

Murder at Muckleton Manor

A Midnight Mystery

by Erik Jensen

The eccentric baronet Sir Roderick Muckleton has invited an eclectic party of family, friends, and strangers to his country house, Muckleton Manor, to show off the treasures of his recent Egyptian expedition. While family and friends alike scheme to get their hands on the Muckleton fortune before Sir Roderick squanders more of it on misguided adventures, the strangers find themselves surrounded by plots, secrets, and old resentments.

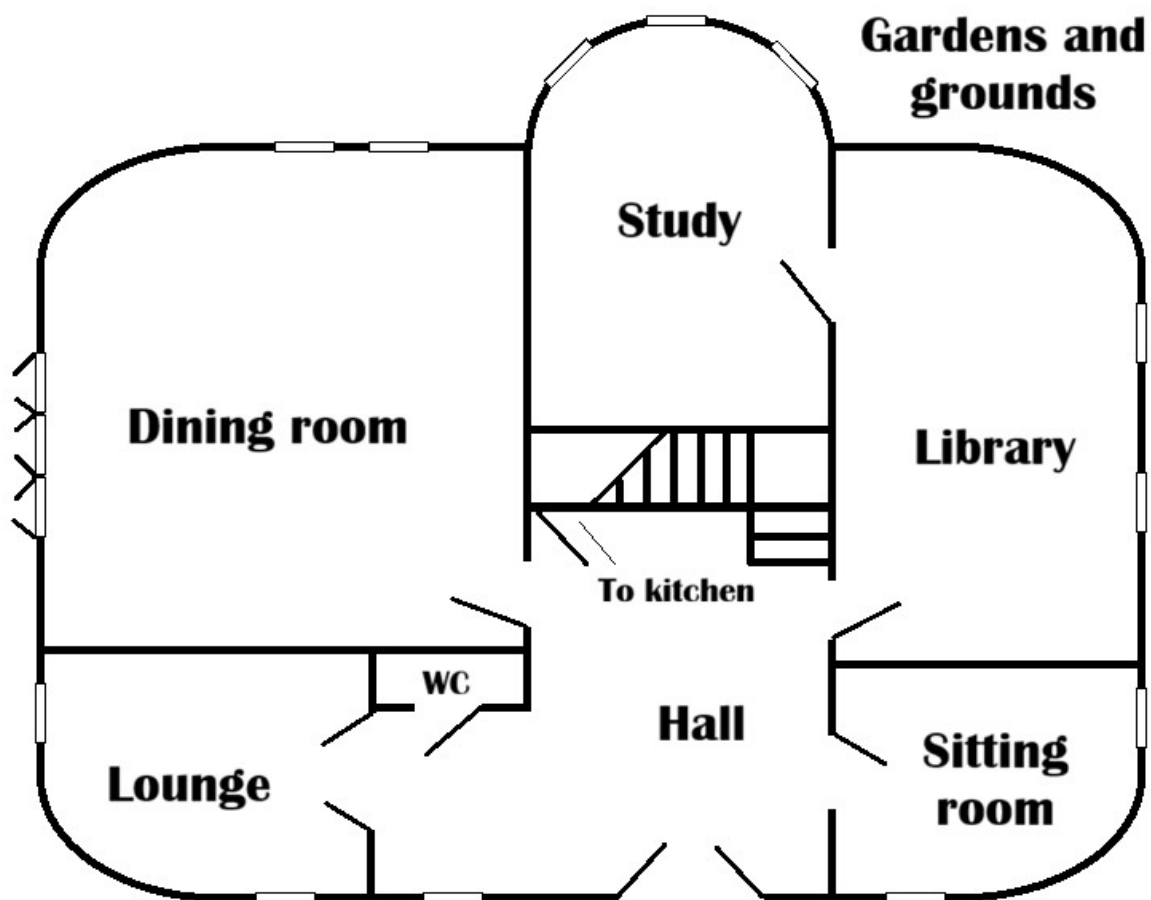
Playing this mystery requires the Midnight Mystery rules.

The crime

The murder of Sir Roderick Muckleton in his study surrounded by the artifacts from his recent archaeological expedition in Egypt. Sir Roderick is stabbed in the heart with an ancient dagger that was part of the display.

Background

Muckleton Manor



The setting

Muckleton Manor is the home of the Muckleton family and seat of the Muckleton baronetcy. The old Muckleton House was demolished fifteen years ago in 1909 and the extravagant new Muckleton Manor was built in its place.

