

K's First Case

L. G. Alexander



About the author

L. G. Alexander was born in London, England in 1932. He studied at the University of London and graduated in 1954. He taught English as a Foreign Language in a number of countries.

Alexander is known as the writer of some best-selling English language courses such as *New Concept English* (1967), *Look, Listen and Learn* (1971), *Follow Me* (1980) and *Direct English* (1993–1998). He also wrote practice books such as *For and Against* (1968), and grammar books such as *Longman English Grammar* (1988).

L. G. Alexander lived in London with his wife, Julia, until his death in 2002.

Summary

Pages 1–8: The reader is introduced to Sir Michael Gray, the boss of Cavell and Company, who was murdered, and Katrina Kirby (known as K), the detective involved in solving the case. K questions the five suspects who were in the house at the time of the murder: Lady Elizabeth (Sir Michael's wife), Colonel William Fawcett (Sir Michael's longtime friend from the army), Angela Everett (Sir Michael's young secretary), Andrew Cavell (Lady Elizabeth's brother and another boss at Cavell and Company) and Mrs Nancy Flack (the Grays' longtime housekeeper).

The details of the case are outlined. After dinner with the five others, Sir Michael went to his study alone at 9 p.m. He shut and locked the door and window of his study from the inside. When Mrs Flack took Sir Michael coffee at 9.30 p.m., he did not answer the door. They found him dead on the floor.

In their investigation, the police discover that Sir Michael drank some whisky in the study. However, there was no poison in it. He had been killed with something sharp through his heart. In the room, K saw that Sir Michael had been holding a whisky glass and that he had been in front of the fridge. There was water and blood on Sir Michael's shirt and on the carpet. There were papers on his desk and the dictaphone was turned on. There was not a knife or gun in the room.

Pages 9–19: K considers Sir Michael's evening routine. He always had a bath, changed his clothes and had an evening drink before having dinner at 8 p.m.

Mrs Flack tells K that Sir Michael and his wife often had arguments and they had a fight that evening after dinner. Later that evening, Mrs Flack took Sir Michael some coffee at 9.30 p.m., as she always did. After they knocked down the door, they found his body.

Lady Elizabeth tells K about the other women in Sir Michael's life, including his secretary, Angela Everett. Angela often worked with Sir Michael in the study after dinner. That night, Lady Elizabeth fought with her husband about Angela and then she spoke to her brother about it.

Pages 20–34: Colonel Fawcett tells K of his friendship with Sir Michael for twenty-five years, ever since they served together in the army. He tells K that Sir Michael lent him 50,000 pounds. Fawcett lost that money gambling. Recently, Sir Michael had insisted that he wanted the money back.

After that, Angela Everett tells K that she loved Sir Michael and that she knew he was leaving her 100,000 pounds in his will. She says she usually worked with Sir Michael in his study after dinner. However, that night he wanted to be alone, so she went into the garden by herself.

Next, Andrew Cavell, Lady Elizabeth's brother, tells K he didn't like his sister's husband. Sir Michael often argued with Lady Elizabeth and also spent the company's money on other women. Andrew heard that Sir Michael was planning to leave money to Angela in his will. Andrew told Sir Michael that he would stop him.

Pages 35–44: Finally, Mrs Flack tells K she had worked with the Cavell family for forty years and had worked with Sir Michael and Lady Elizabeth for the past twenty-five. She is very loyal to them. She says Sir Michael had liked other women before but that Angela was different

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because Sir Michael listened to her. Mrs Flack had read a letter from Angela that told him he should leave his wife and run away with her.

K calls them all together to discuss who killed Sir Michael and how ... and why!

Pages 45–59: K tells them that when Sir Michael opened the freezer door to get ice for his whisky that it triggered a mechanism that shot an icicle in his heart and killed him. She also tells them what Sir Michael had been doing in the study that night. He wrote a note to Andrew telling him that he wasn't leaving money to Angela in his will. He also left a message on his dictaphone telling Angela he wanted to leave her.

Because everybody was under investigation, they all stay in the house that night. K returns to the study to see who will check the mechanism in the fridge. Colonel Fawcett arrives first but tells K he was interested in seeing the mechanism and that Sir Michael made it himself. They find Mrs Flack listening to them outside the door. Mrs Flack admits that she put the mechanism in the fridge before 9 p.m. that night. She had wanted to kill Angela who always poured whisky for Sir Michael – except Angela didn't work with him that night and Sir Michael died by mistake. The mystery is solved.

