And Then There Were None Chapter Summary Analysis

Chapter #1

Justice Wargrave, a recently retired judge, is taking a train to the seaside town of Sticklehaven, where he is to catch a boat to Indian Island. He recalls the rumors that have swirled around the island: since a mysterious Mr. Owen purchased the place, people have suggested that a film star or a member of the royal family really owns the island. Wargrave takes a letter from his pocket and glances over its contents. The letter invites him to spend some time on the island and is signed by an old friend of his, Constance Culmington, whom he has not seen for eight years. He reflects that Constance is exactly the kind of woman who would buy a place like Indian Island.

On the same train, Vera Claythorne ponders her invitation to the island. She has been hired as a secretary by Una Nancy Owen, apparently the wife of the island’s owner. Vera reflects how lucky she is to get this job, especially after her involvement in a coroner’s inquest into someone’s death. She was cleared of all blame for the death, we learn, but Hugo Hamilton, the man she loved, thought her guilty. She thinks of the sea and of swimming after someone in particular, knowing she would not reach him in time to save him. She forces her mind away from those memories and glances at the man across from her, thinking he looks well traveled.

The man, Philip Lombard, gazes at Vera and finds her attractive and capable-looking. He has been hired for a mysterious job on Indian Island and is being paid well for it, because he has a reputation as a “good man in a tight place.” He has never met his employer; someone named Isaac Morris hired him. Lombard looks forward to whatever he will find on the island.

In another part of the train, Emily Brent sits up straight; she disapproves of slouching. She approves of very little, in fact. She is a very conservative, religious woman who holds most of the world in contempt. She has been invited to Indian Island for a holiday by someone who claims to have once shared a guesthouse with her. Emily Brent has decided to accept the invitation, even though she cannot quite read the name on the signature.

General Macarthur is taking a slower train to Sticklehaven. He has been invited to the island and promised that some of his friends will be there to talk over old times. He is glad to have the invitation; he has worried that people avoid him because of a thirty-year-old rumor. He does not explain the nature of the rumor.

Dr. Armstrong is driving to the island, having been asked to report on the condition of Mr. Owen’s ailing wife. He is a wealthy and successful medical man, but, as he drives, he reflects on the good luck that enabled his career to survive an incident that happened some years before, when he drank heavily. A sports car roars past Armstrong, driven by Tony Marston, a rich, handsome, and carefree young man on his way to Indian Island.

Mr. Blore, a former detective and another guest, is taking a different train from the one the others are taking. He has a list of the names of all the other guests, and he reads it over, reflecting that this job will probably be easy. His only company on the train is an old man who warns him that a storm is coming and that the day of judgment is near. As the man gets off the train, Blore reflects that the old man is closer to death and judgment than he himself is. The narrator warns us that “there, as it happens, he was wrong. . . .”

Chapter #2

Two taxis wait at the Sticklehaven train station to drive the guests to the dock. Justice Wargrave and Emily Brent share a cab, while Philip Lombard and Vera Claythorne wait together for the second taxi, which cannot leave until General Macarthur arrives on the slower train. The two make small talk until Macarthur’s train appears, and then the three of them drive to the dock, where Wargrave and Emily are waiting with a man who introduces himself as “Davis.” Just before they set out in the boat, Tony Marston’s car appears. In the twilight, he looks like a “a young god” as he drives toward them.

A man named Fred Narracott ferries the group from Sticklehaven to Indian Island. He reflects on what an odd party these guests constitute, since they do not seem to know each other at all and do not seem like friends of a millionaire, which Mr. Owen must be. When the guests arrive at the island, they go up to the house, a large, modern-style building, and are greeted by the butler, Mr. Rogers, and his wife, Mrs. Rogers, who serves as cook and housekeeper. Mr. Rogers tells them that Mr. Owen has been delayed but that they should make themselves at home. Their rooms are prepared, drinks are made, and dinner is on its way.

Each of the guests goes to his or her room. Vera finds her room well appointed. A statue of a bear sits on the mantelpiece, and a nursery rhyme hangs on the wall. Vera recognizes the nursery rhyme from her childhood. In the rhyme, “Ten Little Indians” get killed one by one: the first chokes, the second never wakes up, and so forth until none is left alive. Vera reflects that the poem is appropriate since they are staying on Indian Island. She then looks out at the sea, which makes her think of drowning.

Dr. Armstrong arrives in the evening, passing Wargrave as he goes into the house. He remembers giving medical testimony in front of the judge once or twice, and recalls that Wargrave had a reputation for convincing juries to convict. The two men speak to one another, and Wargrave asks Armstrong about Constance Culmington, who supposedly invited him to the island. He learns that no one by that name is expected. He remarks on the oddity of the host’s absence.

Upstairs, Marston takes a bath. Blore ties his tie and notices the “Ten Little Indians” rhyme over his mantelpiece. He resolves not to bungle his job. Macarthur has misgivings about the weekend. He wishes he could leave, but the motorboat has already left. Lombard, coming down for dinner, decides to enjoy the weekend. Upstairs, Emily reads a Bible passage about sinners being judged and cast into hell, and then goes down to dinner.