Muckleton Manor is a modernist house filled with all the latest innovations and conveniences, from a dumb waiter connecting the basement kitchen with the dining room to electric fireplaces in every room. Rooms on the first floor include the entry hall, a formal sitting room, a library, a study, a lounge, a dining room, and a water closet. Sir Roderick's Egyptian collection is kept in the study, which can only be accessed through the library (with a locking door in between) or through a window from the garden (which all lock from the inside).

The second floor has bedrooms for the family and guests. Servants' stairs lead down from the entry hall to the lower floor, which has the kitchens, servants' hall, and various storerooms. Outside the house are extensive grounds with fine gardens. Shrubbery close to the house would make it easy for anyone to be concealed outside the windows of the Study or to enter the room from that direction without being noticed.

The characters

Sir Roderick Muckleton, the 8th baronet of Muckleton, is an eccentric who has spent most of his life and a good portion of the family fortune chasing one obsession after another. First it was poodle breeding. Then it was mountain climbing. After that came speedboat racing. His latest obsession has been Egyptology, and he has spent most of the past year and thousands of pounds funding and overseeing an expedition in Egypt. This expedition aimed to find and excavate the tomb of Queen Satiah, wife of the Eighteenth-Dynasty pharaoh Thotmosis III. He has now returned to England with the queen's sarcophagus and treasures, and is eager to show them off to the world.

Roderick's character: An arrogant, egocentric, veneer concealing deep worries about his family's financial future and especially his son Francis's prospects. He enjoys playing the showman and impressing others with his exploits, but stress sometimes shows through the cracks.

Lady Charlotte Muckleton is Sir Roderick's second wife (his first wife was an American who died shortly after giving birth to their daughter, Genevieve). While she loves Sir Roderick and dotes upon their son, Francis, for many years the driving passion of her life has been social reform and political advocacy. She is a well known presence in social reform movements where she freely uses her husband's money to advance her favorite causes, especially medical care for young mothers and infants among the lower classes.

Charlotte's character: Upright and reserved in most matters, may even come across as cold, but her passion shows when talking about her favored causes, especially maternal and infant care. When talking about the risks faced by newborn children, she can get overcome with emotion and need to step away to recover herself.

Genevieve Muckleton is Sir Roderick's daughter by his first wife. While she still relies on the family fortune to support her, she has otherwise largely cut herself off from the family and made a name for herself as an *avant garde* artist with a penchant for dark and moody abstract paintings.

Genevieve's character: A hard shell of bitterness and sarcasm covers a deeply wounded soul who never got the love she longed for from either her father or her stepmother. The closer events come to striking at these raw wounds, the more savagely sardonic she is likely to become.

Francis Muckleton, son of Sir Roderick and Lady Charlotte, is a rather useless gadabout and no stranger to the nastier columns of the society pages. Despite going to all the best schools and being accepted into all the right clubs, he has stubbornly refused to make anything of himself or do anything of any note except use the family fortune to host extravagant parties and get mixed up in a string of petty crimes.

Francis's character: On the surface, he is all louche good cheer and self-indulgent laziness. He cultivates the image of a useless but harmless aristocratic youth. Inwardly, he feels inadequate and longs to live up to his father's adventurous reputation.

Amelia MacBride is Sir Roderick's secretary who accompanied him on his recent Egyptian expedition as a general coordinator and administrator. She comes from the famous dog breeding MacBride family of Stirling, Scotland, who partnered with Sir Roderick in his ill-fated poodle breeding endeavor.

Amelia's character: Brisk efficiency and punctilious politeness. She attempts a polished high-class English accent, but her natural Scottish accent comes through in moments of high emotion. Inside her two feelings are at war: resentment for how Sir Roderick's failed business schemes ruined her family but also an intense romantic attachment to Roderick himself. She keeps these feelings tightly under control and will do anything in her power to avoid showing either of them.

Mortimer Chapel is the Muckleton family's loyal butler, who has served since the days of Sir Roderick's father, Sir Philip Muckleton. While the family pursues their own adventures in archaeology, political activism, art, or idleness, faithful old Chapel keeps Muckleton Manor up to the mark and ready to receive them.

Chapel's character: Chapel plays the part of the faithful family servant, always deferential, helpful, and unflappable in the face of the unexpected. Underneath he has a mercenary streak. Without any ill-will toward the family, he will always look out for his own benefit. He can steal from his employer with as placid a demeanor as he polishes silver.