Background and themes

K's First Case brings together two ingredients that have recurred time and again in murder mystery stories – the country house and the locked room.

The story is a classic 'whodunit' (who has done it). This name is commonly applied to mysteries in which the identity of the criminal is kept secret until the very end. But many whodunits, like this one, are also whydunits (why was it done) and howdunits (how was it done), since we do not know the motive or even the means by which the murderer committed the crime.

Many of the murder mysteries of that most famous whodunit writer, Agatha Christie, took place in country houses. The large house offers atmosphere and a contained environment. It enables the author to bring together a disparate group of people who could have a variety of motives for a murder. We can be told which room each of the suspects was in at the time of the murder and we can check on each suspect's story with the others. There can be many red herrings – clues which point to a person who is entirely innocent. Finally, the country house setting provides the opportunity for

the final scene when the great detective brings together all the suspects and reveals, piece by piece, the crime and how he, or she, solved it. In this story, as in so many others of the genre, the butler – actually the housekeeper – did it.

K's First Case is also an excellent example of the puzzle story. How could the man die violently in a locked room? One of the first murder mysteries, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, by Edgar Allan Poe, posed a similar problem and most crime writers have tried their hand at the locked room mystery at least once in their career. In past mysteries, the murders may have happened before the door was locked, or arrows may have been shot through upper floor windows, or door knobs may have been electrified. In this story the writer adds an extra touch – the disappearing weapon, melting away as the other guests are beating on the door.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- 1 **Group work:** In groups, have students discuss the following questions:
 - a Do you like murder mysteries? Why or why not?
 - b Why do some people like murder mysteries?
 - c Who is your favourite detective? Why?
- 2 **Guess:** Have students look at the name of the book and also the picture on the cover. Have them guess the answers to these questions.
 - a Who is K?
 - b Who is the person on the cover? What seems to have happened?

Introduction

Before reading

- 3 **Discuss:** Have students think about three questions that any detective must answer after a crime. Have students read the Introduction and check their answers.

Pages 1–8

Before reading

- 4 **Guess:** Have students look at the pictures of the people on pages 1 and 2. Without reading the text, have them choose words that describe these people. Also, have them consider what roles these people might play in the story. Who could be guilty? Have students discuss their ideas in class.

While reading

- 5 **Check:** After reading pages 1 and 2 have students look at the descriptive words they selected for each character in activity 4. Have students discuss which character(s) they feel might be responsible for Sir Michael's death.

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After reading

6 Read carefully: Have students work in pairs.

Student A:

- Look at the plan of the rooms on page 5 for one minute. Then close your book and try to draw the plan. Show it to Student B for checking.
- Test Student B on the things in the study (from page 6).

Student B:

- Look at Student A's plan of the room (page 5). If there are mistakes in Student A's picture, explain them.
 - Look at the picture of the study on page 6 for one minute. Be ready to answer questions about the picture from Student A.
- 7 Pair work:** Read the description of Sir Michael's study (page 6) and the report about what K reported seeing in the room (pages 7–8). What facts do you think could be important in solving this case? Have students suggest questions they would like to ask.

Pages 9–19

While reading

8 Guess: Before reading K's ideas about the death of Sir Michael on page 11, have students try to come up with their own ideas about his death. Have them share their ideas with the class. Then read K's ideas on page 11. Have students see how their ideas compared with K's.

After reading

- 9 Role play:** In pairs, have students look at the conversation between Lady Elizabeth and Sir Michael. Have them role play the dialogue on page 18. Have volunteers role play the scene for the class.
- 10 Write:** Have students imagine they are Lady Elizabeth. Have them write a letter to Angela Everett explaining their feelings after the death of Sir Michael.

Pages 20–34

After reading

11 Pair work: Assign pairs of students to consider the feelings of one of these three people: Colonel Fawcett, Angela Everett or Andrew Cavell. Have them role play the encounter between this person and Sir Michael. Then have the pair of students consider one more frame for each scene. What might Sir Michael and the other person (Colonel Fawcett, Angela Everett or Andrew Cavell) think after the conversation? What might they plan to do next?

Pages 35–44

After reading

12 Pair work: Read K's conversation with Nancy Flack. Write down Nancy's relationship with Lady Elizabeth, Sir Michael and Angela Everett and her feelings towards each of them. Mrs Flack and ...

