonight after dinner," placing the social call in the same evening as the chapter's events.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 20

"I felt almost lighthearted at the prospect of no more burnt puddings and undercooked vegetables."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Len's dry, self-aware comic voice and his private divergence from Griselda's distress, character-defining.

"I've never before been in a place where they had a murder in the house, and I never want to be again."

WHY IT LANDS Mary's blunt articulation of the murder's domestic disruption; grounds the crime in the texture of ordinary household life, thematically significant.

"How like Lettice," said Dennis. "She couldn't have left that yellow beret of hers here on Wednesday. She was wearing it for tennis on Thursday."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's pivotal plot disclosure, Dennis's casual remark demolishes Lettice's stated reason for entering the study, worldbuilding-critical and continuity-critical.

"I walked thoughtfully over to the writing table. Here Protheroe had sat, red faced, hearty, self-righteous, and here, in a moment of time, he had been struck down. Here, where I was standing, an enemy had stood. ..."

WHY IT LANDS Len's meditation in the study; the ellipsis and the word "enemy" carry the weight of the unsolved murder and Len's proximity to it, thematically significant and atmospherically marketable.

"I can't use this room," I said aloud. "I can't use it."

WHY IT LANDS Len's only moment of unguarded emotional vulnerability in the chapter; spoken aloud to an empty room, character-defining, marks the psychological cost of the murder on the narrator.

In the palm of my hand was a blue lapis lazuli earring set in seed pearls. It was rather an unusual jewel, and I knew very well where I had seen it last.

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing revelation and its central mystery hook; the withheld identification of the earring's owner is the chapter's primary narrative suspense, marketable and plot-critical.

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Chapter 21

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 21

The chapter takes place at a dinner gathering at the vicar's home, narrated by the vicar himself (referred to as "Len" by his wife Griselda). The guests are Raymond West, a celebrated but self-important novelist, and his aunt, Miss Marple. The chapter opens with the narrator's unflattering assessment of Raymond West, his literary pretensions, his condescension toward village life, and his habit of calling Miss Marple a "survival." Raymond dismisses St. Mary Mead as a "stagnant pool," a remark Miss Marple deflects with quiet precision, turning his own metaphor against him.

When Griselda introduces the subject of Colonel Protheroe's murder, Raymond initially waves it off as too crude to interest him, before Miss Marple reveals they have spoken of nothing else all through dinner. Raymond then advances a theatrical theory: that the vicar himself, driven by a festering inferiority complex and years of suppressed dislike for Protheroe, is the logical murderer. The vicar denies any such feeling, though he acknowledges having made an ill-advised remark wishing Protheroe out of the world, a comment Raymond uses to dismiss his own theory, reasoning that a subconscious planning murder would never have permitted such an open admission.

Miss Marple then reports that Miss Cram visited her garden that afternoon and has since gone to Old Hall for the weekend at Mrs. Protheroe's invitation. This leads to a discussion of Dr. Stone, the archaeologist excavating a barrow on the Protheroe property. Raymond West, who knows Stone personally, flatly states that the man the vicar introduced him to at the station that afternoon was not Stone, not even a resemblance. The revelation that "Dr. Stone" is an impostor electrifies the group. Miss Marple connects it to a remembered case of a man posing as a gas inspector to steal, and flags it as another "Peculiar Thing." The chapter ends with the vicar rising to inform Inspector Slack immediately.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 21

Griselda

Role: ally/minor. The vicar's wife. She engages warmly with Raymond West on modern plays and decoration, asks Raymond directly for his theory on the murder, and raises the question of whether the impostor revelation connects to the murder. The narrator notes she is "susceptible to his conversation" despite affecting to laugh at Raymond West, this is the narrator's inference, marked as such. She is emotionally lively and socially engaged throughout.

Raymond West

Role: minor/guest. Described as a "brilliant novelist" and poet whose poems "have no capital letters in them." He is self-assured, performatively bored by murder (before being exposed as fascinated by it), and given to flourishing his cigarette as a rhetorical prop. He advances the theory that the vicar killed Protheroe out of a festering inferiority complex, then abandons it when the vicar's prior remark undermines it. His most consequential contribution is identifying the man at the station as not being the real Dr. Stone, a fact he states with certainty, noting he knows Stone personally and met him at a dinner. He is Miss Marple's nephew; she is referred to as "Aunt Jane" by him.

Miss Marple

Role: ally/investigative figure. Referred to by Raymond as "Aunt Jane" and a "survival." She listens with apparent flattery but an "amused twinkle" the narrator observes Raymond never notices. She deflects Raymond's "stagnant pool" insult with a precise counter-metaphor. She reveals that she and Raymond discussed the murder throughout dinner, undercutting his pose of indifference. She reports Miss Cram's visit and the information Miss Cram volunteered. She connects the impostor to a remembered case of a man posing as a gas inspector. She twice uses the phrase "Peculiar Thing" (capitalized in the text) to flag the impostor revelation as significant. Her role is observational and connective, she does not theorize aloud about the murder's solution but consistently draws attention to anomalies.

Miss Cram

Role: referenced/offstage. She visited Miss Marple's garden that afternoon. She "volunteered a lot of information" about herself, her people are described as "all dead or in India." She has gone to Old Hall for the weekend, either at Mrs. Protheroe's invitation or at her own suggestion (Miss Marple notes she does not know which). She is Dr. Stone's secretary, and with Stone away, she had nothing to do.

Dr. Stone (the impostor)

Role: referenced/offstage. Described by the vicar as "a little fat man with glasses on." Raymond West states unequivocally that this man is not the real Dr. Stone, whom Raymond knows well and met at a dinner. The impostor has been excavating a barrow on the Protheroe property. He has gone to London for the weekend. His identity and motive are unknown at chapter's end.

Colonel Protheroe (deceased)

Role: referenced/offstage. The murder victim. Described within Raymond's theory as a churchwarden who attended vestry meetings, choirboys' outings, and passed the collection bag in church. No new physical description is provided in this chapter.

Mrs. Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. She has invited (or accepted an invitation from) Miss Cram to come to Old Hall for the weekend to help with correspondence following her husband's death.

Dennis

Role: referenced/offstage (unnamed in the text but identified by the vicar in a parenthetical). The person who apparently repeated the vicar's ill-advised remark about Protheroe. The vicar's parenthetical, "(That miserable Dennis! But my fault, of course, for ever making the remark.)", indicates Dennis is known to the narrator and is blamed for the remark's circulation.

Inspector Slack

Role: referenced/offstage. The vicar resolves at the chapter's end to inform him about the impostor immediately.

The real Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. An archaeologist Raymond West knows personally and met at a dinner. Raymond describes him as "a good man" who is "wonderfully keen on his job." He bears no resemblance to the impostor.

Old Hall	The Protheroe family residence. Miss Cram has gone there for the weekend. It is the location where Mrs. Protheroe is managing correspondence following her husband's death.
The Barrow (on the Protheroe property)	An archaeological site being excavated by the man posing as Dr. Stone. The real Dr. Stone is established as a credentialed archaeologist; the excavation is on land belonging to the Protheroe estate. The barrow is described as having caused "quite an excitement."
The Station	The location where the vicar encountered the impostor that afternoon, and where Raymond West also saw him. Raymond's identification of the man as not being the real Stone occurs through this shared encounter.
Raymond West's literary world	Established through the narrator's description. Raymond is a novelist and poet. His poems have "no capital letters in them," identified as "the essence of modernity." His books concern "unpleasant people leading lives of surpassing dullness." He has published at least one book in which he made a remark Miss Marple quotes back to him (the specific quote is not reproduced in this chapter). He met the real Dr. Stone "at a dinner not long ago."
The Gas Inspector Impostor (historical analogue)	Miss Marple references a prior case, not from this narrative's present, of a man who went around "pretending to be the gas inspector" and obtained "quite a little haul." She uses this as a parallel to the Dr. Stone imposture. This is presented as a remembered real-world event within the story's world, not a fictional or literary reference.
Vestry meetings / choirboys' outings / collection bag	Ecclesiastical details establishing the texture of Protheroe's relationship to the church. These are introduced within Raymond's hypothetical theory and are not independently verified in this chapter as factual details about Protheroe's actual behavior.
Raymond West's theory, the "inferiority complex" / "inhibitions" framework	Raymond applies a psychological vocabulary (inferiority complex, inhibitions, subconscious) to his murder theory. This reflects the intellectual idiom of the character and the period rather than constituting worldbuilding in a technical sense, but it is notable as the chapter's only sustained analytical framework for the murder.

The chapter contains no physical conflict. The primary conflict is social and intellectual: Raymond West's pose of metropolitan superiority against the quiet competence of Miss Marple and the narrator's mild irritation. A secondary, investigative conflict emerges in the final quarter when Raymond's identification of the impostor introduces a new unknown into the murder investigation. The impostor revelation escalates rather than resolves, the chapter ends with the vicar moving to act, not with any answer. The question of whether the impostor is connected to Protheroe's murder is explicitly raised by Griselda and left open.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 21

- Miss Cram visited Miss Marple's garden "this afternoon", the same afternoon as the station encounter.
- Miss Cram has gone to Old Hall "for the weekend," establishing that the chapter occurs on a Friday or the start of a weekend period.
- Dr. Stone (the impostor) has gone to London "for the weekend."
- Raymond West met the real Dr. Stone "at a dinner not long ago", no specific date given.
- Raymond West's encounter with the impostor at the station occurred "this afternoon."
- The vicar's ill-advised remark about Protheroe wishing him "out of the world" is referenced as having been made "not so long ago", no specific date given.
- No character ages are stated in this chapter.
- No historical dates are given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 21

"I regard St. Mary Mead as a stagnant pool."

WHY IT LANDS Raymond West's dismissal of village life, which Miss Marple immediately and precisely dismantles, the exchange is the chapter's thematic centerpiece and establishes the contrast between metropolitan condescension and Miss Marple's quiet authority.

"That is really not a very good simile, dear Raymond. Nothing, I believe, is so full of life under the microscope as a drop of water from a stagnant pool."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's defining character moment in this chapter: she turns Raymond's own metaphor against him with scientific precision and perfect politeness, establishing her as the chapter's most formidable intelligence.

"Raymond and I have been discussing nothing else all through dinner."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple exposing Raymond's pose of indifference toward the murder, a small, devastating social maneuver that reveals her habit of watching and her willingness to puncture pretension.

"Of course, I know you didn't do it. Life is never what it should be. But think of the drama, the fitness, churchwarden murdered in the vicar's study by the vicar. Delicious!"

WHY IT LANDS Raymond West's theory delivered in full, character-defining in its theatricality and its prioritizing of aesthetic pleasure over moral seriousness; also marketable as a moment of dark comedy.

"That's disappointing. Because, of course, if your subconscious were really planning to do him in, it would never have allowed you to make that remark."

WHY IT LANDS Raymond abandoning his own theory on pseudo-psychological grounds, simultaneously comic and a genuine piece of detective reasoning, and illustrative of the chapter's playful treatment of guilt and innocence.

"It is a Peculiar Thing. Another Peculiar Thing."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's signal phrase, capitalized in the text, marking the impostor revelation as investigatively significant, the chapter's pivot from social comedy to genuine suspense, and a strong indicator of her method of accumulating anomalies.

22

Chapter 22

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 22

The chapter opens with the narrator (the vicar, Mr. Clement) relaying Inspector Slack's telephoned instructions: the discovery near the barrow is to be kept quiet, Miss Cram is not to be alarmed, and a search for a suitcase is to be conducted. Returning home with Griselda, the narrator is interrupted by Dennis, who has abruptly abandoned his ambition to go to sea in favour of "going into finance", a vague desire driven, it becomes clear, by his infatuation with Lettice Protheroe and his wish to be wealthy enough to court her. The narrator gently disabuses him of his romantic economics, and Dennis departs in the misery of calf love.

The following morning, a note from Anne Protheroe summons the narrator and Griselda to Old Hall for a quiet lunch, hinting at something strange. At Old Hall they find Miss Cram installed as a house guest, apparently at Anne's invitation. After lunch, Anne leads the narrator on a deliberately circuitous route, through a back corridor, up a ladder staircase, and into a dusty attic lumber room, to show him a portrait whose face has been savagely hacked and slashed, apparently during the night. Neither can identify the portrait or explain the act.

Anne then reveals her plans: she will remain at Old Hall for six months to avoid the appearance of guilt, after which she intends to marry Lawrence. She also discloses that she deliberately invited Miss Cram in order to study her, suspecting the girl may know something relevant to the murder. The narrator then confronts Lettice Protheroe with the lapis lazuli earring, trapping her in a lie by revealing he had seen it on Anne's dressing table the previous Friday. Lettice breaks down, confesses she planted the earring under the desk to incriminate Anne out of jealousy and dislike, then recovers her composure and delivers a spiteful outburst. The narrator promises discretion. The chapter closes with Lettice, in an awkward and somewhat remorseful aside, advising the narrator to remove Dennis from the neighbourhood soon.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 22

Griselda (Clement's wife)

Accompanies the narrator to Old Hall. Contributes a sharp, amused observation about Miss Cram's remark ("I'd like to see one of those fellows trying to get something out of me"), conveying her wit and perceptiveness. She and Lettice are noted to be on cordial enough terms (Lettice nods to her at lunch). Role: ally/minor.

Dennis

The narrator's nephew (referred to as "Uncle Len" by Dennis). Teenage or young adult; in the grip of an infatuation with Lettice Protheroe that has caused him to abandon his previously firm plan to go to sea in favour of a vague desire to "go into finance" and become rich enough to marry "a real girl." Emotionally volatile, declares "I wish I were dead." The narrator diagnoses his condition as "calf love." At chapter's end, Lettice obliquely apologises for her role in his feelings and advises the narrator to remove him from the area. Role: minor/ally.

Inspector Slack

Offstage. Gives telephoned orders at the chapter's opening: suppress news of the discovery, do not alarm Miss Cram, search for a suitcase near the barrow. The narrator and Dennis both express personal dislike of him, the narrator admits he would not wish to see Slack promoted, and Dennis says he would hate to see Slack "swelling with importance." Role: referenced/offstage.

Miss Cram (Gladys Cram)

Present at Old Hall, having been installed as a house guest. Presents herself as having been invited by Anne out of kindness; the narrator suspects the initiative may have come from Miss Cram herself and notes he does not think her "strictly truthful." She is in "a state of high enjoyment," voluble, and expresses animosity toward Lettice while positioning herself as useful to Anne. Anne later reveals she invited Miss Cram deliberately, believing the girl may know something relevant to the murder. Role: minor/suspect-adjacent.

Anne Protheroe

Widow of the murdered man. Dressed quietly in black. Calm, honest, and purposeful. She summons the narrator to show him the slashed portrait in the attic, having heard sounds in the house at approximately 3 a.m. She reveals her plan to remain at Old Hall for six months, then marry Lawrence. She expresses gratitude to the narrator for having previously persuaded her and Lawrence not to run away together. She is frank about her financial situation and about her complicated feelings toward Lettice. Her stated objective is to find out the truth of the murder herself; she invited Miss Cram as part of that effort. The narrator judges her "a very honest woman." Role: ally/key witness.

Lettice Protheroe

Stepdaughter of Anne, daughter of the murdered man. Arrives late to lunch, dressed in pale green (not mourning). Vague and pretty in manner. When confronted by the narrator with the earring, she initially lies coolly, then is trapped by his revelation that he saw the earring on Anne's dressing table the previous Friday. She breaks down, confesses she planted the earring under the desk to incriminate Anne out of jealousy and long-standing dislike, then recovers and delivers a spiteful outburst. She ends the chapter in an awkward, remorseful register, advising the narrator to remove Dennis and apologising for her role in his infatuation. Physical description: short fair hair, extremely pretty, wearing pale green. Role: minor/suspect-adjacent.

Lawrence (surname not given in this chapter)

Referenced/offstage. Anne's intended future husband. Anne states she plans to marry him after six months. She expresses concern that suspicion will always attach to him, especially once he marries her. Role: referenced/offstage.

Dr. Haydock

Referenced/offstage. Dennis reports that Haydock holds the view that he would never give a murderer up to justice. The narrator expresses concern that such views, however sound in themselves, produce a dangerous impression on young minds. Role: referenced/offstage.

Colonel Melchett

Referenced/offstage. The narrator mentions having visited Old Hall with Melchett on Friday morning, at which time he saw the lapis earrings on Anne's dressing table, the detail that allows him to trap Lettice. Role: referenced/offstage.