Angelique de la Lune is a French medium who has made a sensation on the London psychic circuit where she conjures up the spirits of the dear departed. Most recently she has become firmly attached to Lady Charlotte as an indispensable adviser and companion. However, Angelique is not what she claims to be; she is in fact Lilian Van Der Hof Muckleton, Sir Roderick's first wife.

Angelique/Lilian's character: In her persona as Angelique, she plays the part to the hilt. With an exaggerated French accent, she lays the mystical mumbo-jumbo on thick. Skepticism does not faze her, because she doesn't actually believe in any of it, and the only person whose opinion of her matters is Lady Charlotte, who to her is only a means to the end of getting to Sir Roderick. As herself, Lilian is a brassy, loud New Yorker who is unimpressed by the trappings of English aristocracy. Her only concern is for her daughter Genevieve's financial security; she talks openly about money and is unafraid of being thought crass. She has no maternal affection for Genevieve and is not warm to her, but is kind in a distant way. Everyone else she treats in accord with how useful they seem to her in achieving her goals.

History

Sir Roderick was born in 1867. In 1889, at the age of 22, he inherited the baronetcy with its estate and fortune from his father, Sir Philip. Sir Philip was a cautious and respected barrister who greatly enlarged the family fortune before his untimely death. When the young Sir Roderick inherited the estate, the sudden access to money rather went to his head. He went off on a luxurious trip to New York where he fell in love with Miss **Lillian van der Hof**, a dashing and equally reckless beauty (from a minor but still prosperous branch of the van der Hof family). They were quickly married and enjoyed two good years together in the States before eventually getting tired of one another.

During their marriage, Lillian gave birth to their only child, a daughter named **Genevieve**. Sir Roderick and Lillian separated more or less amicably, but never officially divorced. Sir Roderick was obsessed with having an heir to pass his fortune onto, and Lillian did not feel like being burdened with raising Genevieve alone, so they agreed that Roderick would take the baby back to England with him and raise her there, making her his heir if he had no other children, and

providing handsomely for her if he did. Roderick put the word about that he had been briefly married in America, but that his wife had died of a fever.

Since his return to England in 1891, Sir Roderick's fickle passions have taken him off in pursuit of one new scheme after another. The first was poodle breeding, which he attempted to make a go of in partnership with the MacBrides of Stirling, Scotland, a family of renowned dog breeders. The poodle business, however, was a complete disaster, and Roderick moved on after a few years to mountain climbing. With the Muckleton fortune, Sir Roderick could easily weather the losses of the failed poodle business. The MacBrides, however, could not; the family was financially ruined and their reputation in dog breeding circles was irreparably damaged.

Between mountaineering adventures, Sir Roderick soon realized that young Genevieve needed some degree of stability in her life, so he sought a new wife and found her in **Miss Charlotte Kent**, a serious-minded but kindly young woman who married Roderick in 1895 and did her best to raise Genevieve like one of her own. In 1896, Sir Roderick and Lady Charlotte were blessed with a daughter of their own, but young Lucy Muckleton died in infancy. Lady Charlotte was deeply affected by the loss of her child and turned her energies toward good works and advocating for social reforms, especially medical care for mothers and infants of the lower classes. Sir Roderick largely left her to pursue these ambitions on her own, but he always made sure her campaigns were well funded. In addition to her social advocacy, Charlotte also occasionally sought solace in opium, which eventually developed into a habit.

In 1904, Lady Charlotte finally gave birth to a healthy baby boy, who was named **Francis**. Francis and Genevieve never bonded and brother and sister, despite their father's wishes and Lady Charlotte's best efforts. Genevieve felt that Charlotte had abandoned her when she most needed a mother and put her energies into caring for other people's children instead of the one she had at home. Her father was a bewildering and unpredictable presence in their lives who could be relied upon for money, but little else. Charlotte grew into an extremely serious child who could be cuttingly cruel. Young Francis was doted on by his mother and given everything he could ever wish for.

The two children grew up shaped by these experiences. Genevieve has become an artist, making a name for herself by sheer determination and force of personality. She is now a sensation in the *avant garde* art movement in London who taps her own deep emotional pain to inspire her dark and moody paintings. She is well known on the fashionable cocktail circuit where her savagely sarcastic wit is as feared as her art is admired. Francis, for his part, has gone to all the best schools and joined all the right clubs, but has nothing to show for it except a string of petty crimes (always hushed up by the family) and a collection of unsavory friends who exploit his dim wits and seemingly bottomless family coffers.