Chapter #3

The guests enjoy a delicious dinner and begin to relax in spite of the odd circumstances. They notice a set of ten china figures of Indians sitting in the center of the table and immediately associate the figures with the rhyme that hangs framed in all of their rooms. When dinner is over, the whole company moves into the drawing room. Everyone except Mrs. Rogers is in the drawing room when suddenly the group hears a disembodied, mechanical-sounding voice, seemingly coming from nowhere. It accuses each of them of murder, naming the victim and the date of each guest’s purported crime. After listing the crimes, it asks if anyone at the bar has something to say in his or her defense.

The voice falls silent, and almost everyone expresses shock and anger. Mrs. Rogers, who has been standing outside the room, faints. While Mr. Rogers goes to fetch her some brandy, everyone else searches for the source of the voice. Eventually, Lombard finds an old-fashioned record player in an adjoining room. Rogers returns and admits to turning it on in accordance with orders from his employer, but he denies knowing what it was going to play. The record is entitled “Swan Song.”

Mrs. Rogers revives, and her husband and Dr. Armstrong help her to bed. People pour themselves drinks. When Mr. Rogers returns, he explains that he and his wife have never met their employer, Mr. Owen. He says that an agency hired them, and they received instructions by mail. Everyone else takes turns explaining his or her invitation to the island, and they realize that “Mr. Owen” impersonated various old friends and specific acquaintances in the letters. Judge Wargrave, who has taken charge of the discussion, notes that the recorded message mentioned a Mr. Blore, but not a “Mr. Davis,” the name Blore has chosen as an alias. Blore then reveals his real name and admits that he was hired via post as a private detective to protect the jewels of Mrs. U. N. Owen. Wargrave suggests that U. N. Owen sounds like and stands for “unknown,” and that a homicidal maniac has invited them all here.

Chapter #4

The subject turns to the accusations made by the voice on the record, and the guests defend themselves. Wargrave, accused of killing a man named Edward Seton, says that Seton was an accused murderer on whom he passed sentence. Armstrong, remembering the case, privately recalls that everyone felt sure Seton would be acquitted, but Wargrave influenced the jury, which found Seton guilty. Vera, accused of killing Cyril Hamilton, tells the group that she was his governess, and he drowned while swimming to a rock. She says she tried her best to save him. Macarthur, accused of killing his wife’s lover, Arthur Richmond, says that Richmond was one of his officers who died on a routine reconnaissance mission; Macarthur denies that his wife ever had an affair. Lombard, accused of killing twenty-one members of an East African tribe, admits to taking their food and abandoning them in the wilderness, saying that he did so in order to save himself. Tony Marston, accused of killing John and Lucy Combes, remarks that they must have been two children he ran over by accident.

Mr. Rogers says that he and his wife did not kill Jennifer Brady, their employer, an old, sickly woman who died one night when Mr. Rogers could not reach the doctor in time. He admits that they inherited some money after her death. Blore says that when he was a police inspector, he testified against a man named James Landor in a bank robbery case. Landor later died in jail, but Blore insists that Landor was guilty. Armstrong, accused of causing the death of a woman named Louisa Mary Clees, denies knowing the name but privately remembers the case. Clees was an elderly woman on whom he operated while drunk. Only the dignified Emily Brent will not speak to the accusation made against her.

Wargrave suggests they leave in the morning as soon as the boat arrives; all the guests but one concur. Tony Marston suggests they ought to stay and solve the case. He then takes a drink, chokes on it, and dies.

Chapter #5

Armstrong examines the drink and finds it was poisoned, but since Marston poured it himself, the guests assume he committed suicide. Still, they find it hard to believe that such a high-spirited young man would want to take his own life. Marston’s body is carried to his bedroom and placed beneath a sheet. After a time, everyone goes upstairs to bed except for Rogers, who stays downstairs to clean up. As they enter their rooms, each guest locks his or her door. The house, so modern and gleaming, now seems horrifying in its blankness.

As he prepares for bed, Wargrave thinks about Edward Seton, the man whom the voice earlier accused him of sentencing to death. The defense defended Seton well, and the prosecution presented a poor case. Everyone assumed the jury would acquit Seton. Wargrave smiles, remembering how during his summing up “[h]e’d cooked Seton’s goose.” Downstairs, Rogers notices that although ten little Indian statues originally sat on the table, now there are only nine. Macarthur lies awake in bed, recalling how during World War I he discovered that his young wife was having an affair with one of his officers. Furious, he ordered the officer, Richmond, on an impossible mission, effectively sending him to his death. No one suspected him at the time, except perhaps one of the other officers, a man named Armitage. His wife became distant and died of pneumonia a few years later. Macarthur retired and lived by the sea, but after a time he began to worry, suspecting that Armitage had spread the story around and that people knew his secret. Now, lying in his bedroom listening to the sound of the sea, a strange feeling of peace comes over him, and he realizes that he does not really want to leave the island.