Miss Marple

Referenced briefly. Anne mentions her as someone she likes: "that funny old Miss Marple." Role: referenced/offstage.

The Hartley Napiers / Susan Hartley Napier

Referenced/offstage. Dennis reports that Lettice left their tennis party early and that Susan Hartley Napier is "going about everywhere saying Lettice has rotten manners." Role: referenced/offstage.

Lucius Protheroe

The murdered man, referenced throughout. Anne's late husband. His will is described: Old Hall goes to Anne; Lettice is to choose furniture for a small house and receives a separate sum to purchase one. Role: referenced/offstage (deceased).

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 22

The attic lumber room

Site of the chapter's central mystery. Contains a portrait in oils whose face has been hacked and slashed with fresh cuts, rendering it unrecognizable. Also contains mediocre landscapes, oleographs, cheaply-framed reproductions, and a large old-fashioned trunk of the kind called an "ark," bearing the initials **E. P.** The trunk is empty. Anne states she has never examined these items, as they were in the attic when she married Lucius and came to live at Old Hall.

The Blue Boar

A local inn or public house where Miss Cram had been staying. Referenced as an unsuitable place for a young woman alone, given the presence of reporters.

The barrow

A location in the neighbourhood where Inspector Slack has ordered a search for a suitcase. The nature of the discovery that prompted this order is not specified within this chapter.

The narrator's study

Referenced as the site of the murder and as the location where the lapis earring was found, rolled underneath the desk. Also referenced as a site of ongoing press intrusion, reporters have been photographing the study windows, necessitating a constable from Much Benham to stand guard outside.

Much Benham

The source of the constable assigned to guard the study window. Implied to be a nearby town or village.

The inquest

Referenced as a recent public proceeding at which Anne gave evidence (stating she came only as far as the study window, not inside) and at which she encountered a reporter whose questions she answered briefly.

The lapis lazuli earring

A blue lapis lazuli earring belonging to Anne Protheroe. The narrator has been holding it as evidence. Its significance: the narrator last saw it on Anne's dressing table on Friday morning when he visited with Colonel Melchett; it was subsequently found rolled under the desk in the study. Lettice confesses to having planted it there to incriminate Anne.

The portrait

An oil portrait found in the attic with its face hacked and slashed in what the narrator describes as "a fit of maniacal rage." The cuts are fresh. Neither the narrator nor Anne can identify the subject. Its connection to the murder, if any, is unresolved.

The Sunday paper

Contains a sensationalised account of Anne's inquest interview under the headline "Widow Declares She Will Never Rest Till She Has Hunted Down Husband's Murderer," with a photograph of Anne apparently sourced from at least ten years prior. Anne notes the account does not accurately represent what she said.

Protheroe's will

Lucius Protheroe left his estate roughly equally divided between Anne and Lettice. Old Hall goes to Anne. Lettice is to choose furniture sufficient to furnish a small house and receives a separate monetary sum to purchase one.

The funeral

Mentioned as scheduled for the following morning (i.e., the morning after the chapter's main action). The narrator expects press interest to diminish afterward.

CONFLICT

Chapter 22

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external investigative conflict advances on two fronts: the discovery of the slashed portrait introduces a new and inexplicable element into the murder case, while the narrator's confrontation with Lettice resolves the question of the planted earring, an act of petty malice rather than evidence of guilt in the murder itself. The internal conflict belongs chiefly to Lettice, whose jealousy and dislike of Anne have led her to a spiteful act she cannot fully sustain under pressure, and to Anne, who is determined to remain at Old Hall and pursue the truth despite the personal cost. Neither the portrait mystery nor the broader murder is resolved; both escalate in complexity by the chapter's end.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 22

- Dennis's conversation with the narrator takes place in the narrator's study on the evening of that same day; the narrator says goodnight and goes to bed.
- The narrator takes the eight o'clock service "the following morning", the day after the opening scene.
- Anne's note is waiting at the breakfast table when the narrator returns from the eight o'clock service.
- Anne reports hearing sounds in the house "last night, or rather this morning about three o'clock", i.e., the night between the two days covered in the chapter.
- Anne came up to the attic "early this morning" (the morning of the lunch invitation) and found the slashed portrait.
- The narrator states he last saw the lapis earring "on Friday morning when I came up here with Colonel Melchett", establishing Friday as a prior reference point in the investigation's timeline.
- Thursday is identified as "the day of the murder", Anne wore the lapis earrings on Thursday, per Lettice's recollection.

- Anne states she plans to remain at Old Hall "for at least another six months," after which she intends to marry Lawrence.
- The funeral is scheduled for "tomorrow morning" (the morning following the chapter's main action at Old Hall).
- The portrait in the attic and the other stored items predate Anne's marriage to Lucius, she states they "were in the attic when I married Lucius and came here to live."
- The newspaper photograph of Anne is described as "evidently taken at least ten years ago."

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 22

"I mean that there are ramifications, undercurrents, that we know nothing about. There are a whole lot of things to clear up before we get at the way."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's statement of the novel's investigative thesis, that the visible facts of the case conceal deeper, unresolved currents, and a signal to the reader that the chapter's revelations are not the end of the mystery.

"There's a kind of savagery about it. It looks as though it had been done in a fit of maniacal rage."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's assessment of the slashed portrait establishes the act as emotionally violent rather than calculated, introducing a new and disturbing register into the investigation.

"It's awfully easy to appear silly, Mr. Clement. It's one of the easiest things in the world."

WHY IT LANDS Anne's remark about Miss Cram, thematically significant as a statement about performance and concealment that applies equally to several characters in the novel, and character-defining in its revelation of Anne's sharp, unsentimental intelligence beneath her composed exterior.

"I know that," I said.

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's two-word reply when Lettice tells him the earring is Anne's, a quietly devastating moment of interrogative technique that reveals he has been leading her into a trap, and that defines his method throughout the chapter.

"Oh!, oh, yes! You can call it jealousy. I've always disliked Anne, ever since she came queening it here. I put the damned thing under the desk. I hoped it would get her into trouble."

WHY IT LANDS Lettice's confession, character-defining in its combination of spite, self-awareness, and loss of control, and significant for resolving the earring subplot while leaving Lettice's deeper knowledge of events ambiguous.

"I know. That's another reason why I'm staying on here. Mr. Clement, I'm going to find out the truth."

WHY IT LANDS Anne's declaration of intent, thematically central, character-defining in its determination, and marketable as a statement of the novel's driving energy; it also reframes Anne from passive victim to active investigator.

23

Chapter 23

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 23

The narrator returns from an outing and proposes a detour to a nearby barrow, where police are searching for a hidden cache. His wife Griselda declines, so he goes alone and finds Constable Hurst overseeing the search. Hurst is confident the suitcase will be found at the barrow, dismissing the narrator's suggestion, based on Miss Marple's timing observation, that the girl would not have had time to reach the barrow and return. The narrator disagrees with Hurst's casual dismissal of Miss Marple's sense of time and moves on.

Walking home, the narrator recalls a disturbed trail in the woods he had previously attributed to Lawrence. Reconsidering, he wonders whether the trail was originally made by Dr. Stone or Miss Cram. He re-enters the woods, follows the trail past where he had encountered Lawrence, and discovers a small clearing showing signs of recent disturbance. There he finds a small brown suitcase hidden in the undergrowth. He also picks up a small brownish crystal from the ground. As he climbs back over the stile, Miss Marple appears and identifies the suitcase as the one she had seen.

At Miss Marple's suggestion, the narrator telephones the police rather than carrying the suitcase through the village. Inspector Slack arrives and opens the case, which contains worn clothing and, wrapped in newspaper, Colonel Protheroe's valuable silver, the trencher salts and a Charles II tazza. Slack concludes that Dr. Stone was a thief, not a murderer, and departs for Old Hall. Miss Marple, however, is not fully satisfied. She reasons that the silver could only be profitably stolen if copies were substituted, since a reported theft would make the pieces unsaleable. She then recalls that Colonel Protheroe had spoken of arranging a valuation of his possessions. The narrator telephones Old Hall and confirms that a valuation had been scheduled for the following Monday. This establishes a motive for murder, Dr. Stone would have been exposed, though his alibi (he had rejoined the others at the stile when the shot was fired) still rules him out.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 23

Griselda

Role: minor. Referenced only; she declines to accompany the narrator on the detour to the barrow because she has things to do at home. Does not appear in the chapter directly.

Constable Hurst

Role: minor. In charge of the police search at the barrow. Confident the suitcase will be found there; dismissive of the narrator's reasoning and of Miss Marple's timing observation, generalizing that "no lady knows anything about time." His condescension provokes the narrator's internal reflection on the folly of generalization. He uses the word *cache* but pronounces it "catch." He addresses the narrator as "sir" throughout, maintaining a formal but slightly superior tone.

Miss Marple

Role: ally. Appears at the stile as the narrator emerges from the woods, having apparently observed events without being seen herself; the narrator notes that "in the art of seeing without being seen, Miss Marple had no rival." She identifies the suitcase and suggests telephoning rather than carrying it through the village. In the subsequent discussion with Inspector Slack and the narrator, she advances the chapter's most significant analytical insight: that the silver could only be profitably stolen via substitution of copies, and that Colonel Protheroe's planned valuation would have exposed the substitution, thereby providing a motive for murder. She presents her reasoning with characteristic self-deprecation ("I've no doubt I am quite wrong I'm so stupid about these things"), though her logic is sound. She remains not fully satisfied even after the motive is confirmed, because Dr. Stone's alibi holds.

Inspector Slack

Role: antagonist (procedural). Arrives in "his most cantankerous mood" and immediately criticizes the narrator for not reporting his suspicions to the proper authorities. He is skeptical of the narrator's claim that finding the suitcase was accidental. He opens the case, identifies the silver as stolen property, and quickly constructs a theory: Dr. Stone is a thief who had Miss Cram hide the silver and a change of clothing, intending to retrieve them later while she remained to "disarm suspicion." He concludes this clears Dr. Stone of the murder. He declines Miss Marple's offer of sherry and departs for Old Hall. His manner is described as "cantankerous" and his attitude toward the suitcase as one of "dislike and wouldbe indifference."

Miss Gladys Cram

Role: referenced/offstage. Discussed as the young woman who hid the suitcase. The narrator finds it impossible to imagine her "shut up" in conversation; he characterizes her as "overflowing with conversation." Hurst explains that Inspector Slack has avoided questioning her directly so as not to alert her.

Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. Identified by Inspector Slack as an impostor and thief who used his archaeological work at the barrow as cover for stealing Colonel Protheroe's silver. Slack theorizes he fled when the murder and subsequent police activity threatened to expose him. Miss Marple's reasoning suggests he had a motive for murder (the impending valuation), but his alibi, he had rejoined the group at the stile when the shot was fired, rules him out.

Lawrence

Role: referenced/offstage. The narrator recalls having previously attributed a disturbed trail in the woods to Lawrence. He now reconsiders whether the trail was originally made by Dr. Stone or Miss Cram.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (deceased). Owner of the stolen silver, the trencher salts and the Charles II tazza. Miss Marple recalls that he had spoken of arranging a valuation of his possessions for insurance purposes, and the narrator confirms via telephone that this appointment was set for the following Monday.

Anne Protheroe

Role: minor/offstage. The narrator reaches her by telephone at Old Hall. She confirms that Colonel Protheroe had arranged for a man to come from London on Monday for a full valuation, and that the appointment has been postponed following the colonel's death.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 23

The Path and Woodland	A wooded area accessible by a path that leads both to Old Hall and to the barrow. The narrator previously searched this path the day after the murder and found disturbed bushes. The woodland contains dense undergrowth with a faint trail leading to a small clearing where the branches of trees meet overhead; the clearing is described as "not more than a few feet across." A stile connects the path to a lane near Miss Marple's property.
Old Hall	The residence of Colonel Protheroe (now presumably managed by Anne Protheroe following his death). Reachable by the path through the woods. Inspector Slack departs for Old Hall at the chapter's end to investigate the theft.
Miss Marple's House	Located near the stile at the edge of the lane. Has a garden gate and a French window opening onto a drawing room. The narrator enters through the French window and uses the drawing room telephone to contact the police and later Old Hall.
The Suitcase	A small brown suitcase with a cheap lock, described as one of "thousands of cheap shiny suitcases all exactly alike." Contains: a greasy plaid scarf, a faded dark blue overcoat, a checked cap, a pair of battered boots, and a newspaper-wrapped parcel containing the stolen silver.
The Stolen Silver, Trencher Salts and Charles II Tazza	Identified by Miss Marple as belonging to Colonel Protheroe. The tazza is described as a connoisseur's piece; the narrator notes that a tazza sold recently for over a thousand pounds, specifying that the value is not in the metal itself but in its status as a collector's object. Miss Marple reasons that such pieces could not be sold if a theft were reported, and that the only viable method of theft would be substitution with copies, a technique she refers to as "legerdemain."
The Valuation Appointment	Colonel Protheroe had arranged for an expert to come from London on Monday to conduct a full valuation of his possessions, apparently for insurance purposes. This appointment was postponed after his death. Its existence establishes that any substitution of the silver with copies would have been discovered imminently, providing a motive for silencing the colonel.
The Brownish Crystal	A small object the narrator picks up from the ground near the hidden suitcase, almost automatically, and slips into his pocket. Its nature and significance are not explained in this chapter.

CONFLICT

Chapter 23

The chapter presents two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict is investigative: the narrator, working independently and against the condescension of Constable Hurst, reasons out the location of the hidden suitcase and retrieves it, advancing the murder investigation. A secondary external conflict emerges when the silver's discovery raises the question of motive: Inspector Slack concludes the theft clears Dr. Stone of murder, but Miss Marple's reasoning, confirmed by the valuation appointment, establishes that Stone had a strong motive after all. The conflict does not fully resolve; Stone's alibi holds, leaving the murder question open and escalating the mystery.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 23

- The narrator and Lawrence subsequently searched together and found a second trail made by the inspector, this search is referenced as a past event.
- The narrator observes "fresh twigs broken" in the current chapter, indicating someone passed through the trail after his search with Lawrence.
- The narrator notes that "withered leaves on broken twigs" in the original disturbance suggested the trail was not made the afternoon of his search with Lawrence (though he qualifies this as something he "remembered, or else imagined remembering").
- Colonel Protheroe had arranged for a valuation expert to come from London "on Monday, tomorrow", establishing that the chapter takes place on a Sunday.
- The valuation appointment has been postponed following Colonel Protheroe's death.
- Inspector Slack says he will arrive "in a couple of jiffies", an informal duration, not a precise time.
- Miss Marple had previously observed the girl with the suitcase "quite a short time" before she reappeared empty-handed, a timing detail the narrator uses to argue the barrow is too far for the girl to have reached and returned from in that interval.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 23

"I often wonder why the whole world is so prone to generalize. Generalizations are seldom if ever true and are usually utterly inaccurate."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: establishes the narrator's empirical, evidence-based cast of mind and implicitly defends Miss Marple's reliability against Hurst's dismissal.

"Mentally registering the fact that in the art of seeing without being seen, Miss Marple had no rival, I balanced my find on the palings between us."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: captures Miss Marple's signature quality of unobtrusive observation in the narrator's wry, admiring voice.

"I've no doubt I am quite wrong. I'm so stupid about these things. But I just wondered, I mean this silver is very valuable, is it not?"

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: exemplifies Miss Marple's habitual self-deprecating manner of introducing her most penetrating insights, a rhetorical signature that conceals acute reasoning.

"The only satisfactory thing to do would be to replace these things with copies. Then, perhaps, the robbery wouldn't be discovered for some time."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and thematically significant: articulates the substitution theory that reframes the entire motive question and reopens the possibility of Dr. Stone's involvement in the murder.

"Then there was a motive," said Miss Marple softly.

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant and marketable: the chapter's pivot line, delivered with quiet weight; confirms that the investigation has not closed but deepened.

"Yes," said Miss Marple thoughtfully. "So that rules him out."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: the chapter's closing line, in which Miss Marple's tone of thoughtfulness, rather than relief or satisfaction, signals that she remains unsettled, leaving the mystery unresolved and the reader in suspense.