Sir Roderick continued to freely spend the family fortune on his whimsies while keeping his wife's political activism, his daughter's art career, and his son's boozy misadventures liberally funded. While the family was distracted by their own concerns, the household staff of Muckleton Manor has noticed the draining of the coffers. The old butler, **Mortimer Chapel**, is acutely aware of the family's flagging fortunes and has been making his own plans accordingly. Over the past few years, he has been quietly dismissing members of the staff and pocketing their salaries for himself. By doing so, he has built up a respectable nest egg to retire on when the inevitable collapse hits, and since the family spend so little of their time at the Manor these days, no one has yet noticed the decline in the quality of the housekeeping.

In 1924, Francis staged an extravagant and chaotic twentieth birthday party which left the Manor in shambles and the wine cellar sadly depleted. With the household so understaffed, clean-up of the resulting mess took days, and Sir Roderick returned from his attempt on Mount Kilimanjaro before everything had been set right again. Seeing the wreck of the house finally brought home to Roderick the need to do something about Francis's overindulgence. He thought that if he took his son on one of his grand adventures, it might spark a passion in the boy for something other than idleness and drink. It was then that the baronet conceived of the idea of an Egyptian expedition. He took a hard look at the family's finances for the first time in decades and was shocked to discover

how badly the ship was sinking. He cut off his usual support for his wife's activism, his daughter's artistic career, and his son's sloth; instead, he devoted much of the remaining Muckleton fortune to outfitting his Egyptian expedition, hoping that a sensational discovery might turn things around both for his son's ambitions in life and the family's fortune.

Sir Roderick realized that he needed a more competent administrator to manage the ambitious expedition. He remembered the competence of the MacBrides (and perhaps felt some pangs of regret at the failure of their joint venture), so he reached out to **Amelia MacBride**, the youngest daughter of the family, who was then trying to make her way as a secretary at a London firm. Though apprehensive at first, Amelia was eventually convinced of Sir Roderick's seriousness, and agreed to join the expedition as managing secretary. When it was made clear to Francis that any hope of future funds was dependent on his joining the expedition, he grudgingly agreed to go along. One of Francis' unsavory friends, hearing about the expedition, convinced Francis to smuggle some heroin from Egypt to England by hiding it inside the artifacts recovered by the expedition. The expedition set out in the fall of 1925.

The Egyptian adventure was a failure from beginning to end. Though Sir Roderick set out with his usual enthusiasm, he was hopelessly misguided in his understanding of Egyptian history and archaeology. The sites he chose for excavation turned up nothing of scholarly or material value. Competent archaeologists saw him as an arrogant dilettante and refused to collaborate with him. Locals happily took his money and regaled him with tall tales of treasures waiting to be unearthed in the trackless desert. With time and money running short, he finally turned to the Cairo back streets in desperation and bought a mixed load of black market antiquities and counterfeits. Most of his money was spent on a genuine unopened sarcophagus recently looted from an unknown grave. While Sir Roderick was busy acquiring the rest of his collection from shady dealers, Francis opened the sarcophagus, disposed of the mummy inside, and filled it with heroin supplied by his friend's local contact. He then paid some local crafters to convincingly restore the seal.

Despite the disastrous failures of the expedition, it did have one unexpected result. Amelia, who was still nursing resentment at Sir Roderick when she joined the expedition, had a change of heart. Observing Roderick at close quarters, she was impressed by his genuine concern for his son, his remorse at the failure of all his previous ambitions, and his sincere desire to live a more serious life. During one emotional late-night conversation in the desert at another empty dig site, Roderick poured his heart out to her, lamenting his own misspent life and promising that if the Egyptian expedition were a success, his next project would be to restore the good name of the MacBrides. Against her expectations, Amelia found herself falling in love with her employer, and before the expedition was over, they had begun an affair.

Meanwhile, in America, word had reached Lillian van der Hof that Sir Roderick had cut off his financial support to Genevieve. Lillian impetuously boarded a steamer from New York to see Roderick and demand that he make good on his promise to always support their daughter. Once at sea, she cooled down and realized that she needed to be cautious in her approach, knowing that no one in England thought she was alive, so she could easily be dismissed as a fortune hunter or madwoman. When she arrived in London, she cultivated a new identity and began presenting herself as **Angelique de la Lune**, a French mystic and medium.