In her bedroom, Vera remembers her time as Cyril’s governess. She was in love with Cyril Hamilton’s cousin, Hugo, but Hugo was too poor to marry her and support both himself and her. Vera knew that if Cyril died, Hugo would inherit the family fortune. One day Cyril begged her again and again to be allowed to swim to a rock in the ocean. Vera pushes these recollections aside. As she passes the mantelpiece, she notices the similarity between Marston’s death and the first verse of the “Ten Little Indians” poem, which reads, “One choked his little self and then there were nine.”

Chapter #6

Armstrong has a nightmare in which he stands at his operating table, realizing he must kill the patient on the table. The patient looks like Emily Brent, then like Marston. Rogers, worried because he cannot rouse his wife, comes into the room and wakes Armstrong. Armstrong rises and goes to find that Mrs. Rogers has died in her sleep, perhaps of an overdose of sleeping pills. Rogers says she took only the pills Armstrong gave her.

In the morning the guests rise, hoping to catch sight of the boat back to the mainland. Vera, Lombard, and Blore go to the summit of the island to watch for it, but it doesn’t appear. After breakfast, Armstrong announces Mrs. Rogers’s death to the group. The group is alarmed, and Macarthur gives Rogers his condolences when he returns to the room. When Rogers leaves the room, the group begins to speculate about the cause of his wife’s death. Emily Brent insists it was an act of God and that Mrs. Rogers died of a guilty conscience after hearing the recorded accusation of murder the previous night. Blore suggests that Rogers killed his wife in the hopes of covering up their secret.

After the meal, Blore and Lombard discuss their situation on the terrace and decide that the boat will not come. Macarthur, passing them, expresses his agreement in a dazed voice and wanders off, saying that none of them will ever leave the island. Meanwhile, a baffled and frightened Rogers shows Armstrong that only eight Indian figures remain on the table.

Chapter #7

Emily and Vera take a walk together. Emily reiterates her conviction that Mrs. Rogers died of a guilty conscience. She tells Vera the story of Beatrice Taylor, the girl the recorded voice accused Emily of killing. Beatrice Taylor worked for Emily as a maid, but when Beatrice got pregnant, Emily immediately threw her out of the house. Friendless and despairing, Beatrice drowned herself. Emily insists that she has no reason to feel remorse, but the story horrifies Vera.

Meanwhile, Lombard and Armstrong consult with each other. They discuss the possibility that Rogers killed his wife, and Armstrong expresses his conviction that the Rogers couple probably did kill the old woman in their care simply by withholding drugs that she needed. They also consider the possibility that Mrs. Rogers killed herself, but two deaths—hers and Marston’s—within twelve hours seems like an improbable coincidence. Armstrong tells Lombard that two Indian figures have disappeared. When Armstrong recites the first two verses of the poem, Lombard notices that they neatly correspond to the two murders. They decide that their host, Mr. Owen, committed the murders and is now hiding on the island, and they determine to search for him.

Chapter #8

Joined by Blore, Armstrong and Lombard make an exhaustive sweep of the small island. Since the island is mostly bare rock, few places for concealment exist. It turns out that Lombard has a revolver, which surprises Blore. As they make their search, the men come across a dazed Macarthur sitting by himself, staring off into the sea. He tells them that there is very little time and that they need to leave him alone. They decide that he must be crazy. Leaving him, they discuss how they might signal the mainland, and Lombard points out that a storm is brewing, which will isolate them. He adds that the fishermen and village people probably have been told (by Mr. Owen, presumably) to disregard all signals from the island. The men come to some cliffs they want to search for caves, but they need a rope. Blore returns to the house to get one, while Armstrong wonders about Macarthur’s apparent madness. Meanwhile, Vera goes out for a walk and comes across the Macarthur. She sits down, and he talks of the impending end of his life and of the relief he feels, given the guilt he has felt over the death of Richmond. Eventually, having seemingly become unaware of Vera’s presence, he begins to murmur the name of his dead wife as if he expects her to appear.

When Blore returns with a rope, he finds only Armstrong, who is musing that Macarthur may be the killer. Lombard returns, having gone to check some unnamed theory, and climbs down the cliff to make his search for caves. As Armstrong and Blore hold the rope, Blore remarks that Lombard climbs extremely well. He says he does not trust Lombard and thinks it odd that he brought a revolver, saying, “It’s only in books that people carry revolvers around as a matter of course.” Lombard finds nothing on the cliff face, and the three men return to the house, where they make a thorough search for their missing host. The search goes quickly, since the modern house contains few potential hiding places. They hear someone moving about upstairs in Mrs. Rogers’s bedroom, where her body has been laid, but it turns out to be Mr. Rogers. Completing their search, they conclude there is no one on the island but the eight of them.