24Chapter 24

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 24

The narrator (the Vicar, referred to as "Len" by his wife) returns to the Vicarage to find his curate, Hawes, waiting in his study in a state of visible agitation. Hawes asks the Vicar to preach in his place that evening, citing crippling headaches, though he insists on conducting the service himself. The Vicar observes Hawes take a rice-paper headache capsule and privately wonders whether Hawes has developed a drug dependency. Hawes then probes the Vicar about his visit to Old Hall and expresses unease about Lawrence Redding's recent social call on him, interpreting it as suspicious. The conversation turns to the murder of Colonel Protheroe: Hawes pushes the theory that a man named Archer, described by Hawes as a poacher and drunkard, is the guilty party, while the Vicar resists this conclusion, arguing that a man of Archer's type would not use a pistol. Hawes departs without resolution.

The Vicar then discovers four notes delivered by hand during his absence. Three are from village women, Martha Price Ridley, Caroline Wetherby, and Amanda Hartnell, each claiming to possess important information about Colonel Protheroe's death and requesting a visit. The fourth is an anonymous letter alleging that the Vicar's wife, Griselda, has been seen leaving Lawrence Redding's cottage in a "surreptitious manner" and is conducting an affair with him. The Vicar attempts to burn the letter, but Griselda enters, retrieves and reads it, then discards it herself. After the letter is burned, Griselda volunteers a confession: she had known Redding before her marriage and had once been "rather in love with him," a fact she deliberately concealed from her husband. She explains she feared his jealousy given their age difference. The chapter closes on the Vicar's ambiguous, unresolved question, "But did I?", in response to his own claim that he understands.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 24

Hawes

(minor; ally with suspicious qualities): No new physical description. Emotional state is one of acute nervous distress, he paces, starts at the Vicar's entrance, wipes his forehead, shuts his eyes, and swallows convulsively. He takes a rice-paper capsule (described as a headache powder) during the visit. He asks to be relieved of preaching but insists on conducting the service, suggesting his anxiety is specifically about being observed. He probes the Vicar about the visit to Old Hall and about Redding's motives for calling on him, revealing anxiety about being suspected. He advocates strongly for Archer as the murderer and is notably evasive when asked direct yes/no questions. The Vicar infers (stated as the Vicar's own suspicion, not confirmed) that Hawes may have become addicted to drugs. His role in the murder investigation is ambiguous; his nervousness and deflection toward Archer are noted by the Vicar.

Griselda Clement

(protagonist-adjacent; the Vicar's wife): No physical description in this chapter beyond her movement, she enters the room, moves to the window, stands with her back to her husband. Emotionally, she is controlled but chooses a moment of voluntary disclosure. She reads the anonymous letter, expresses disgust, and discards it without apparent distress. She then confesses that she had previously known Lawrence Redding well and had been "rather in love with him" before her marriage, a fact she deliberately hid from her husband. She acknowledges she enjoys concealing things ("I've always been able to hide things. In a way, I like doing it"). Her stated motivation for concealment is the Vicar's tendency toward jealousy, which she attributes to the age difference between them. Her relationship with Redding is clarified as a prior romantic attachment, now apparently resolved on her side.

Lawrence Redding

(referenced/offstage): Not present in the chapter but central to two separate threads, Hawes's anxiety about Redding's social call on him, and Griselda's confession of her prior feelings. Hawes's reaction to Redding's visit is one of suspicion and fear. Griselda characterizes Redding as someone most people fall in love with and notes that during her recent interactions with him she observed he was "not, well, really not noticing me," which she attributes to his involvement with a woman named Anne.

Dr. Haydock

(referenced/offstage): Mentioned by the Vicar as a local doctor who, in Hawes's account, warned Hawes against taking too many headache powders. Hawes dismisses him as "an ignorant country practitioner." The Vicar defends him as "a very able man in his profession."

Mrs. Protheroe

(referenced/offstage): Mentioned only as the Vicar's stated reason for visiting Old Hall, funeral arrangements and "one or two other small matters." The Vicar does not confirm or deny whether this is the true reason.

Archer

(referenced/offstage): Described by Hawes as a poacher, drunkard, and "godless irreligious ruffian" who has been "in and out of prison." Hawes believes Archer made threats against Colonel Protheroe and committed the murder. The Vicar disputes the probability of this theory on the grounds that Archer would not use a pistol. Archer does not appear in the chapter.

Martha Price Ridley

(minor; referenced via letter): A village woman, apparently widowed ("since my dear husband's death"). She writes to the Vicar claiming to have information about Colonel Protheroe's death and expressing reluctance to go to the police due to her "shrinking from every kind of publicity."

Caroline Wetherby

(minor; referenced via letter): A village woman who writes to the Vicar in an emotionally heightened register, claiming to have heard something important and expressing "horror" at being involved with the police.

Amanda Hartnell

(minor; referenced via letter): A village woman whose letter is described by the Vicar as "militant" in tone, brief, direct, and commanding. She instructs the Vicar to call on her and states she will wait in for him.

Mary

(minor; functional): The Vicar's domestic servant. She appears briefly in the hallway to inform the Vicar that the notes arrived by hand since lunchtime, with one exception found in the letter box. No description or further characterization.

Colonel Protheroe

(referenced/offstage; deceased): The murder victim whose death drives the chapter's investigative threads. Not described in this chapter beyond his role as the subject of the investigation.

Anne

(referenced/offstage): Mentioned by Griselda as the reason Redding was "not noticing" her. No surname or further identification given in this chapter.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 24

Old Hall

Referenced as the location the Vicar visited earlier in the day, associated with Mrs. Protheroe. Not described in this chapter beyond its name and association.

The Parish Church / Evening Service

The chapter establishes that there is a church service scheduled for that evening. Hawes is the curate responsible for preaching; the Vicar agrees to preach in his place and insists on taking the full service.

The Pulpit

Mentioned specifically as the source of Hawes's anxiety, "the idea of getting up in the pulpit, of all those eyes staring at me." Establishes the physical and social exposure of the preaching role.

Rice-paper capsule / headache powder

A specific medicinal form described in the chapter. Hawes produces it from a small cardboard box and takes it with water. The Vicar notes it appears to bring "instant relief" and privately suspects possible drug dependency. Dr. Haydock is said to have warned Hawes against taking too many.

Anonymous letter conventions

The Vicar characterizes anonymous letters as "the meanest and cruellest weapon there is." He notes this letter "purported to be written by an illiterate person" but that "several things inclined me to disbelieve that assumption", establishing that the letter's apparent register is likely a disguise. The specific markers of the letter (erratic capitalization, phonetic spelling of "wot," the sign-off "A Friend") are presented as deliberate affectations.

Village social network

The chapter establishes a pattern of village women (Ridley, Wetherby, Hartnell) who are socially connected to the Vicar, monitor local events, and channel information through him rather than directly to the police. Their near-identical letters arriving simultaneously suggest a shared source of information or a coordinated (if informal) response to the same piece of gossip or evidence.

Archer

Established as a known local figure with a criminal record, poaching, imprisonment, and a reputation for threats against Colonel Protheroe. His existence as a suspect is a matter of village knowledge, not merely police investigation.

The pistol as murder weapon

The Vicar states as a "complete stumbling block" to Archer's guilt that "a man like Archer wouldn't think of shooting a man with a pistol. It's the wrong weapon." This establishes the pistol as the confirmed murder weapon and introduces a class/type-based logic of weapon selection as an investigative principle.

CONFLICT

Chapter 24

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict concerns the murder investigation: Hawes presses the Vicar to accept Archer as the guilty party, while the Vicar resists, and the arrival of three letters from village women suggests new information is about to surface. This conflict escalates, the investigation is clearly moving, but does not resolve within the chapter. The internal conflict belongs to the Vicar: the anonymous letter and Griselda's subsequent confession force him to confront the possibility that his wife has concealed a significant prior relationship. His closing question, "But did I?", signals that the internal conflict is unresolved and deepening.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 24

- The four notes arrived "since lunch time," with one exception found already in the letter box (implying it arrived before lunch or by a different means).
- Hawes visited Lawrence Redding "last night" (the night before this chapter's events).
- Griselda refers to what she told the Vicar "less than a week ago" in the same room (the study), establishing that the events of the novel's present timeline span less than one week to this point.
- The church service is scheduled for "tonight."
- No specific dates or character ages are stated in this chapter.
- Griselda's prior romantic attachment to Redding is placed before her marriage to the Vicar; no specific timeframe is given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 24

"I can't desert my post. No, that is a thing I will never do."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Hawes's self-image as a man of duty, which sits in ironic tension with his evident psychological deterioration and evasiveness throughout the chapter.

"Ringing bells is a profitless form of exercise in our house."

WHY IT LANDS A small, dry aside that efficiently characterizes the Vicar's domestic circumstances and his wry, understated narrative voice.

"An anonymous letter is, I think, the meanest and cruellest weapon there is."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant, the Vicar's moral framework stated plainly; also signals his immediate dismissal of the letter's content as a weapon rather than evidence, which shapes his response to it.

"Yes, I've always been able to hide things. In a way, I like doing it."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Griselda: her admission is disarming in its candor, but the pleasure she takes in concealment complicates the confession itself and raises the question of what else she may be hiding.

"You're very clever at concealing things," I said, remembering what she had told me in that room less than a week ago, and the ingenuous way she had talked.

WHY IT LANDS Marks the Vicar's recognition that Griselda's earlier candor was itself a performance; establishes the theme of concealment as layered and deliberate rather than incidental.

"Yes," I said, "I understand." But did I?

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing lines; character-defining for the Vicar and thematically central, his uncertainty about his own understanding of his wife mirrors the reader's uncertainty about the investigation, and the question is left entirely open.

25

Chapter 25

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 25

The narrator (a vicar named Clement) begins the chapter unsettled by an anonymous letter mentioning "pitch soils" and sets out to make calls on three local women who have each written to him. Before doing so, he detours to the police station, where he witnesses the interrogation of Miss Gladys Cram, who flatly denies having carried a suitcase to the woods. Inspector Slack releases her, explaining he hopes to trace a larger suspect through her movements. Slack also reveals that a man named Archer has been under suspicion from the start, possessing an alibi backed by companions whose testimony Slack dismisses as worthless. Slack expresses frustration at the lack of hard evidence and muses that a spinster living on Clement's road would have been useful.

Clement then visits his three correspondents in turn. Miss Hartnell confesses that on the afternoon of the murder, around six o'clock, she went round the exterior of Mrs. Lestrangle's house peering in at the windows and found it entirely empty, contradicting Mrs. Lestrangle's claim that she was home but not answering the door. Miss Wetherby, through elaborate circumlocution, reports that a maid (her "little bird") saw a woman whose name begins with "L" turn into the Vicarage road just before six o'clock on the day of the murder, looking furtively up and down the street first. Mrs. Price Ridley contributes her maid Clara's account of hearing an unusual sneeze near the Vicarage shrubbery sometime between a quarter and half-past six.

Clement then visits his friend Dr. Haydock, who reveals two significant pieces of information: Mrs. Lestrangle is terminally ill and has at most a month to live, which is why Haydock has been shielding her; and on the evening of the murder, she came to Haydock's house between six and seven, leaving to keep an appointment whose destination Haydock claims not to know. Haydock also states with unusual certainty that no one will be hanged for Colonel Protheroe's murder. The chapter closes with Clement producing a small brownish crystal he found in the woods; Haydock identifies it as picric acid, used both as an explosive and medicinally for burns. Clement declines to reveal where he found it, and the two part on slightly guarded terms, each keeping secrets from the other.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 25

Inspector Slack

Role: ally (official investigator). Slack is present at the police station. He is described as being in a genial mood on this occasion, which Clement notes as nearly singular. Slack's approach to the case is characterized not by personal conviction about guilt but by pragmatic concern for what can be proven in court. He dismisses Archer's alibi as worthless in principle but acknowledges it is difficult to overcome in practice. He has already received anonymous letters pointing to Archer and treats them as routine. He is pursuing Miss Cram as a potential lead to a larger suspect. He has arranged for a silver expert from Much Benham to determine whether the silver at Old Hall is genuine or a fake. His stated view is that the robbery subplot is minor compared to the murder, and he is inclined toward "the lady" (implied to be Mrs. Lestrangle or another female suspect) if he can find proof of blackmail. He makes a passing, wistful remark about the absence of a spinster on Clement's road.

Miss Gladys Cram

Role: minor/suspect. Miss Cram is physically present at the police station at the chapter's opening. She is described as "the fair Gladys" and is conducting herself with aggressive self-confidence, denying all accusations. She challenges the reliability of the witness who identified her by moonlight, points out the absence of her name on the suitcase, defends Dr. Stone against the accusation of burglary, invokes her solicitor, and ultimately walks out when Slack opens the door for her. Her emotional state is combative and performative. Haydock later characterizes her as "rather shrewd" and "a remarkably healthy specimen," contradicting Clement's own assessment of her as "a prize idiot." Her objective is stated: to deny everything and avoid arrest. Her relationship to Dr. Stone is one of professional association and apparent loyalty.

Dr. Stone

Role: referenced/offstage. Not physically present. Miss Cram defends him against the accusation of being "a common burglar," noting he "has a lot of letters after his name." Haydock characterizes him as "a high-class thief" who had read up his subject but made slips that Colonel Protheroe apparently caught. Haydock recalls a row between Stone and Protheroe. Stone's role in the chapter is as the subject of discussion rather than an active participant.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned by Clement in defense of her reliability as a witness: "Miss Marple is usually right. That's what makes her unpopular." Slack's colleague Hurst is cited as sharing this view. She is the witness who identified Miss Cram by moonlight. Her role in this chapter is as an absent but authoritative presence whose judgment Clement endorses.

Archer

Role: suspect, referenced/offstage. Not physically present. Discussed by Slack as a suspect who has been under consideration from the beginning of the investigation, identified through anonymous letters as well as police initiative. He has an alibi supported by "a couple of pals" whose testimony Slack regards as inherently untrustworthy. He has been seen near Mr. Redding's house, which he could explain by reference to his mother, described as "a decent body." Slack is reluctant to arrest him without a fingerprint, footprint, or placement near the scene at the time of the crime. Haydock dismisses Archer at the chapter's end, saying he "hasn't got brains enough to wipe his fingerprints off the pistol." Archer's motivation is inferred: if guilty, self-preservation; the nature of any motive for the murder is not stated in this chapter.

Mr. Redding

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned twice by Slack in passing. First as someone Archer has been seen near ("to speak to his mother"), and second in a sardonic remark about his unusual cooperativeness with the police: "A pity about Mr. Redding. It's not often you find a man who goes out of his way to oblige you." Clement responds with a slight smile, suggesting shared knowledge of Redding's prior conduct. No further detail is provided in this chapter.

Miss Hartnell

Role: minor. Clement's first parish call. She is physically described only by her "jolly voice" and her tendency toward truculence. She is shown watching from the window and opening the door before Clement can ring. She leads him into a very small room ("about the size of a hencoop") and delivers her information with self-righteous framing, presenting her window-peering as a matter of duty. Her emotional state is one of self-satisfaction mixed with residual indignation at Inspector Slack's dismissiveness. Her key information: she visited Mrs. Lestrangle's house on the afternoon of the murder, knocked and rang multiple times, then went around the exterior and looked in all the windows, finding the house entirely empty. She estimates the time as close to six o'clock. She also places Mrs. Protheroe arriving at her own house around half-past six, with Dr. Stone and Mr. Redding outside. Clement infers (stated as inference) that she used the pretext of a broken bell to indulge her curiosity about the interior. Her relationship to Mrs. Lestrangle is one of social hostility and condescension.

Miss Wetherby

Role: minor. Clement's second parish call. She receives him with excessive fussiness and flattery. Her information is delivered through elaborate indirection: a "little bird" (inferred by Clement to be a maid visiting a fishmonger's room above a shop) saw a woman whose name begins with "L" turn into the Vicarage road just before six o'clock on the day of the murder, looking furtively up and down the street beforehand. Miss Wetherby refuses to name her source directly, citing a promise of confidentiality. She is anxious about being called to testify in court. Her emotional state is fluttery and self-dramatizing. She unexpectedly laughs at Clement's mild joke about "another kind of bird," tapping him on the arm, a moment of uncharacteristic warmth.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Role: minor. Clement's third parish call. She is cold and imperious in manner, shaking his hand coldly and immediately declaring she will not be involved in any police court business. Her information concerns her maid Clara, who heard an unusual sneeze near the Vicarage shrubbery sometime between a quarter and half-past six on the day of the murder. Mrs. Price Ridley insists it was a man's sneeze and theorizes the murderer was concealed in the shrubbery. She also makes an apparently unrelated remark about a tennis racquet left on the grass without a press, which bewilders Clement entirely. Her emotional state is one of aggrieved self-importance. She closes her eyes at the end of the interview "like one weary of this world."