Finding that Sir Roderick was out of the country, Lillian inveigled herself into the company of Lady Charlotte, quickly determining that Charlotte was still mourning the death of her firstborn daughter. As Angelique, Lillian promised the possibility of speaking across the veil to the spirit of Lucy. She used their seances to both secure herself in Lady Charlotte's orbit and plant doubts about Sir Roderick's behavior. She hoped to ensure that she would get an opportunity to speak with Sir Roderick upon his return by making herself so indispensable to his wife that she could not be readily turned away from the house, while at the same time preparing the ground to destroy Roderick's life and reputation if he should not follow through on his promise to support Genevieve.

Sir Roderick and company returned to England in the spring of 1926, making as much public noise as possible to try to drum up interest in their finds. He claimed to have found and excavated the tomb of Queen Satiah and brought her unopened sarcophagus back to England.

Unsure of how convincing his relics would be, he planned the first unveiling of the treasures for a private event at Muckleton Manor with family and a few specially invited guests. If that event should prove to be a success, the intention was to follow it up with a grand public exhibition (with an admission fee). Since Sir Roderick's return, the Egyptian treasures have been under lock and key in the study of Muckleton Manor. Francis has not been able to get into the sarcophagus to get his smuggled drugs out.

The Mystery

Introductions

The eccentric baronet Sir Roderick Muckleton has invited an eclectic party of family, friends, and strangers to his country house, Muckleton Manor, to show off the treasures of his recent Egyptian expedition. You are among the lucky guests who through some relationship with the family or other circumstance have been invited to the party.

Your host tonight is **Sir Roderick**, the 8th baronet of Muckleton, an eccentric who has spent most of his life and a good portion of the family fortune chasing one obsession after another. First it was poodle breeding. Then it was mountain climbing. After that came speedboat racing. His latest obsession has been Egyptology, and he has spent most of the past year and thousands of pounds funding and overseeing an expedition in Egypt. This expedition aimed to find and excavate the tomb of Queen Satiah, wife of the Eighteenth-Dynasty pharaoh Thotmosis III.

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Francis Muckleton, son of Sir Roderick and Lady Charlotte, is a rather useless gadabout and no stranger to the nastier columns of the society pages. Despite going to all the best schools and being accepted into all the right clubs, he has refused to make anything of himself or do anything except use the family fortune to host extravagant parties and get mixed up in a string of petty crimes.

Joining the family tonight is also **Amelia MacBride**, Sir Roderick's secretary who accompanied him on his recent Egyptian expedition as a general coordinator and administrator. She comes from the famous dog-breeding MacBride family of Stirling, Scotland.

Naturally, the Muckleton family's loyal butler, **Mortimer Chapel**, is supervising the festivities. Chapel has served since the days of Sir Roderick's father, Sir Philip Muckleton.

The last member of the party is **Angelique de la Lune**, a French medium who has made a sensation on the London psychic circuit where she conjures up the spirits of the dear departed. She has recently become firmly attached to Lady Charlotte as an indispensable adviser and companion.¹

(Players introduce their characters and establish their relationships with the Muckleton family.)

The story begins

(The player characters are invited to describe their arrival at Muckleton Manor and play out any early interactions with one another and the household.)

¹ Text presented in gray boxes is to be read to the players. All other information is background for the Narrator and should not be shared until brought out by a player Sleuth's investigation.

Sir Roderick enjoys playing the host and building up the excitement. The treasures of Queen Satiah's tomb are locked in the study, to which Roderick has the only key. He promises that at midnight, he will open the study to show the treasures and, as a special treat for the assembled guests, will open the queen's sealed sarcophagus and reveal her mummy.

Genevieve is grouchy and snappish and makes it clear that she's only here because her father stopped her allowance, and she wants to talk him into restoring it.

Francis is doing his best to come off as charming and nonchalant, but is visibly nervous about anything to do with the Egyptian expedition and its treasures.

Amelia is businesslike and efficient but may be evasive if any specific questions are asked about the Egyptian expedition.

Chapel acts the part of the perfect butler, doing his best to put on an event worthy of the family, but also seems tired and stressed, and deficiencies in the housekeeping may show at the edges.

Lady Charlotte insists on holding a séance with **Angelique**, to which Sir Roderick grudgingly assents. The family assembles, along with any guests who choose to participate, in the sitting room. Angelique puts on a performance, complete with unearthly moans and flickering candles. A cold draft is felt in the room. Before long she claims to have made contact with the spirit of Queen Satiah herself. The only message the queen has to deliver is: "The child... Remember the child... That which was promised must be fulfilled."

Upon hearing these words, Sir Roderick storms out of the room and locks himself in the study. Amelia takes over and invites the guests to enjoy the house and grounds, promising that the midnight reveal of Queen Satiah and her treasures will go ahead as scheduled. In the intervening time, cocktails are served in the lounge, followed by dinner in the dining room. Chapel is the only member of the household staff to appear for either. Sir Roderick does not attend either. After dinner, guests are invited to enjoy the house and grounds before reconvening for the midnight event.

At one time or another in the evening, all of the suspects are on their own, unobserved by others. If questioned, they will give the following account of their movements (which may or may not turn out to be true):

Lady Charlotte: Retired to her room during the cocktail to recover her composure after the séance, returned to join the guests for dinner.

Genevieve: Enjoyed cocktails, walked around the grounds to clear her head in the evening air, came in late for dinner.

Francis: Drifted in and out of the house with cocktails, wasn't feeling up to dinner and so went to see if his father needed any help setting up the treasure display but got no answer when he knocked at the door, so retired to a dim corner of the library to nurse a headache. (Francis actually broke into the study to retrieve his opium stash from the sarcophagus and hand it out the window to an accomplice who carried it away. Whether Roderick was alive and/or in the study at the time is for the Narrator and players to determine.)

Amelia: Supervised the serving of cocktails, then skipped dinner and went to her room go over some accounts.

Chapel: Served cocktails and dinner, but spent much time going up and down the stairs to manage the kitchen.

Angelique: Went out into the grounds to commune with the spirits of nature, came in late for dinner.

Lilian (if questioned after her identity is revealed): Went outside during the cocktail hour to try to get Roderick's attention through the study windows, but backed off when she spotted another person, whom she could not identify, hanging around outside the same room. Went back in for dinner, slipped out to try again, but could not see Roderick through the windows.

The scene of the crime

The study door is locked and there is no answer to any knock. The door is locked from inside, and Sir Roderick's key is in the lock. If the players do not figure out a way to enter the room, Lady Charlotte will insist on breaking the door down. Francis and Chapel will do it if the player characters do not. Upon getting into the room, the sleuths see:

Sir Roderick is lying sprawled on the floor of the study next to the sarcophagus, which is cracked open. He has been stabbed with a copper dagger which was part of the treasure collection.

Art credits

Muckleton Manor map by Erik Jensen

Character portraits by Tannah Kuusikumpu

AI statement

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Clues

- Most of the treasure collection is made up of forgeries.
- Flakes of opium resin.
- A silver locket engraved with the letter L.
- Someone stood outside the study window.
- Love letters signed A.
- A duplicate key to the study.
- Generous salaries for maids and footmen.
- A broken window in the sitting room.
- A woman's muddy scarf.
- A cocktail mixed with opium.
- A broken latch on one study window.
- A photograph of Lady Charlotte, torn to shreds.
- An unsigned letter that reads: "Remember, I can destroy you."
- Footprints and drag marks in the garden.
- A ticket for a steamer from New York to London.

Secrets

- Sir Roderick and Lady Charlotte's first child, Lucy, died in infancy.
- The Muckleton fortune is almost entirely spent.
- Angelique de la Lune is actually Lilian Van der Hof, Sir Roderick's first wife.
- Francis Muckleton is in debt to a criminal gang.
- Amelia MacBride's family was ruined by Sir Roderick's ill-conceived business ventures.
- Lady Charlotte is in the habit of taking opium.
- Sir Roderick's Egyptian expedition was a disaster.
- Sir Roderick has cut off Genevieve's allowance.