Clara (Mrs. Price Ridley's maid)

Role: minor. Clement speaks to her briefly on the doorstep. She confirms hearing the sneeze and characterizes it as not "an ordinary sneeze." She estimates the time as between a quarter and half-past six, before her mistress received a telephone call and "was took bad." She also claims to have heard shots, which she describes as "something awful", a statement Clement finds so exaggerated as to undermine her credibility entirely.

Dr. Haydock

Role: ally. Clement visits him last. Haydock is described as looking "worried and haggard," aged by the business of the murder investigation. He is warm toward Clement but evasive on the subject of Hawes. He reveals that he knew Colonel Protheroe nearly twenty years ago, when both lived in Westmorland. His two major disclosures: (1) Mrs. Lestrangle is terminally ill, with at most a month to live, and came to his house between six and seven on the evening of the murder; (2) he states with unusual certainty that no one will be hanged for Protheroe's murder, without explaining the basis for this conviction. He identifies the brownish crystal Clement produces as picric acid, used both as an explosive and medicinally in solution for burns. He is reluctant to return the crystal and curious about where Clement found it. His emotional state is one of suppressed anxiety and guarded loyalty, to Mrs. Lestrangle, to some knowledge he is not sharing, and to Clement as a friend. His objective appears to be protecting Mrs. Lestrangle while managing Clement's growing suspicions.

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: suspect, referenced/offstage. Not physically present. The subject of Miss Hartnell's and Miss Wetherby's information, and of Haydock's disclosure. Miss Hartnell found her house empty around six o'clock. Miss Wetherby's source saw a woman whose name begins with "L" entering the Vicarage road just before six, looking furtively about. Haydock reveals she is terminally ill (given a month at most to live), that she came to his house between six and seven on the evening of the murder, and that she left to keep an appointment whose destination Haydock claims not to know. Her medical certificate excusing her from the inquest was issued by Haydock and is now understood by Clement to be genuine rather than a favor. Her relationship to Haydock is described as that of an old friend.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage (murder victim). Mentioned in passing by Haydock, who knew him nearly twenty years ago in Westmorland. Haydock characterizes him as "too full of his own rectitude and too self-assertive" and notes that "nobody ever liked him much." He is also said to have caught Dr. Stone out in errors, which led to a row between them.

Hawes

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement mentions being worried about Hawes and wanting him to get away for rest and change. Haydock's response is evasive and does not ring true to Clement. No further detail is provided in this chapter.

Griselda

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only in a brief, wistful aside by Clement: "Twenty years ago Griselda was five years old." This places her current age at approximately twenty-five. The reference is personal and reflective rather than plot-relevant.

Mrs. Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned by Miss Hartnell as having arrived at Hartnell's house around half-past six on the day of the murder, with Dr. Stone and Mr. Redding outside. They discussed bulbs. No further detail.

Mary (the Clements' maid)

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned by Clement as a possible explanation for the sneeze Clara heard: Mary has been suffering from a severe cold in the head. Mrs. Price Ridley dismisses this explanation, insisting the sneeze was a man's and could not have been heard from the kitchen at the gate.

The police station	A physical location in the village. Inspector Slack operates from here. Miss Cram is brought here for questioning and released. The station receives anonymous letters at a rate Slack describes as "a dozen a day, at least."
Old Hall	Referenced as the location from which Inspector Slack has returned at the chapter's opening. The silver there is under examination; Slack has arranged for "a very good man in Much Benham, an authority on old silver" to be brought by car to determine whether the silver is genuine or a fake. The implication is that one set of silver (either at Old Hall or elsewhere) is counterfeit, connected to Dr. Stone's activities as a "high-class thief."
Much Benham	A nearby location from which a silver expert has been summoned. Mentioned only in passing.
The Blue Boar	A local establishment (implied to be a pub or inn) whose landlady is cited by Inspector Slack as a potential witness who might identify a suitcase as belonging to Miss Cram.
Mrs. Lestrangle's house	A house in the village. Miss Hartnell's account establishes that it has a front door with a bell audible from the mat outside, windows visible from the garden, and a garden that can be circumnavigated on foot. The house was empty around six o'clock on the afternoon of the murder.
The Vicarage	Clement's residence. Referenced as the location near which the sneeze was heard (in the shrubbery) and into whose road the woman beginning with "L" was seen to turn. The study is mentioned as a room within it. The front gate is the vantage point from which Clara heard the sneeze.
Haydock's house	Dr. Haydock's residence and surgery. Established in this chapter as the destination Mrs. Lestrangle walked to on the evening of the murder, arriving between six and seven. Haydock notes that six to seven is not his normal time for seeing patients, which is why he had not previously disclosed her visit.
Westmorland	A region mentioned as the place where Haydock previously had a medical practice, approximately twenty years before the novel's present. Colonel Protheroe also lived in the area at that time. This establishes a prior connection between Haydock and Protheroe predating the events of the novel.
Picric acid	A substance identified by Haydock when Clement produces a small brownish crystal found in the woods. Haydock describes it as both an explosive and a medicinal substance used in solution for burns, which he calls "wonderful stuff." Its presence in the woods is treated by Clement as potentially significant; he declines to reveal where he found it. The crystal is described as "little" and "brownish."
Anonymous letters	Established as a routine feature of police work in this context. Slack states the station receives "a dozen a day, at least." Clement has also received an anonymous letter (mentioned at the chapter's opening, containing the phrase "pitch soils") that has left a strong impression on him. The three women's letters to Clement are distinct from the anonymous letter; they are signed communications from named parishioners.
The silver examination / robbery subplot	Slack explains that there are two sets of silver, one of which must be a fake. A specialist from Much Benham has been summoned to determine which is genuine. Slack characterizes the robbery as "a small business compared with murder" and treats it as a secondary matter, useful primarily as a means of tracing a larger suspect through Miss Cram.
Solicitor (legal right)	Miss Cram invokes her right to have a solicitor present before saying anything further, establishing that this right exists and is recognized within the world of the novel.

Evensong

A church service Clement must take, mentioned as a time constraint on his visit to Haydock. Establishes Clement's professional obligations as a working vicar.

CONFLICT

Chapter 25

The chapter contains two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict is the ongoing murder investigation: Clement is gathering witness testimony that places Mrs. Lestrange away from her house and near the Vicarage at the time of the murder, while Slack pursues Miss Cram and Archer as alternative leads. The internal conflict emerges in the final scene with Haydock: Clement must weigh his trust in and loyalty to a friend against the possibility that Haydock's protection of Mrs. Lestrange could allow an innocent person to be convicted. Haydock's cryptic assurance that no one will be hanged partially resolves this tension but does not eliminate it; the chapter ends with both men withholding information from each other, escalating the interpersonal conflict rather than resolving it.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 25

- Miss Hartnell places her visit to Mrs. Lestrange's house at "close on six o'clock" on the day of the murder. She arrived home at "about ten past six."
- Miss Hartnell places Mrs. Protheroe's arrival at her (Hartnell's) house at "somewhere round about the half-hour" (i.e., approximately six-thirty), with Dr. Stone and Mr. Redding outside.
- Miss Wetherby's source (the maid) saw the woman beginning with "L" turn into the Vicarage road "just before six o'clock" on the day of the murder.
- Clara heard the sneeze "some time between a quarter and half-past six" on the day of the murder, i.e., between 6:15 and 6:30.
- Clara specifies the sneeze occurred before "the mistress had the telephone call and was took bad," providing a relative internal marker for Mrs. Price Ridley's timeline.
- Haydock states Mrs. Lestrange came to his house between six and seven on the evening of the murder, and left to keep an appointment.
- Haydock states he has known Colonel Protheroe for "nearly twenty years," dating their acquaintance to approximately twenty years before the novel's present. Both were in Westmorland at that time.
- Clement reflects that twenty years ago, Griselda was five years old, placing her current age at approximately twenty-five.

- Clement notes he has "just time" to visit Haydock before taking Evensong, establishing that the chapter's events occur in the late afternoon or early evening.
- Archer's alibi covers "all the afternoon" on the day of the murder, supported by "a couple of pals."
- Haydock gives Mrs. Lestrangle "a month at longest" to live.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 25

"Miss Marple is usually right. That's what makes her unpopular."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for both Miss Marple and Clement; encapsulates the social dynamic of the village, where accuracy is a social liability, and establishes Clement's respect for Miss Marple's judgment against Slack's skepticism.

"I don't want to have to say these things. No one likes it less. But duty is duty."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Miss Hartnell; the line is ironic given that she is visibly enjoying herself, and it crystallizes the novel's satirical portrait of village self-righteousness masquerading as civic obligation.

"In St. Mary Mead the best authority is always somebody else's servant."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and marketable; a compact, wry statement of the village's social epistemology and the role of domestic servants as the true intelligence network of the community.

"She's a dying woman. I give her a month at longest. Do you wonder that I want to keep her from being badgered and questioned?"

WHY IT LANDS Plot-critical revelation; Haydock's disclosure of Mrs. Lestrangle's terminal illness reframes his entire prior conduct in the investigation and introduces a new layer of moral complexity into Clement's assessment of the case.

"No one will be hanged for the murder of Colonel Protheroe. You can take my word for that."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant and plot-critical; Haydock's twice-repeated certainty implies knowledge beyond what he has disclosed, raising the question of what he knows and whether Clement can or should trust him, the central unresolved tension of the chapter's closing scene.

"He had his secrets. Well, I would have mine."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Clement; the line marks a subtle shift in the friendship between Clement and Haydock, from open collaboration to mutual guardedness, and captures the novel's broader theme of information withheld between people who nominally trust one another.

26

Chapter 26

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 26

The narrator, Reverend Leonard Clement, opens the chapter in an unusual emotional state as he mounts the pulpit for an evening service. The church is unexpectedly crowded, and Clement attributes the turnout not to piety but to communal curiosity in the wake of an unspecified crime. Overcome by a sudden impulse, he abandons his prepared approach and delivers an impassioned, revivalist-style sermon, something entirely out of character, using the text "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" and closing with "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." He is himself unsettled by what he has done.

Returning to the Vicarage, Clement finds a note from Miss Marple requesting a private meeting at half-past nine. Griselda and Dennis are dispatched to entertain Miss Marple's nephew, Raymond West, while Clement waits. Miss Marple arrives punctually, wrapped in a Shetland shawl, and the two settle into a substantive discussion of the murder case. Clement shares a chronological schedule of the crime's known facts, which Miss Marple approves. She then raises a logical puzzle she has been troubled by: if Colonel Protheroe was seen at the writing-table at 6:20 by Mrs. Protheroe, he could not yet have been writing the note saying he could not wait, that note would only make sense after 6:30. She proposes three alternatives: he was already dead, he was writing a different note, or the room was actually empty. As she prepares to leave, a casual remark from Clement about the maid Mary and Lettice Protheroe triggers a sudden revelation in Miss Marple. She departs in haste, muttering that she has been "extremely stupid," and leaves Clement bewildered, particularly when she adds, almost as an afterthought, that the note in evidence was never the real note and she never thought it was.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 26

Miss Jane Marple

(ally; amateur investigator): Arrives at half-past nine as arranged, wearing a Shetland shawl, described as "looking rather old and frail." She is voluble and self-deprecating in manner but demonstrably sharp. She explains her lifelong hobby of studying Human Nature, comparing it to classifying birds or flowers, and argues that solving a village mystery and solving a murder are logically equivalent, "a tiny working model of a torpedo is just the same as a real torpedo." She has been reading American detective stories to prepare. She raises the central logical problem of the chapter: the inconsistency of Protheroe's position at the writing-table at 6:20. Near the chapter's end, a casual remark about Mary and Lettice triggers a sudden, unspecified insight she refuses to share until she has thought it through. She departs stating she has been "extremely stupid, almost incredibly so," and drops the further revelation that she never believed the note in evidence was the real note. Role: ally and primary analytical intelligence of the scene.

Griselda Clement

(ally; Clement's wife): Appears briefly at the Vicarage after the sermon, described as "rather pale." She is unsettled by Clement's uncharacteristic preaching, "you were rather terrible tonight", and wonders aloud whether it meant "something special." She is cheerful about the prospect of visiting Miss Marple's nephew, motivated by the promise of homemade liqueur. She is characterized as serene and slightly irreverent. Role: minor/ally.

Dennis

(minor; presumably a young relative or lodger of the Clements): Present at the sermon and at supper. He is grumpy about being sent to entertain Raymond West, feeling out of his depth in intellectual company. Role: minor.

Mary

(minor; the Clements' maid): Offstage in this chapter but discussed. She is described as "raw," unreliable in her household duties (the plant goes unwatered), and has given notice after a confrontation with Lettice Protheroe following the inquest. Role: referenced/offstage.

Raymond West

(minor; Miss Marple's nephew): Offstage. Griselda is sent to "cheer him up." Griselda remarks, "I don't think Mr. Raymond West is so frightfully clever as he pretends to be." Role: referenced/offstage.

Colonel Protheroe

(referenced/offstage; murder victim): Central to the investigative discussion. His movements on the day of his death are analyzed in Clement's schedule. The question of why he was seated at the writing-table at 6:20 is the chapter's key logical puzzle.

Mrs. Anne Protheroe

(referenced/offstage): Present in church. Referenced in the schedule as having passed the study window at 6:20 and not seen Colonel Protheroe, which she interpreted as the room being empty, leading her to proceed to the studio to meet Lawrence Redding. Her testimony is central to Miss Marple's three-alternative analysis.

Lettice Protheroe

(minor; referenced): Present in church, which Clement notes is unusual, she had never attended evening service before. Also referenced as having had "words" with Mary the maid after the inquest, precipitating Mary's notice. Role: minor/present in church; referenced in domestic subplot.

Lawrence Redding

(minor; present in church): Noted as being in church alongside Hawes. Referenced in the schedule as having arrived at the Vicarage at 6:45 and found the body. Role: minor/present.

Hawes

(minor; present in church): His presence is noted as surprising, Clement describes his face as "white" and "strained." His sermons are characterized as "dull and dogmatic." Role: minor/present.

Dr. Haydock

(referenced): Present in church, which Clement notes is unusual. Referenced in the schedule as having examined the body at 6:55 and as having identified a crystal Clement found. Role: minor/present; referenced in investigative context.

Miss Gladys Cram

(minor; present in church): Described as "looking rather blatantly young and healthy against a background of wizened spinsters." Referenced in the schedule's note as having no alibi for 6:30–6:35, claiming she was at the barrow, though Clement tentatively dismisses her as a suspect. Role: minor/present.

Mrs. Lestrangle

(minor; present in church): Described as "a dim figure at the end of the church who had slipped in late." Referenced in the schedule's note as having no alibi for 6:30–6:35 and as having left Haydock's house after six to keep an unspecified appointment. Clement rejects Inspector Slack's blackmail theory regarding her. Role: minor/present; referenced in investigative context.

Mrs. Price Ridley

(minor; present in church): Present "in full force." Referenced in the schedule as having received a telephone call from Lawrence Redding's cottage at 6:29, her testimony used to establish the time of the shot. Role: minor/present; referenced in schedule.

Miss Hartnell, Miss Wetherby

(minor; present in church): Listed among those present "in full force." No further characterization in this chapter. Role: minor/present.

Inspector Slack

(referenced/offstage): Not present. Miss Marple compares him to "the young lady in the boot shop who wants to sell you patent leather because she's got it in your size, and doesn't take any notice of the fact that you want brown calf." His blackmail theory regarding Mrs. Lestrangle is mentioned and rejected by Clement. Role: referenced/offstage.

Colonel Melchett

(referenced/offstage): Described by Miss Marple as "such an autocratic man." She states she would not share her analytical approach with him. Role: referenced/offstage.

Dr. Stone

(referenced/offstage): Referenced in the schedule as one of the witnesses whose evidence suggests the shot may have been earlier than 6:30–6:35. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Archer

(referenced/offstage): Referenced in the schedule in connection with the pistol last being seen at 12:45, noted as doubtful because "Mrs. Archer had previously said she could not remember." Role: referenced/offstage.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

The Vicarage

Clement's home, adjacent to the church. Contains a study with a window opening onto a garden or lawn, used as the entry point for Miss Marple's visit. The study is where Clement compiles his schedule and conducts the meeting. The household includes a maid (Mary) and a plant in a stand near the window, which Miss Marple notes is underwatered.

Miss Marple's House / Garden

Across the lawn from the Vicarage, accessible through a garden gate. Miss Marple's nephew Raymond West is there during the chapter. The two properties are close enough that Clement escorts her to the gate on foot.

The Revivalist Sermon Style

Clement explicitly frames his sermon as a departure from his normal "dull and scholarly" approach. He describes the style as that of "a raving, ranting evangelist" and an "emotional Revivalist spirit," which he states he disbelieves in as a matter of principle. The sermon text is drawn from the Bible: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" and "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." The latter is described by Clement as "perhaps the most poignant words in the whole Bible."

Clement's Crime Schedule (embedded document)

- A chronological reconstruction of events on "Thursday, 21st inst." The schedule is reproduced in full within the chapter and constitutes a key worldbuilding/investigative document. Key entries:
- *12:30 a.m.:* Colonel Protheroe alters his appointment from six to six-fifteen; overheard by much of the village.
 - *12:45:* Pistol last seen in its proper place (noted as doubtful).
 - *5:30 (approx.):* Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe leave Old Hall for the village by car.
 - *5:30:* A fake telephone call is put through to Clement from the North Lodge, Old Hall.
 - *6:15 (or a minute or two earlier):* Colonel Protheroe arrives at the Vicarage; shown into the study by Mary.
 - *6:20:* Mrs. Protheroe comes along the back lane and across the garden to the study window; Colonel Protheroe not visible.
 - *6:29:* A call from Lawrence Redding's cottage is put through to Mrs. Price Ridley (per the Exchange).
 - *6:30–6:35:* Shot heard (accepting the telephone call time as correct); Lawrence Redding's, Anne Protheroe's, and Dr. Stone's evidence suggest it may have been earlier, but Mrs. Price Ridley's account is treated as probably correct.
 - *6:45:* Lawrence Redding arrives at the Vicarage and finds the body.
 - *6:48:* Clement meets Lawrence Redding.
 - *6:49:* Body discovered by Clement.
 - *6:55:* Haydock examines the body.
 - *Note:* Miss Cram and Mrs. Lestrangle are identified as the only two people with no alibi for 6:30–6:35.

Old Hall

The Protheroe family residence. The fake telephone call originates from its North Lodge. Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe depart from here at approximately 5:30.

The North Lodge, Old Hall

The specific location from which the fake call to Clement was placed at 5:30.

Lawrence Redding's Cottage	The origin point of the 6:29 telephone call to Mrs. Price Ridley.
The Studio	Referenced as the location where Anne Protheroe went to meet Lawrence Redding after looking through the study window and believing the room empty.
The Barrow	Miss Cram's claimed location during the 6:30–6:35 window. No further description given in this chapter.
Picric Acid	A substance referenced in the investigative discussion. Clement has apparently found a crystal identified by Haydock as picric acid. Miss Marple recalls a detective story in which "a man was poisoned by picric acid and lanolin being rubbed on him as an ointment," but notes this does not seem applicable as nobody has been poisoned in the present case.
American Detective Stories	Miss Marple mentions she has been reading these from the library in hopes of finding them helpful to the investigation. This establishes her as an active, self-educating investigator.
Homemade Liqueur / Raymond West's Household	Griselda anticipates "a glass or two of homemade liqueur" at Miss Marple's house, suggesting Miss Marple or her household produces it. Raymond West is characterized as someone who discusses "art and books" at a level Dennis finds intimidating.
The Greuze Reference	Raymond West reportedly calls Griselda "the perfect Greuze", a reference to the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Baptiste Greuze, known for idealized portraits of young women. This characterizes West as aesthetically pretentious and Griselda as conventionally beautiful in a classical sense.

CONFLICT

Chapter 26

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The external conflict is the ongoing murder investigation: Clement and Miss Marple work to reconstruct the timeline and logic of Colonel Protheroe's death, with Miss Marple identifying a critical inconsistency, Protheroe's presence at the writing-table at 6:20 cannot be reconciled with the note as currently understood. This conflict does not resolve; it deepens, as Miss Marple's sudden insight at the chapter's end opens an entirely new line of inquiry she declines to share. The internal conflict belongs to Clement: his uncharacteristic sermon disturbs him, and he cannot fully account for the "sudden madness" that overtook him, leaving him uncertain about his own nature and judgment.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 26

- The "Nephew Amusing Party" departs "a little after nine."
- Miss Marple arrives "at half-past nine punctually."

- The crime occurred on **Thursday, 21st inst.** (the current month, not specified by name).
- **12:30 a.m., Thursday:** Colonel Protheroe alters his appointment from six to six-fifteen.
- **12:45, Thursday:** Pistol last seen in place (noted as doubtful).
- **5:30 (approx.), Thursday:** Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe leave Old Hall; fake call placed to Clement from North Lodge.
- **6:15 (or slightly earlier), Thursday:** Colonel Protheroe arrives at the Vicarage.
- **6:20, Thursday:** Mrs. Protheroe at the study window; Protheroe not visible.
- **6:29, Thursday:** Call from Redding's cottage to Mrs. Price Ridley (per Exchange records).
- **6:30–6:35, Thursday:** Shot heard (per Mrs. Price Ridley's account, treated as most reliable).
- **6:45, Thursday:** Lawrence Redding arrives at Vicarage; finds body.
- **6:48, Thursday:** Clement meets Redding
- **6:49, Thursday:** Clement discovers body.
- **6:55, Thursday:** Haydock examines body.
- The inquest has already taken place prior to this chapter (Mary returned from it in a "temperamental state" and had words with Lettice).
- No character ages are stated in this chapter.
- No explicit calendar date beyond "Thursday, 21st inst." is given.

"Tonight I was of necessity preaching extempore, and as I looked down on the sea of upturned faces, a sudden madness entered my brain. I ceased to be in any sense a Minister of God. I became an actor."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: establishes Clement's self-awareness of the gap between his clerical identity and the performance he is about to give, and introduces the chapter's theme of people acting contrary to their known natures.

"Mass emotion is a strange and terrible thing."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: a one-sentence observation that resonates beyond the sermon scene, implicitly commenting on the village's collective response to the murder and the way communal feeling distorts individual judgment.

"You see, living alone, as I do, in a rather out-of-the-way part of the world, one has to have a hobby. There is, of course, woolwork, and Guides, and Welfare, and sketching, but my hobby is, and always has been, Human Nature."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining and marketable: Miss Marple's self-introduction as an investigator, framed with characteristic self-deprecation; establishes her method and her voice.

"After all, a tiny working model of a torpedo is just the same as a real torpedo."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant and worldbuilding-critical: Miss Marple's articulation of her core investigative philosophy, that the logic of small village mysteries and large crimes is identical, which underpins her entire approach to the case.

"If I were at any time to set out on a career of deceit, it would be of Miss Marple that I should be afraid."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining and marketable: Clement's tribute to Miss Marple's perceptiveness, delivered in his dry, self-aware narrative voice; functions as a strong encapsulation of her role in the novel.

"The note? Oh! Of course that wasn't the real note. I never thought it was. Good night, Mr. Clement."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and thematically significant: Miss Marple's parting revelation reframes the entire evidentiary basis of the investigation and closes the chapter on a note of deliberate, unsettling ambiguity.

27

Chapter 27

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 27

The narrator (the Vicar, Clement) stands alone in the hall after realizing he and Miss Marple had become so absorbed in the murder investigation that they neglected to accompany Griselda and Dennis back to the house. Before he can act on this, the doorbell rings. Retrieving a letter from the box, he pockets it without reading it when the bell rings a second time, and opens the door to find Colonel Melchett, who has stopped in on his way home from town and asks for a drink.

The two men settle in the study with whisky and soda. Melchett dismisses Miss Marple's investigative instincts with condescension before Clement raises the question of whether the fish boy was questioned about anyone leaving by the front door. Melchett confirms Inspector Slack did question him, but the boy saw no one, the murderer would have had ample cover near the front gate to avoid being seen. Melchett also notes that if Archer is the culprit, the boy (Fred Jackson, Archer's cousin) likely would not have reported seeing him anyway.

Melchett then delivers his promised "astounding" news: handwriting experts have determined that the letter found beside Protheroe's body, the note apparently written by Protheroe himself, is a forgery. Protheroe never wrote it. The "6:20" time notation may have been added by yet a third hand. Clement recalls that Mrs. Protheroe remarked at the time that the handwriting did not look like her husband's, a comment he had dismissed. He also recalls Miss Marple stating that evening that the note was "all wrong"

The chapter ends abruptly when the telephone rings. A strange, high-pitched, hysterical voice announces a desire to confess to the murder, then the exchange cuts the call off. Clement tells Melchett what happened, leaves him to deal with the telephone operator, and exits, stating he has a fancy he recognized the voice.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 27

Colonel Melchett

Role: ally / official investigator. Physical description: wearing a leather coat (removed on arrival); stands in front of the fireplace with legs wide apart, stroking his closely-cropped moustache. Emotional state: sociable, self-assured, somewhat dismissive of Miss Marple. He brings the key revelation of the chapter, the forgery verdict, and is the one who takes over the telephone at the end. His stated view on Protheroe: "Live and let live", he considers Protheroe's refusal to give men the benefit of the doubt a character flaw. He is skeptical of expert certainty but accepts the forgery finding as reliable enough.

Miss Marple

Role: referenced/offstage. Not present in the chapter but discussed twice. Melchett dismisses her with "Women like that always think they know everything" Clement counters implicitly by noting she had already identified the note as "all wrong." Melchett's exasperated response, "Confound the woman, she couldn't know more about it if she had committed the murder herself", functions as reluctant acknowledgment of her accuracy.

Griselda

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement's wife. Mentioned only in the opening sentence as someone who has not yet returned, along with Dennis.

Dennis

Role: referenced/offstage. Mentioned only in the opening sentence alongside Griselda. Relationship to Clement not elaborated in this chapter.

Inspector Slack

Role: referenced/offstage. The officer who questioned the fish boy. Mentioned by Melchett as having done his job correctly, though the questioning yielded nothing

Fred Jackson (the fish boy)

Role: minor / referenced. Did not see anyone leaving by the front gate. Identified as a cousin of Archer. Melchett implies he would not have reported seeing Archer even if he had.

Archer

Role: referenced/offstage. A suspect. Protheroe had "his knife into Archer pretty badly", described as "lots of bad blood between them." Melchett raises him as a serious possibility. His first name is not given in this chapter.

Colonel Protheroe (the victim)

Role: referenced/offstage (deceased). Characterized in this chapter as ruthless and unforgiving, he "prided himself" on never giving men the benefit of the doubt. The central revelation of the chapter concerns the letter found at his death, now confirmed as a forgery he never wrote.

Mrs. Protheroe

Role: referenced/offstage. Clement recalls that she remarked at the time of the discovery that the handwriting did not look like her husband's. This observation, previously dismissed by Clement, is now vindicated.

The unidentified caller

Role: minor but pivotal. Speaks in "a strange, high-pitched hysterical voice." Announces a desire to confess, "*I want to confess. My God, I want to confess.*", before the line is cut off. Identity unknown within the chapter; Clement states he has "a fancy" he recognized the voice, but does not name the person.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 27

The front gate / grounds

Melchett notes there is "lots of cover by your front gate," sufficient for a murderer to observe the road and avoid being seen by a passing delivery boy. This is relevant to the question of how the killer left the scene undetected.

The murder scene and the forged letter

The letter found beside Protheroe's body, previously treated as a note written by Protheroe himself, has been submitted to handwriting experts. Their verdict: the letter is a forgery; Protheroe did not write it. The "6:20" notation (a time, presumably written into the letter) is believed to have been added by yet another, third hand, though the experts are less certain on this point. The heading of the letter was written in a different ink from the body of the letter. This is the chapter's central worldbuilding/plot revelation.

Handwriting expertise as investigative method

The police sent samples of Protheroe's handwriting to an expert for comparison. The expert's conclusion is treated as reliable but not infallible, Melchett notes, "they're as certain as experts ever are," with a degree of irony about the nature of expert testimony.

The telephone exchange

The local telephone exchange is an intermediary in calls. When the mysterious call is cut off, Clement speaks to "a languid voice" at the exchange who expresses no particular urgency or information. Melchett takes over to press the exchange for the originating number or caller. The exchange's failure to maintain the connection is treated as a significant obstacle.

Archer's history with Protheroe

Protheroe had "his knife into Archer pretty badly," suggesting a prior legal or quasi-legal conflict in which Protheroe acted against Archer without leniency. The nature of the original offense is not specified in this chapter.

Social geography

The fish boy's delivery route is specified: the Vicarage, Haydock's, and Mrs. Price Ridley's. This establishes the spatial relationships of key households and the predictability of the boy's movements, information relevant to how the murderer could have timed an exit.

CONFLICT

Chapter 27

The chapter carries two interlocking conflicts. The primary external conflict is the murder investigation: the revelation that Protheroe's letter is a forgery dismantles a foundational assumption of the case and implicates an unknown forger, raising the stakes of the inquiry. A secondary, brief external conflict erupts at the chapter's close when a mysterious caller attempts to confess and is cut off before identification is possible, creating urgent new pressure. There is also a minor internal conflict for Clement at the chapter's opening, guilt over having neglected his domestic responsibilities, though this is quickly displaced by events.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 27

- No character ages are stated.
- Melchett is traveling home from town by car and stops in, suggesting the chapter takes place in the evening (consistent with the reference to Miss Marple's conversation with Clement occurring "this evening").
- The mysterious telephone call occurs at the end of the chapter, in the immediate present of the scene.

- The forged letter was written at some prior point, before or at the time of Protheroe's murder. The "6:20" notation is implied to have been added separately, possibly after the body of the letter was forged.
- Mrs. Protheroe's remark about the handwriting is recalled as having been made "at the time" of the letter's discovery, a past event referenced in retrospect.
- Miss Marple's statement that the note was "all wrong" is placed as having occurred "this evening", the same evening as the current scene.
- No durations, historical dates, or precise time-of-day markers are given beyond "this evening"

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 27

"Women like that always think they know everything."

WHY IT LANDS Melchett's dismissal of Miss Marple establishes the gendered skepticism she operates against, and sets up the irony of her being proven correct within the same scene.

"That letter was never written by Protheroe at all."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's central revelation, the forgery verdict, delivered in Melchett's own emphasis; this is the pivot on which the entire investigation turns.

"Confound the woman, she couldn't know more about it if she had committed the murder herself."

WHY IT LANDS Melchett's exasperated half-compliment to Miss Marple; marketable as a character-defining line that captures both her uncanny accuracy and the resistance she faces.

"I thought it one of those silly remarks women will make. If there seemed one thing sure on earth it was that Protheroe had written that note."

WHY IT LANDS Clement's self-indictment for dismissing Mrs. Protheroe's observation; reveals the investigative blind spots created by assumption and condescension.

"I want to confess. My God, I want to confess."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing shock, verbatim from the hysterical caller, thematically significant as a cry of guilt breaking through, and structurally critical as the cliffhanger that propels the narrative forward.

"Do. You may have some effect. I'll leave you to it. I'm going out. I've a fancy I recognized that voice."

WHY IT LANDS Clement's final lines; character-defining in their quiet decisiveness and the suggestion that he is already ahead of the official investigation, a key beat in his arc as an amateur investigator.