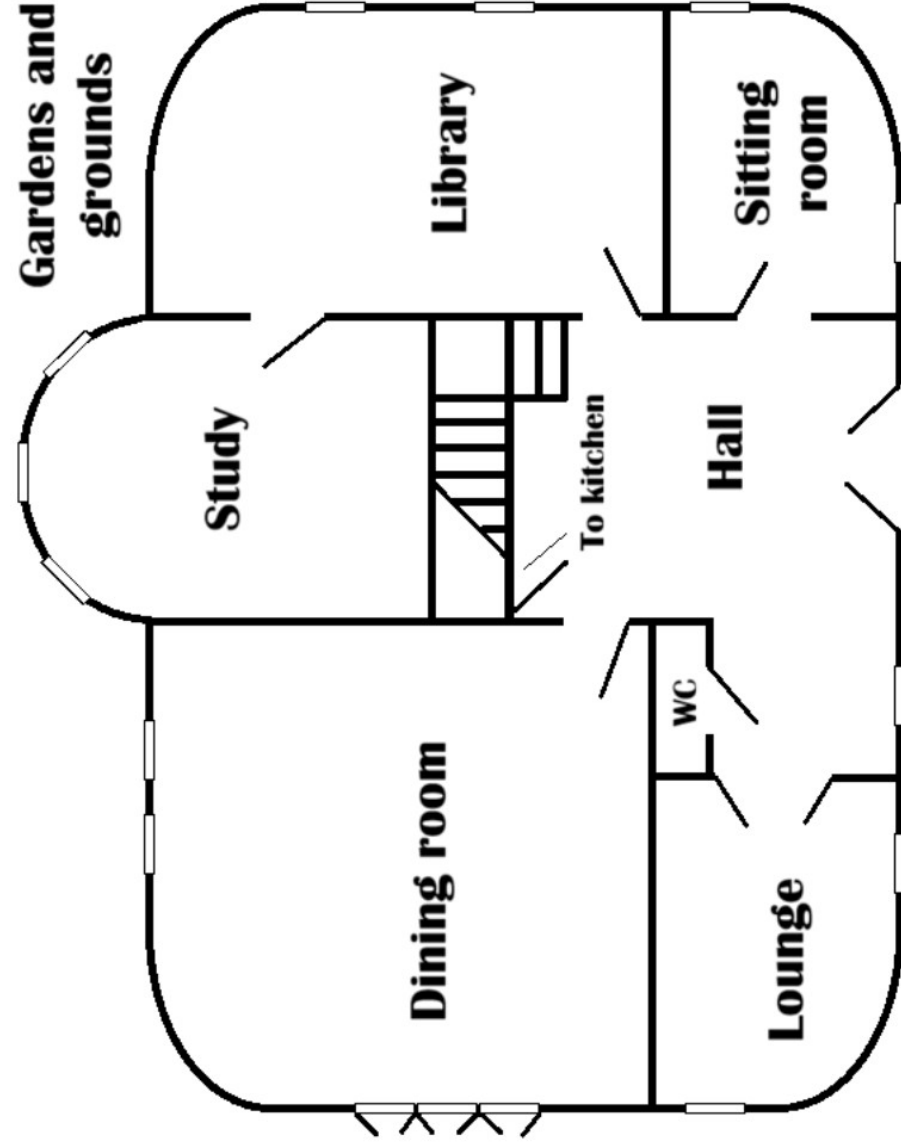
Scenes

- Flashback to something that happened during the séance
- Something happens as characters are getting drinks.
- Something reveals a dark secret you have long kept hidden.

	Most of the treasure collection is made up of forgeries. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	Flakes of opium resin. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>
A silver locket engraved with the letter L. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	Someone stood outside the study window. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	Love letters signed A. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>
A duplicate key to the study. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	Generous salaries for maids and footmen. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	A broken window in the sitting room. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>
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A ticket for a steamer from New York to London. <i>Clue: +1 to Solving roll</i>	Sir Roderick and Lady Charlotte’s first child, Lucy, died in infancy. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>	The Muckleton fortune is almost entirely spent. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>
Angelique de la Lune is actually Lilian Van der Hof, Sir Roderick’s first wife. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>	Francis Muckleton is in debt to a criminal gang. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>	Amelia MacBride’s family was ruined by Sir Roderick’s ill-conceived business ventures. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>
Lady Charlotte is in the habit of taking opium. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>	Sir Roderick’s Egyptian expedition was a disaster. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>	Sir Roderick has cut off Genevieve’s allowance. <i>Secret: Add 1d6 to Solving Roll</i>

Muckleton Manor





Genevieve Muckleton



Angelique de la Lune



Francis Muckleton



Sir Roderick Muckleton



Lady Charlotte Muckleton



Amelia MacBride



Mortimer Chapel