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Chapter 28

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 28

The narrator, identified as "Vicar" and addressed as "Clement", hurries through the deserted village of St. Mary Mead at eleven o'clock on a Sunday night. Noticing a light in a first-floor window, he stops at Hawes's lodgings and is admitted by the landlady, Mrs. Sadler, who reports that Hawes has had a quiet evening with no visitors and has not gone out. Upstairs, the narrator finds Hawes unconscious in a long chair, an empty cachet box and a half-full glass of water beside him. On the floor near Hawes's left foot lies a crumpled sheet of paper addressed "My dear Clement," which the narrator reads, exclaims over, and pockets. He attempts to telephone the Vicarage to reach Melchett but finds the line engaged; he leaves a callback request. While waiting, he draws from his pocket a second note, one he had found earlier, unopened, in the letter box, and recognizes its handwriting as matching an anonymous letter received that afternoon. He tears it open and reads it three times, struggling to absorb its contents. When Melchett calls back, the narrator confirms he has found "the confession" but, after a moment of intense internal struggle in which he surveys Hawes, the crumpled letter, the anonymous note, and the empty cachet box, declines to name the murderer outright, telling Melchett only "I don't know" and giving him the address. He then sits opposite the unconscious Hawes with two minutes to think before Melchett arrives, re-reads the anonymous letter a third time, closes his eyes, and thinks.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 28

Hawes

Role: minor/functional (present but unconscious). Occupant of the first-floor bedroom and sitting-room at his lodgings. Found lying back in a long chair, asleep or unconscious. An empty cachet box (brand name: Cherubim) and a half-full glass of water stand beside him. A crumpled letter addressed to Clement lies on the floor by his left foot. Mrs. Sadler reports he has had no visitors and has not gone out that evening. His physical and emotional state within the chapter is one of insensibility; he does not wake when the narrator enters. His role in the plot is as the apparent author of the crumpled confession letter and/or as a potential victim of self-administered medication. No physical description is provided in this chapter.

Mrs. Sadler

Role: minor. Hawes's landlady. She unfastens two bolts, a chain, and a key before opening the door, suggesting habitual caution. She identifies the narrator immediately as "Vicar." She reports that she has not seen Hawes since bringing up his supper and that he has had a quiet evening with no visitors and has not gone out. No physical description beyond the implication of her cautious, laborious manner at the door.

Melchett

Role: ally/offstage (present only by telephone). Reached by the narrator via telephone at the Vicarage number. He has been engaged in tracing a telephone call. He asks about "that confession" and whether the narrator has "got the murderer," indicating he is actively involved in the same investigation. He is given the address of Hawes's lodgings and told to come round. No physical description; present only through dialogue.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 28

Hawes's Lodgings	A first-floor flat comprising at minimum a bedroom and a sitting-room, located on the village street. The sitting-room contains a long chair, a telephone, and a side table or surface holding the cachet box and glass of water. The building is secured at night with two bolts, a chain, and a key.
The Vicarage	Referenced as the narrator's residence and the number he calls to reach Melchett. The line is engaged when he first attempts to call, because Melchett is using it to trace a prior telephone call.
Cachet box (brand: Cherubim)	An empty pharmaceutical container found beside Hawes. The narrator notes "a certain casual conversation" in connection with it, suggesting prior knowledge of the drug or its significance. The brand name "Cherubim" is the author's specific terminology. The nature of the cachets (what drug they contain) is not stated in this chapter.
The crumpled letter	A handwritten document beginning "My dear Clement," found on the floor by Hawes's left foot. The narrator reads it, exclaims, and pockets it. It is referred to subsequently as "the confession" by Melchett, indicating its contents amount to an admission of guilt in the murder under investigation. Its full contents are not reproduced in this chapter.
The anonymous letter	A note found earlier by the narrator in the letter box, still sealed when he arrives at Hawes's lodgings. Its handwriting matches an anonymous letter received that afternoon. Its contents are read three times by the narrator but not quoted or summarized within the chapter text. It is distinct from the crumpled confession letter.
The investigation / murder case	An ongoing murder investigation in which Melchett is involved and the narrator is participating. The existence of a confession, a murderer to be identified, and prior anonymous correspondence are all established. The specific crime, victim, and prior events are not introduced in this chapter.

CONFLICT

Chapter 28

The chapter's primary conflict is internal: the narrator, having apparently gathered sufficient evidence to identify the murderer, faces what he explicitly calls "the strongest temptation of my life" and chooses, at least temporarily, not to name the killer to Melchett. The external conflict is the race against time before Melchett arrives (two minutes), during which the narrator must reconcile what the crumpled confession, the anonymous letter, and the empty cachet box together mean. The conflict does not resolve by chapter's end; it is suspended, with the narrator sitting in thought as Melchett approaches.
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TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 28

● Mrs. Sadler states she has not seen Hawes since bringing up his supper earlier that evening; he has not gone out and has had no visitors.
● An anonymous letter was received by the narrator that afternoon (same day, earlier).

- The narrator finds the second anonymous note in the letter box at some point before or during his arrival at Hawes's lodgings; it was still unopened when he pocketed it.
- The narrator estimates Melchett will arrive in two minutes after the telephone call ends.
- The narrator reads the anonymous letter three times within the chapter's present action.
- A "certain casual conversation" is referenced by the narrator in connection with the cachet box; no date or timeframe is given for when this conversation occurred.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 28

"Why, it's Vicar!" she exclaimed.

WHY IT LANDS Establishes the narrator's identity and social role in the village through a minor character's instinctive recognition.

"I had then the strongest temptation of my life."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's moral and dramatic pivot: explicitly names the internal conflict driving the narrator's decision to withhold the murderer's identity from Melchett.

"I looked at Hawes. I looked at the crumpled letter. I looked at the anonymous scrawl. I looked at the empty cachet box with the name of Cherubim on it. I remembered a certain casual conversation."

WHY IT LANDS Enumerates the physical evidence before the narrator and signals that his conclusion rests on a combination of documents and prior knowledge; marketable as a moment of classic detective-fiction reckoning.

"I, don't know," I said. "You'd better come round."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's spoken capitulation to uncertainty, or deliberate concealment, after his moment of temptation; the comma in the original text suggests a pause or hesitation that is character-defining.

"Then I closed my eyes and thought. ..."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing line; suspends the action at the moment of maximum ambiguity and places the weight of the mystery entirely on the narrator's unshared conclusions.

29

Chapter 29

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 29

The chapter opens with the narrator, Clement, sitting in a room with Hawes, who appears to be asleep in a chair. Colonel Melchett enters and Clement hands him a letter, an unfinished document written by Colonel Protheroe, which Melchett reads aloud. The letter implicates an unnamed ordained priest in unspecified "recent speculations," breaking off mid-sentence where death overtook the writer. Melchett immediately concludes that Hawes is the murderer and that remorse drove him to confess. He then discovers that Hawes is not asleep but drugged, and finds an empty cachet box nearby. Clement implies this is a deliberate overdose and suggests it may be "the best way out," but Melchett, acting in his capacity as Chief Constable, insists on saving Hawes to face justice. After a frustrating series of wrong telephone numbers, Melchett reaches Dr. Haydock, who arrives, administers a hypodermic injection, and transports Hawes to the hospital at Much Benham. Haydock warns Melchett that even if Hawes survives, he will testify that Hawes was not responsible for his actions due to encephalitis lethargica. As Clement and Melchett return upstairs, Miss Marple arrives unexpectedly, explaining she was accidentally connected to Melchett's misdial. Clement shows her Protheroe's unfinished letter. Miss Marple then delivers the chapter's pivotal revelation: Hawes is innocent, the letter and overdose are a frame, and the true murderer is Lawrence Redding.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 29

Colonel Melchett

Role: authority figure / functional antagonist to Clement's moral position. Physical description: not provided in this chapter. Melchett enters the room, reads the letter aloud, and immediately accepts Hawes's guilt without question. He is decisive, impatient, and procedurally minded, his first action upon discovering the overdose is to telephone for a doctor, not to reflect on Hawes's guilt or innocence. He is dismissive of scientific or psychological explanations for criminal behavior ("Science be damned"), characterizing such reasoning as "namby pambyism." He is described as Chief Constable of the County. His relationship to Clement is one of authority; he criticizes Clement for not summoning the doctor immediately. He is visibly irritated by Miss Marple's arrival. Motivation: stated, he "had caught a murderer and he wanted his murderer hanged."

Hawes

Role: apparent suspect / victim of framing Physical state: unconscious in a chair, initially mistaken for asleep, then discovered to be drugged. An empty cachet box is found nearby. Clement notes Hawes "has been very queer lately" and that Hawes had previously shown him the cachets and warned about overdose risk. Haydock assesses him as "pretty far gone." Hawes is transported to the hospital at Much Benham. He does not speak in this chapter. His guilt is assumed by Melchett and initially by Clement; Miss Marple ultimately declares him innocent. Medical history: encephalitis lethargica (sleepy sickness), which Haydock states would render him not responsible for his actions. Role in chapter: offstage from consciousness; the central object of dispute.

Dr. Haydock

Role: minor / functional. Described as "not a man who ever shows his feelings." He arrives quickly after Melchett's call, examines Hawes (pulse, eyelid), administers a hypodermic injection, and transports Hawes to Much Benham hospital. He states that even if Hawes recovers, he will give evidence that Hawes "wasn't responsible for his actions" due to his medical condition. His parting remark, "You won't be able to hang him, you know, Melchett", is the first challenge to Melchett's certainty before Miss Marple's more complete reversal.

Miss Marple

Role: detective figure / revelation agent. Described as "pink and somewhat flustered" on arrival. She explains her presence by the accidental wrong-number telephone connection (her number is three five; Haydock's is three nine). Her arrival is described as "a most amazing" interruption. She reads Protheroe's letter "without any appearance of surprise," confirming she had already deduced something of the kind. She asks pointed questions about what brought Clement and Melchett to the scene. She delivers the chapter's climactic reversal: Hawes is innocent, the letter and overdose are a deliberate construction, and the true murderer is Lawrence Redding. Her relief at Hawes being in hospital is explicitly tied to his safety, "where no one can get at him." Motivation: stated as concern for Hawes's safety and correction of a false conclusion.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: referenced / offstage (deceased). Author of the unfinished letter read aloud by Melchett. The letter breaks off mid-sentence where "death had overtaken the writer's hand." The letter concerns "recent speculations" and the identity of a culprit whom Protheroe describes as "an ordained priest of the church." Protheroe is not physically present; his letter is the central piece of evidence in the chapter.

Lawrence Redding

Role: named as true murderer in the chapter's final line. Does not appear in person. Miss Marple names him as the murderer and the architect of the frame against Hawes. No further detail about him is provided within this chapter's text.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 29

Much Benham hospital

The hospital to which Haydock transports Hawes. Referenced as the nearest medical facility capable of treating the overdose. No further detail provided.

The cachet box

An empty pharmaceutical container found in the room. Clement identifies it as the source of Hawes's overdose, noting that Hawes had previously shown him the cachets and warned him of the danger of an overdose. The box is the physical evidence Melchett and Miss Marple both examine.

Protheroe's unfinished letter

A handwritten document, found crumpled on the floor where it had fallen from Hawes's hand. It is addressed to "My Dear Clement" and concerns "recent speculations," accusing "an ordained priest of the church" of unspecified culpability. The letter breaks off in "an undistinguishable scrawl where death had overtaken the writer's hand." Melchett notes that the "old maid" (inferred to be Miss Marple from context) had previously identified a different note as the wrong one. The letter is later characterized by Miss Marple as a deliberate plant, kept and used by the true murderer as a framing device.

Encephalitis lethargica ("sleepy sickness")

A medical condition from which Hawes is stated to have suffered. Clement explains this to Melchett after Haydock's departure. Haydock states he will give evidence that Hawes "wasn't responsible for his actions" on this basis. Melchett dismisses the relevance of the condition as "namby pambyism." The condition is presented as a legal and moral complication to prosecution.

Telephone exchange / wrong numbers

The local telephone system is depicted as error-prone. Melchett's attempt to reach Haydock (number three nine) results in two wrong connections before success. The first wrong connection reaches Miss Marple (number three five), which is the mechanism by which she learns of the crisis and arrives on the scene. This detail is treated as a realistic and recurring feature of the communication infrastructure.

The role of Chief Constable

Melchett's title and function are explicitly invoked to explain his behavior: "Melchett was Chief Constable of the County before anything else." This institutional role is presented as overriding personal or moral considerations in his decision-making.

CONFLICT

Chapter 29

The chapter contains both external and internal conflict. Externally, Melchett and Clement are in implicit disagreement over whether Hawes should be saved, Clement advocates for allowing the overdose to run its course as a merciful resolution, while Melchett insists on medical intervention to bring Hawes to justice. This conflict resolves in Melchett's favor through action. A deeper conflict emerges with Miss Marple's revelation: the apparent solution (Hawes as murderer, confession by overdose) is itself a fabrication, meaning the chapter's entire preceding action has been conducted under a false premise. The true conflict, identifying the actual murderer, escalates sharply at the chapter's close, with Lawrence Redding named as the culprit and Hawes recast as a victim rather than a perpetrator.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 29

- No specific date or time of day is stated for the chapter's events.
- Melchett references a prior event: "the old maid was right about its being the wrong note we found", indicating a previous investigative stage in which a different note was examined. No date given for this prior event.
- Hawes had previously shown Clement the cachets and warned him about overdose risk at an unspecified earlier date ("the other day").
- Haydock's response time from telephone call to arrival is implied to be short (Melchett hears a car shortly after the call ends), but no duration is stated.
- No character ages are stated in this chapter.
- No historical dates are referenced.

"My Dear Clement, It is a peculiarly unpleasant thing that I have to say. After all, I think I prefer writing it. We can discuss it at a later date. It concerns the recent speculations. I am sorry to say that I have satisfied myself beyond any possible doubt as to the identity of the culprit. Painful as it is for me to have to accuse an ordained priest of the church, my duty is only too painfully clear. An example must be made and, "

WHY IT LANDS The unfinished letter is the chapter's central piece of evidence and the mechanism of the false frame; its abrupt termination, "death had overtaken the writer's hand", is both worldbuilding-critical and structurally significant to the mystery's misdirection.

"But Melchett was Chief Constable of the County before anything else. The arguments that appealed to me had no weight with him. He had caught a murderer and he wanted his murderer hanged."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for both Melchett and Clement: it articulates the institutional versus pastoral divide between them and frames Melchett's subsequent actions as driven by role rather than reflection.

"You won't be able to hang him, you know, Melchett."

WHY IT LANDS Haydock's parting remark is the first crack in the chapter's false certainty, introducing the legal and moral complication of Hawes's medical condition before Miss Marple delivers the fuller reversal.

"Of course! That's what he wants you to think! That you know the truth, and that it's best for everyone as it is. Oh, yes, it all fits in, the letter, and the overdose, and poor Mr. Hawes's state of mind and his confession. It all fits in, but it's wrong. ..."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically central: Miss Marple's statement names the chapter's structural irony, the very coherence of the apparent solution is evidence of its falsity, and marks the pivot from false resolution to renewed investigation.

"That's why I am so glad Mr. Hawes is safe, in hospital, where no one can get at him. If he recovers, he'll tell you the truth."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining for Miss Marple: her relief is not sentimental but strategic, revealing that she has already assessed the danger to Hawes as ongoing and physical, not merely juridical.

"I mean the murderer," said Miss Marple. She added very quietly: "I mean Mr. Lawrence Redding. ..."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's climactic revelation and its final lines; marketable as a chapter-ending hook and structurally critical as the naming of the true antagonist.

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Chapter 30

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 30

The chapter opens with the narrator and Colonel Melchett staring in disbelief as Miss Marple accuses Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe of Colonel Protheroe's murder, a charge that initially seems preposterous given that Redding has been cleared. Miss Marple explains that Redding's false self-accusation was itself the mechanism of his alibi: by confessing to a crime he did not commit, he made himself appear innocent. She then walks through the full roster of suspects she had considered, Archer, Mary, Lettice, Dennis, Hawes, the vicar himself, and Griselda, before arriving at her reconstruction of the actual crime.

Her account is precise and methodical. Anne Protheroe, carrying no handbag (so as to demonstrate she had no weapon), passed Miss Marple's garden at just before twenty past six, entered the vicarage study through the window, retrieved a pistol Redding had hidden in a plant pot during an earlier visit, shot the deaf Colonel Protheroe from behind using a Maxim silencer, and exited to the studio. Redding then returned to the vicarage, planted a forged letter, adjusted the clock, and pocketed the genuine letter Protheroe had been writing, all before staging his theatrical, distracting confession at the police station. The shot heard in the wood was a separate, engineered explosion using picric acid and a slow-burning fuse, timed to provide the couple with a witnessed alibi.

Miss Marple further explains that Redding attempted to frame Hawes for the murder by substituting a poisoned cachet for one of Hawes's own and planting an incriminating letter in his dressing-gown pocket. Hawes's survival is attributed to the vicar's sermon prompting him to confess his embezzlement before the cachet could kill him. The chapter ends with Colonel Melchett reluctantly conceding that Miss Marple's solution is the only one that fits all the facts, and Miss Marple suggesting that, since there is no proof, a trap may be necessary.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 30

Colonel Melchett

Role: authority figure / skeptical ally. Emotional state: initially dismissive and impatient ("Mad, quite mad"), progressing through bewilderment ("Upon my word!") to reluctant conviction. He snorts, blows his nose, and resists committing himself verbally even as his body language and statements betray belief. His final admission, "Yes, I do. Dash it all, it's the only way the thing could have happened", is described as "almost reluctant." He raises two specific objections: Redding's verified alibi up to 6:45, and the absence of proof.

Mr. Clement (the vicar/narrator)

Role: narrator, minor participant in this chapter's action. Emotional state: astonished, retrospectively self-examining. He recalls a "dreadful suspicion", a nightmare scenario in which Griselda had a past intrigue with Lawrence Redding, Protheroe discovered it, and Griselda shot Protheroe to silence him. He explicitly states he never spoke of this suspicion "then or at any time." He is moved by Miss Marple's humorous self-awareness and finds her reconstruction fascinating. He contributes the anonymous letter about Griselda and confirms, through memory, the detail about Lawrence carrying a large stone. His sermon is identified as the indirect cause of Hawes's confession and survival.

Lawrence Redding

Role: antagonist (offstage). Described by Miss Marple as "one of those charming young men who have no moral sense" and "a very intelligent young man." His actions reconstructed in this chapter: hid the pistol in the vicarage plant pot during an earlier visit; telephoned the vicar impersonating a woman's voice from the North Lodge; engineered the picnic acid explosion in the wood; returned to the vicarage after the murder to plant a forged letter, adjust the clock, and pocket Protheroe's genuine letter; made a false confession at the police station; spent time with Hawes the previous night and substituted a poisoned cachet for one of Hawes's own; planted an incriminating letter in Hawes's dressing-gown pocket. His motive is stated by Miss Marple: he "is not the kind of young man who would dream of running away with a penniless woman" and therefore Colonel Protheroe "had to be removed."

Anne Protheroe

Role: antagonist (offstage). Described as completely under Redding's influence. Her specific actions reconstructed: walked to the vicarage without a handbag (deliberately, to demonstrate she carried no weapon); paused to speak with Miss Marple in the garden (deliberately, to establish a witness); entered the study through the window; retrieved the pistol from the plant pot; shot Colonel Protheroe from behind; exited to the studio. Her demeanour afterward is described as "gay and natural," which Miss Marple identifies as a mistake, inconsistent with having genuinely said goodbye to a lover.

Colonel Protheroe

Role: victim (offstage/deceased). Described as deaf, seated at his desk writing a letter when shot. The genuine letter he was writing becomes a key piece of evidence that Redding did not anticipate finding.

Mr. Hawes

Role: near-victim, minor character (offstage). Identified as having embezzled church funds. Miss Marple states he was targeted by Redding to serve as a posthumous scapegoat for Protheroe's murder. His survival is attributed to the vicar's sermon prompting him to confess his embezzlement before the poisoned cachet took full effect. Miss Marple expresses hope that "Dr. Haydock is so clever" and his life may be saved. His phone call confessing is clarified as a confession to embezzlement, not murder.

Griselda Clement

Role: ally, briefly a suspect (offstage in this chapter). Miss Marple reveals she came by an earlier train than she claimed and was seen leaving Lawrence Redding's cottage by the back window at twenty past six. The narrator discloses the anonymous letter containing this information and describes the "nightmare" suspicion it briefly inspired in him. Miss Marple identifies Griselda and Dennis as jointly responsible for the prank telephone call to Mrs. Price Ridley, made to silence rumours about the vicar.

Dennis

Role: minor, offstage. Identified as having participated with Griselda in the prank telephone call. Previously noted as having returned from a tennis party earlier than stated (the tennis racquet seen by Clara). Miss Marple had considered him a possible suspect on grounds of susceptibility and imbalance at age sixteen.

Dr. Haydock

Role: minor, offstage. His evidence about the time of death is described by Miss Marple as "absolutely truthful", he is "a very upright man." His testimony is reconciled with the murder timeline through the introduction of the Maxim silencer. He is currently treating Hawes.

Mary

Role: minor, offstage. The vicar's maid. Identified as a suspect Miss Marple had considered: "a queer-tempered girl" with motive and opportunity, having been alone in the house. Her long-standing relationship with Archer is noted.

Archer

Role: minor, offstage. Considered a suspect by Miss Marple on grounds of drink ("so inflaming"). Old Mrs. Archer is noted as someone who could have obtained the pistol from Redding's house for either Archer or Mary.

Old Mrs. Archer

Role: minor, offstage. Referenced as a potential conduit for obtaining the pistol. Also noted as having sworn at the inquest that the pistol was still in the cottage when she left at midday.

Lettice

Role: minor, offstage. Considered a suspect by Miss Marple on grounds of wanting "freedom and money." Miss Marple observes that "the most beautiful and ethereal girls have shown next to no moral scruple, though, of course, gentlemen never wish to believe it of them", a remark that causes the narrator to wince.

Mrs. Price Ridley

Role: minor, offstage. Had been circulating rumours about the vicar in connection with the disappearing church funds. Was the target of the prank telephone call made from Redding's cottage. Her maid Clara is referenced as the witness who saw the tennis racquet by the Vicarage gate and heard what may have been the shot (described as a sneeze).

Clara (Mrs. Price Ridley's maid)

Role: minor, offstage. Referenced as having seen a tennis racquet lying on the grass by the Vicarage gate, and as having heard what Miss Marple suggests may have been the muffled shot, perceived as a sneeze.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

The plant pot / palm by the window

A specific physical object in the vicarage study. Redding concealed the pistol in this pot during his earlier visit to the vicarage. Miss Marple identifies it as the key to her complete reconstruction of the crime.

The studio

Located in or adjacent to the vicarage garden. Anne Protheroe went directly from the study to the studio after the murder, where she met Redding. They emerged together with "gay and natural" demeanour. Miss Marple notes she was watching from her garden and would not have left until they came out.

Miss Marple's garden	Adjacent to the vicarage. Miss Marple observed Anne Protheroe passing "just before twenty past six" and stopping to speak with her. This observation is central to establishing the timeline and Anne's deliberate staging of her appearance.
The North Lodge	The location from which Lawrence Redding telephoned the vicar, impersonating a woman's voice, at five-thirty.
The wood	The location of the engineered explosion. The narrator had previously encountered Redding carrying a large stone in this part of the wood and had later found a crystal there. The explosion was designed to produce a sound resembling a gunshot at approximately 6:30, when Redding and Anne Protheroe were in full view of witnesses.
Redding's cottage	Lawrence Redding's residence. The pistol was originally kept here. Old Mrs. Archer swore at the inquest it was still present at midday. Griselda was seen leaving by the back window at twenty past six on the day of the murder. Redding and Hawes spent time here the previous night, during which Redding is believed to have substituted the poisoned cachet.
The Maxim silencer	An invention referenced by Miss Marple as the explanation for why no gunshot was heard at the time of the murder. She attributes her knowledge of it to detective stories. Its use reconciles Dr. Haydock's truthful testimony about time of death with the absence of a heard shot. Miss Marple speculates that the "sneeze" Clara heard may have been the muffled report.
Picric acid	A substance Miss Marple identifies as explosive when a weight is dropped on it. Redding is believed to have arranged a stone suspended above crystals of picric acid, with a slow match or time fuse calculated to detonate approximately twenty minutes after being set, producing the shot heard in the wood at around 6:30. The device would leave no meaningful evidence, "only a big stone."
The forged letter	A letter left by Redding in the vicarage study, written in a different ink and apparently different handwriting from Protheroe's genuine letter, bearing a time notation. Miss Marple states that when the forgery was discovered it was designed to look like "a clumsy attempt to incriminate Anne Protheroe."
Colonel Protheroe's genuine letter	The letter Protheroe was in the act of writing when he was shot, addressed to the vicar. Redding did not anticipate finding it and took it away, recognizing it might be useful. Miss Marple identifies this as an unexpected element Redding turned to his advantage.
The clock	A clock in the vicarage study, habitually kept a quarter of an hour fast. Redding altered its hands to match the time written on the forged letter, reinforcing the false timeline and the appearance of an attempt to incriminate Anne Protheroe.
The poisoned cachet	A medicinal cachet substituted by Redding for one of Hawes's own during their time together the previous night. Intended to kill Hawes and make his death appear a suicide following a guilty conscience over Protheroe's murder. The incriminating letter planted in Hawes's dressing-gown pocket was designed to be found after his death and confirm this narrative.
The anonymous letter	A letter received by the vicar, described as the last of a series, stating that Griselda had been seen leaving Lawrence Redding's cottage by the back window at twenty past six on the day of the murder. Miss Marple notes it "has been all over the village."
The tennis racquet	Seen lying on the grass by the Vicarage gate by Mrs. Price Ridley's maid Clara. Miss Marple had interpreted this as evidence that Dennis returned from his tennis party earlier than he claimed, making him a possible suspect.

The prank telephone call

A call made from Redding's cottage to Mrs. Price Ridley, attributed by Miss Marple to Griselda and Dennis acting together to silence rumours about the vicar. Its timing coincided with the engineered explosion in the wood, creating the misleading impression that the two events were connected.

The 6:50 train

The train Griselda claimed to have returned on. Miss Marple states it was half an hour late that night, but that she observed Griselda with her own eyes starting for Old Hall at a quarter past seven, meaning Griselda must have arrived on the earlier train.

The church funds / misappropriations

Money that had been disappearing from church accounts. Either the vicar or Hawes was responsible; Miss Marple states she was always convinced it was Hawes, who reminded her of "that unfortunate organist." Mrs. Price Ridley had been publicly hinting that the vicar was at fault, partly because of his vigorous objection to any inquiry. Hawes's phone call confessing is clarified as a confession to this embezzlement, prompted by the vicar's sermon.

CONFLICT

Chapter 30

The primary conflict is external and intellectual: Miss Marple's reconstruction of the murder against the skepticism of Colonel Melchett and the apparent impossibility of the crime as previously understood. The stakes are twofold, justice for Protheroe's murder and the life of Hawes, who may yet die from the poisoned cachet. A secondary internal conflict is present in the narrator, who briefly entertained a "nightmare" suspicion about his own wife. By chapter's end the external conflict partially resolves, Melchett is convinced, but escalates into a new phase: the absence of proof means a trap must be set.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 30

- **Just before twenty past six:** Anne Protheroe passed Miss Marple's garden and stopped to speak with her.
- **Twenty past six:** Griselda was seen leaving Lawrence Redding's cottage by the back window (per the anonymous letter).
- **Approximately 6:30:** The engineered explosion in the wood detonated, producing the sound of a shot. At this time Redding and Anne Protheroe were in full view of witnesses outside the studio.
- **Up to 6:45:** Lawrence Redding's time is stated by Colonel Melchett to be "fully accounted for", this is the alibi that had previously cleared him, now recontextualised by Miss Marple's reconstruction.
- **6:50 train:** The train Griselda claimed to have returned on; stated to have been half an hour late that night.
- **Quarter-past seven:** Miss Marple observed Griselda starting for Old Hall, establishing she had arrived on an earlier train.

- **Thursday afternoon:** Identified by Miss Marple as when "the crime had been fully planned down to the smallest detail."
- **The previous night:** Redding returned with Hawes and spent a long time with him, the occasion on which Miss Marple believes the cachet was substituted and the letter planted.
- **"This evening":** Miss Marple references a conversation with the vicar earlier the same evening, during which she noticed the palm in the pot and completed her reconstruction.
- **The inquest:** Old Mrs. Archer swore at the inquest that the pistol was still in Redding's cottage at midday on the day of the murder.
- **Dennis's age:** Stated as sixteen.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 30

"I know that in books it is always the most unlikely person. But I never find that rule applies in real life. There it is so often the obvious that is true."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's explicit statement of her detective philosophy, directly inverting the conventions of the genre she inhabits; thematically central and highly marketable.

"One of those charming young men who have no moral sense."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's character verdict on Lawrence Redding, precise, devastating, and delivered without melodrama; character-defining for both speaker and subject.

"I have not thought it right to speak until now. One's own belief, even so strong as to amount to knowledge, is not the same as proof."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's articulation of the standard she holds herself to before accusing anyone; thematically significant as a statement on the ethics of certainty and the limits of intuition.

"It was the wrong sort of stone for my rock gardens! And that put me on the right track!"

WHY IT LANDS The pivot on which the entire solution turns, a detail so domestic it is comic, yet it is the crack through which the truth entered; character-defining and worldbuilding-critical, establishing Miss Marple's method of noticing what others overlook.

"Yes, I do. Dash it all, it's the only way the thing could have happened. But there's no proof, not an atom."

WHY IT LANDS Colonel Melchett's reluctant capitulation, the moment the solution is validated by the authority figure who most resisted it; marks the structural turning point of the chapter and the investigation.

"That is why I thought perhaps under the circumstances, a little trap might be permissible."

WHY IT LANDS The chapter's closing line; Miss Marple's understated proposal that shifts the narrative from reconstruction to action, and encapsulates her willingness to operate at the edge of propriety when proof is unavailable.

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Chapter 31

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 31

The chapter opens mid-conversation, with the narrator (Mr. Clement) and Colonel Melchett listening as Miss Marple proposes a trap to catch the man she believes responsible for the crime: Lawrence Redding. Her plan involves having Dr. Haydock telephone Redding with a specific, fabricated warning, that a witness, Mrs. Sadler or one of her children, claims to have seen the transposing of the cachets. The logic is that an innocent man would find the statement meaningless, while a guilty one might panic and act incriminatingly. Melchett is skeptical that Redding is naive enough to fall for it, but acknowledges the plan's ingenuity. When Haydock arrives, looking tired and haggard after apparently saving a patient's life against his own emotional wishes, Melchett briefs him on Miss Marple's theory and her proposal. Haydock's response illustrates Miss Marple's earlier distinction between theory and practice: whatever philosophical views he may hold in the abstract, his fury at the real-world attempt to frame the vulnerable Hawes, and the suffering it would have caused Hawes's mother and sister, overrides them entirely. He agrees to participate immediately and begins working out the details with Melchett. Miss Marple then takes her leave, and Mr. Clement walks her home. On the way, he notes that her theory, if correct, will give her a decisive advantage over her nephew Raymond West, who had offered his own psychological analysis of the crime. Miss Marple responds with an indulgent smile and quotes her Great Aunt Fanny: the old know the young are fools, even when the young believe the reverse.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 31

Colonel Melchett

No physical description provided. Skeptical but open-minded; he initially pushes back on the trap idea ("That's an old wheeze, Miss Marple") but concedes its ingenuity and moves efficiently to implementation once Haydock agrees. His stated concern is whether Redding is too shrewd to be caught by such a ruse, and whether Haydock will cooperate given his known views. He takes the lead in briefing Haydock and arranging operational details. Role: ally/official investigator.

Mr. Clement (narrator)

No physical description provided. Observes and records the scene; his emotional state is one of quiet confidence in Miss Marple's theory ("which I for one do not doubt for a minute"). His actions are limited to listening, walking Miss Marple home, and offering the observation about her score over Raymond West. Role: narrator/minor participant.

Dr. Haydock

Described as looking "tired and haggard" upon arrival. He has just saved a patient's life, identified only as "he", and states he would have been "just as glad" if he had not succeeded, implying the patient is someone he believes guilty or morally compromised. His emotional arc within the chapter is the chapter's most dramatic: he arrives apparently holding detached or unconventional views on matters such as murder (referenced obliquely as "his views"), but upon hearing the specifics of the plot against Hawes, he undergoes what the narrator calls "a complete transformation." His rage is described as "sheer primitive rage" and is attributed specifically to the cowardice of targeting a defenceless man. His stated motivation for agreeing to the plan is moral outrage at the attempted framing of Hawes and the collateral suffering it would have caused Hawes's family. He is characterized as someone who instinctively champions "a lame dog of any kind." Role: ally/instrument of the proposed trap.

Lawrence Redding

Does not appear in the chapter; referenced as the target of the proposed trap and the suspected perpetrator of the crime. Melchett describes him as "too downy a bird" to be caught by a vague warning, implying he is shrewd. Miss Marple's plan is premised on the idea that a specific, credible detail, the transposing of the cachets, would only alarm a guilty man. Role: antagonist/offstage.

Hawes

Does not appear; referenced as the victim of an attempted framing. Haydock reveals that Hawes has a mother and a sister, and that the stigma of being their relation to a supposed murderer would have been a lasting harm to them. Described by Haydock as "a defenceless chap" and "that poor devil." Role: victim/offstage.

Raymond West

Does not appear; referenced by Mr. Clement as Miss Marple's nephew, who had previously offered "a subtle psychological analysis of the crime." Miss Marple's indulgent smile at the mention of him, and her subsequent quotation of Great Aunt Fanny, implies she regards his analysis as the confident but mistaken theorizing of the young. Role: referenced/offstage.

Mrs. Sadler

Does not appear; referenced only as a proposed fictional witness in Miss Marple's trap, someone whose name Haydock could plausibly invoke as having seen the transposing of the cachets. Her children are also mentioned in this context. Role: minor/referenced/offstage.

Great Aunt Fanny

Historical/familial reference only. Miss Marple quotes her: "The young people think the old people are fools; but the old people *know* the young people are fools!" Miss Marple notes she heard this at age sixteen and found it "particularly foolish" at the time. Role: referenced/offstage.

The unnamed patient

Referenced by Haydock as someone he has just saved ("he's going to pull through") but whom he would not have minded losing. Identity not stated in this chapter. Role: minor/referenced/offstage.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 31

The trap mechanism (telephone warning)	Miss Marple's proposed method involves a telephone call to Lawrence Redding, framed as a warning from someone with known unconventional views, specifically Dr. Haydock, suggesting that a witness (Mrs. Sadler or one of her children) saw the transposing of the cachets. The plan relies on the specificity of the detail to distinguish a guilty reaction from an innocent one.
Haydock's "unusual views"	Referenced but not elaborated upon in this chapter. Both Miss Marple and Melchett allude to Haydock holding views on matters such as murder that are philosophically or morally unconventional, views that would make it plausible, in character, for him to warn a suspected murderer. The chapter demonstrates that these views do not survive contact with a specific, emotionally resonant injustice.
The setting, a street at night, past midnight	Miss Marple and Mr. Clement walk down "the deserted street" after the meeting. The time is noted as "past twelve o'clock." The domestic detail that Miss Marple hopes Raymond has gone to bed and not waited up suggests a small, close-knit community where household routines are known and neighbors are familiar.
The social/legal stakes of a false murder conviction	Haydock articulates the worldbuilding logic of reputational harm in this community; being the mother or sister of a convicted murderer carries a lasting "stigma," and the "mental anguish" of such a position is treated as a serious, concrete injury. This frames the attempted framing of Hawes not merely as a legal wrong but as a social one with generational consequences.

CONFLICT

Chapter 31

The primary conflict is external: the investigators must determine how to provoke Lawrence Redding, a suspected murderer believed to be too shrewd for a generic trap, into a self-incriminating action. The secondary conflict is briefly internal, whether Haydock's philosophical views will prevent him from cooperating, but this resolves almost immediately when the specifics of the plot against Hawes override his abstractions. By the chapter's end, the trap has been agreed upon and is being arranged; the conflict escalates toward its next phase rather than resolving.
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TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 31

● Miss Marple states she was sixteen years old when she first heard Great Aunt Fanny's saying, establishing a past memory but providing no absolute date.
● No other specific dates, durations, character ages, or historical references are provided in this chapter.
● The patient Haydock has just saved is described as having been a "near thing," implying the medical crisis occurred shortly before or during the events of this chapter, though no precise duration is given.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 31

"The young people think the old people are fools; but the old people know the young people are fools!"

WHY IT LANDS The thematic and marketable centerpiece of the chapter, Miss Marple's articulation of the generational epistemology that underlies her entire method, delivered as a family heirloom rather than a boast.

"It would have to be something specific. I quite realize that."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: establishes Miss Marple's precision and self-awareness; she anticipates and pre-empts Melchett's skepticism before he fully voices it, demonstrating that her diffidence is a manner, not a limitation.

"We were then privileged to see exactly what Miss Marple meant by the difference between theory and practice."

WHY IT LANDS Thematically significant: the narrator's dry observation frames the chapter's central demonstration, that abstract moral positions collapse when confronted with specific human suffering, and validates Miss Marple's earlier distinction.

"For sheer primitive rage, commend me to a thoroughgoing humanitarian when you get him well roused."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining and marketable: the narrator's wry aphorism captures Haydock's transformation and delivers a pointed observation about the gap between humanitarian principle and human emotion.

"The damned scoundrel! The damned scoundrel! That poor devil Hawes. He's got a mother and a sister too."

WHY IT LANDS Character-defining: Haydock's outburst reveals that his moral compass is activated not by abstract principle but by the concrete vulnerability of specific people, "a lame dog of any kind", and anchors the chapter's emotional climax.

"It's been a near thing. A very near thing. But he's going to pull through. It's a doctor's business to save his patient and I saved him, but I'd have been just as glad if I hadn't pulled it off."

WHY IT LANDS Worldbuilding-critical and character-defining: Haydock's opening statement establishes that a second victim or target has survived, hints at Haydock's morally complex position, and sets up the irony of his subsequent fury at the injustice done to Hawes.

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Chapter 32

SUMMARY

CHARACTERS

WORLDBUILDING/SETTING

CONFLICT

TIMELINE DETAILS

BEST QUOTES

SUMMARY

Chapter 32

The final chapter of the novel ties together the remaining loose ends following the resolution of the Protheroe murder case. The narrator opens by confirming that Miss Marple's plan succeeded: Lawrence Redding's guilty conscience drove him to act rashly, and police officers tailing him overheard a damning conversation between him and Anne Protheroe at Old Hall, confirming their guilt. The trial of both is noted as a matter of public record, with Inspector Slack receiving official credit for the investigation while Miss Marple's role goes unacknowledged, to her own satisfaction.

Lettice Protheroe visits the narrator and reveals two significant pieces of information: first, that she had long suspected her stepmother Anne and had deliberately planted Anne's earring near the desk to implicate her, having already lost faith in the police search; second, and more surprisingly, that Mrs. Lestrangle is her biological mother, who came to the village under an assumed name while dying, aided by Dr. Haydock. Lettice explains the circumstances of their secret meeting on the evening of the murder and her subsequent efforts to protect her mother from suspicion, including destroying an old portrait. She announces she will go abroad with her mother for whatever time remains.

The chapter closes on a warm domestic note. Griselda reveals she is pregnant, and the narrator responds with an uncharacteristically effusive declaration of love. Miss Marple arrives, intuiting Griselda's condition from a book purchase she witnessed, and discreetly signals that she will keep the secret. The narrator reflects warmly on Miss Marple's perceptiveness and kindness.

CHARACTERS

Chapter 32

Mr. Clement (narrator)

Role: protagonist/narrator. He is the first-person narrator throughout. In this chapter he receives Lettice's visit, listens to her revelations without judgment (though he privately notes she is "morally colour blind" in some respects), and shares a tender scene with Griselda. He owns to Griselda that the anonymous letter upset him greatly. His emotional state moves from reflective sobriety during Lettice's visit to warmth and joy in the domestic scene with Griselda. He closes the chapter with fond appreciation of Miss Marple. His role as village clergyman is implicit throughout his measured, pastoral responses to Lettice.

Lawrence Redding

Role: antagonist (offstage; referenced). Confirmed as guilty. His guilty conscience caused him to go to Old Hall the night of the trap rather than flee, in order to warn his accomplice. He is described as "peculiarly placed", unable to run without alerting Anne Protheroe. His actions that night (throwing gravel at Anne's window, whispering urgently) are recounted by the narrator. He and Anne Protheroe are tried together; the trial is described as "a matter of public knowledge."

Anne Protheroe

Role: antagonist (offstage; referenced). Confirmed as guilty co-conspirator. She came down from Old Hall in response to Redding's signal. The overheard conversation between her and Redding "left the matter in no doubt." She and Redding are tried together.

Lettice Protheroe

Role: ally/minor (present). Described as drifting through the study window, "wraithlike as ever." She reveals she had long suspected Anne of the murder and that her search of the study (ostensibly for a yellow beret) was a deliberate attempt to find evidence the police had missed. She planted Anne's earring by the desk, reasoning that since she *knew* Anne had done it, "one way was as good as another." The narrator judges her "morally colour blind" in some respects, stated assessment, not inferred. She also reveals the truth about Mrs. Lestrangle being her biological mother, explains the circumstances of their secret meeting on the murder evening, and describes her efforts to protect her mother from suspicion (slashing an old portrait). She announces she will go abroad with her dying mother. Her emotional state is dreamy, resigned, and quietly determined. Relationship to narrator: she thanks him and Griselda for being "frightfully decent."

Mrs. Lestrangle

Role: referenced/offstage. Revealed to be Lettice's biological mother. She came to the village under an assumed name while dying, aided by Dr. Haydock. She had previously approached Colonel Protheroe (Lettice's father) to ask permission to see Lettice; he refused. She then sent a note directly to Lettice. Lettice describes her as "a desperate kind of person" who "doesn't count consequences" and as "awfully attractive even now." Dr. Haydock is described as having been "keen about her once" and as still caring for her. She and Lettice met briefly at the end of the footpath at a quarter past six on the evening of the murder, parting before half-past six. She is dying; Lettice will go abroad with her.

Dr. Haydock

Role: referenced/offstage. Described as a very old friend of Mrs. Lestrangle who helped her come to the village under an assumed name. Lettice states he "was keen about her once" and that "in a way, he still is." He assisted Mrs. Lestrangle out of personal loyalty and affection. Lettice notes that he was sometimes frightened that her mother might actually have committed the murder, given her "desperate" nature.

Colonel Protheroe (deceased)

Role: referenced/offstage. Lettice's father, the murder victim. Referenced in this chapter only in Lettice's account of his refusal to allow Mrs. Lestrangle to see Lettice. Lettice describes him as "a beast" who "said she'd forfeited all claim" and calls him the type of man who never "see[s] an inch before their noses."

Inspector Slack

Role: minor/referenced. Receives official credit for bringing the criminals to justice. The narrator notes that "great credit was reflected upon Inspector Slack, whose zeal and intelligence had resulted in the criminals being brought to justice." No irony is explicitly stated, though the context, that Miss Marple's plan was the actual mechanism, implies it.

Griselda (Mrs. Clement)

Role: ally/protagonist-adjacent (present). The narrator's wife. She is revealed in this chapter to be pregnant, the "steadying influence" and "rejuvenating" development she alludes to. She has purchased books on Household Management, Mother Love, and child-rearing. She is playful and affectionate with the narrator, asking him to say he loves her "madly" and receiving an extravagant declaration in return. She is eager to conceal her pregnancy from Miss Marple to avoid being fussed over, and uses the excuse of a forgotten yellow pullover at the golf links to absent herself. Her pregnancy has already been deduced by Miss Marple from the book purchase. Her emotional state is warm, teasing, and contented.

Miss Cram

Role: minor/referenced. Cleared of complicity in Dr. Stone's activities. She had taken a suitcase to the wood in good faith, having been told by Dr. Stone that rival archaeologists might commit burglary to discredit his theories. The narrator notes she "apparently swallowed this not very plausible story." She is now, per village gossip, "looking out for a more genuine article in the line of an elderly bachelor requiring a secretary."

"Dr. Stone"

Role: minor/referenced. Revealed to be "a well-known cracksman with several different aliases." His true identity and the nature of his crimes are not elaborated upon in this chapter beyond this description.

Colonel Melchett

Role: referenced/offstage. His "two most efficient officers" followed Redding to Old Hall and overheard the conversation between Redding and Anne Protheroe.

WORLDBUILDING / SETTING

Chapter 32

The footpath / end of the footpath

The location where Lettice and Mrs. Lestrangle held their secret meeting on the evening of the murder. Described only as "the end of the footpath"; its precise location relative to other landmarks is not specified in this chapter.

The narrator's study

The setting for both Lettice's visit and the closing scene with Griselda and Miss Marple. Lettice enters and Miss Marple arrives via the study window, suggesting it opens directly to the outside or to a garden.

The golf links

Where Griselda claims to have gone (truthfully, to retrieve a forgotten yellow pullover) when Miss Marple arrives. Used as a cover for her absence.

Much Benham

A nearby town containing a bookshop. Miss Marple saw Griselda purchasing a book on "Mother Love" there, which is how she deduced the pregnancy.

The wood

Referenced in connection with Miss Cram, who took a suitcase there on Dr. Stone's instructions.

The capsule switch

The mechanism of the murder, referenced obliquely. Miss Marple's plan involved hinting to Redding that there was a witness to "the change of capsule," which provoked his guilty flight to Old Hall. The specific nature of the capsule switch is not elaborated upon in this chapter.

The anonymous letter

Referenced by the narrator as having "terribly upset" him. Griselda laughs and lectures him about it. No further detail is given in this chapter.

The portrait / old picture

An old picture of Mrs. Lestrangle that Lettice found in the attic. Fearing police might recognize it and connect Mrs. Lestrangle to the case, Lettice "slashed it about" to destroy it.

Anne's earring

Planted by Lettice near the desk in the study during her ostensible search for the yellow beret. Lettice's reasoning: since she already knew Anne was guilty, the method of implication was immaterial.

Books on Household Management, Mother Love, and child-rearing

Purchased by Griselda in anticipation of the baby. The book on "Mother Love" was spotted by Miss Marple at the bookshop in Much Benham, revealing Griselda's pregnancy. Described by Griselda as "simply screamingly funny, not intentionally."

The trial of Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe

Described as "a matter of public knowledge." The narrator declines to detail it. Inspector Slack receives official credit; Miss Marple's role is not publicly acknowledged.

Village gossip network

Implicitly present; the narrator learns of Miss Cram's current situation "according to the village."

CONFLICT

Chapter 32

The chapter's primary conflicts are retrospective and resolving rather than active. The external conflict of the murder investigation is fully resolved: Redding and Anne Protheroe are caught, tried, and their guilt confirmed. A minor residual moral conflict surfaces in Lettice's admission that she planted evidence, the narrator judges her "morally colour blind" but does not confront her directly. The chapter's emotional tension is light: Griselda's desire to conceal her pregnancy from Miss Marple creates brief comic suspense, resolved immediately when Miss Marple reveals she already knows. By chapter's end, all conflicts have closed or dissolved into warmth.

TIMELINE DETAILS

Chapter 32

- The trial of Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe: Takes place after the events of the trap night; Lettice visits the narrator "just before the trial took place."

- The evening of the murder (flashback within Lettice's account): Lettice arranged to leave the tennis party early and meet Mrs. Lestrange "at the end of the footpath at a quarter past six." They parted "before half-past six."
- Miss Marple's visit to the bookshop in Much Benham: "yesterday" relative to the chapter's present scene.
- Mrs. Lestrange's condition: She is described as dying; no specific prognosis or duration is given.
- Lettice's plans: She will go abroad with her mother after the trial is "all over"; no specific date given.
- No character ages are stated in this chapter.
- No calendar dates are given in this chapter.

BEST QUOTES

Chapter 32

"You see, they didn't hate her like I did. And hate makes things easier for you."

WHY IT LANDS Lettice's chilling explanation for why she found evidence the police missed; character-defining line that encapsulates her moral worldview and the novel's interest in the distorting power of personal feeling.

"Since I knew she had done it, what did it matter? One way was as good as another. She had killed him."

WHY IT LANDS Establishes Lettice's willingness to plant false evidence on the basis of private certainty, a morally significant admission that the narrator implicitly critiques; thematically resonant with questions of justice versus personal conviction.

"I sighed a little. There are always some things that Lettice will never see. In some respects she is morally colour blind."

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's stated judgment of Lettice; character-defining for both Lettice and the narrator, whose clerical moral perspective shapes the novel's ethical register throughout.

"Men like father never see an inch before their noses!"

WHY IT LANDS Lettice on Colonel Protheroe; character-defining for both Lettice's bitterness toward her father and her retrospective portrait of the murder victim as a rigid, unfeeling man.

"Griselda," I said, "I adore you! I worship you! I am wildly, hopelessly and quite unclerically crazy about you!"

WHY IT LANDS The narrator's extravagant declaration of love, notable for the self-aware qualifier "quite unclerically", marketable as a closing emotional beat and character-defining in its revelation of warmth beneath the narrator's habitually restrained clerical manner.

"My love to dear Griselda, and tell her, that any little secret is quite safe with me."

WHY IT LANDS Miss Marple's closing line; establishes her characteristic combination of acute perception and discreet kindness, and provides the novel's final note on her character, the narrator's closing reflection, "Really Miss Marple is rather a dear," seals it.