Who?	Relationship (How long she has known them ...)	Feelings about this person
Lady Elizabeth		
Sir Michael		
Angela Everett		

- 13 Group work:** Have students discuss these questions:
- How does K start each interview (starting with Lady Elizabeth on page 16)?
 - Why does she start each interview in this way?
- 14 Role play:** In pairs, have students imagine they are putting together a short TV report about the murder of Sir Michael.
- Student A:* You are a TV reporter. Explain briefly what has happened and ask questions of the police spokesperson.
- Student B:* You are the police spokesperson. Answer the reporter's questions carefully and honestly.

Pages 45–59

Before reading

15 Check: Have students read their descriptions of the witnesses and who might be guilty from activities 3 and 4. Then read K's notes from page 43 and her meeting with them all on page 44. Have students consider their earlier guesses and present any further ideas they might now have.

While reading

16 Guess: Consider the new facts revealed by K about Sir Michael's letter and the dictaphone message. Have students discuss whether this information might give them further ideas about Sir Michael's death.

After reading

- 17 Read carefully:** In groups, have students re-read each of K's interviews with the suspects and think about why she asked every person about whisky and ice. Have students share their ideas.
- 18 Role play:** In pairs, have students role play a later scene between a police investigator and Mrs Flack. *Why did she commit the murder? How does she feel about what happened?*
- 19 Write:** Ask students to imagine the childhood of K. *Why did she decide to become a detective?*

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Photocopiable

While reading

Pages 1–8

- 1 Put these events in the correct order (1–8).
- a Mrs Flack took coffee to the study but Sir Michael didn't open the door.
 - b Lady Elizabeth called the police.
 - c The police took pictures of the crime scene and took Sir Michael's body to the police station.
 - d Sir Michael had dinner with the others.
 - e They found Sir Michael's body on the floor.
 - f The police and the detective arrived at the house.
 - g Sir Michael went to his study by himself and locked the window and door.
 - h They broke down the door and went into the study.

2 Underline YES or NO.

- a Did K have a lot of experience as a detective?
YES NO
- b Is Lady Elizabeth's brother younger than Sir Michael?
YES NO
- c Is 'Flanders' the name of the town near the house?
YES NO
- d Was Sir Michael sitting at his desk when he died?
YES NO
- e Did the police check the whisky for poison?
YES NO
- f Were there other fingerprints in the room?
YES NO
- g Was the dictaphone on Sir Michael's desk turned on?
YES NO

Pages 9–19

3 Underline the mistakes in the sentences and correct them.

- a Sir Michael sometimes had a drink before dinner.
.....
- b Sir Michael had dinner with the others at 7 p.m. in the dining room.
.....
- c Sir Michael and Lady Elizabeth had an argument at dinner.
.....
- d Sir Michael's secretary always worked in the study with Sir Michael in the evening.
.....

- e Mrs Flack always took Sir Michael a cup of tea at 9.30.
.....
- f Lady Elizabeth tells K that she has never hated her husband.
.....
- g Lady Elizabeth often talked to Colonel Fawcett about her husband.
.....

4 Match the letters with the numbers below to make complete sentences.

- a Sir Michael's killer did not seem to leave the study through the window because
- b Sir Michael did not seem to drink the whisky to kill himself because
- c Sir Michael was killed before 9.30 p.m. because
- d Sir Michael was killed after 9 p.m. because
- e The detective is having a difficult time deciding what was used to kill Sir Michael because
- f Lady Elizabeth says that K should talk with Sir Michael's secretary because
 - 1) he did not answer the door at that time.
 - 2) they cannot find a weapon in the room.
 - 3) it was locked from the inside.
 - 4) she might have some answers.
 - 5) the others saw him go to the study by himself at that time.
 - 6) there was not poison in his blood.

Pages 20–34

5 Who said the following? Choose the names from below.

- a 'She didn't love him. She had fights with him. All the time.'
 - b 'Without me, Cavell and Company will die.'
 - c 'We couldn't agree about money, but we were friends.'
 - d 'I'm asking the questions. You're here to answer them.'
 - e 'But he spent money like water. I didn't like that.'
- 1) Sir Michael
 - 2) Colonel Fawcett
 - 3) Andrew Cavell
 - 4) Angela Everett
 - 5) K

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Photocopiable

- 6 Choose the correct words in *italics*.
- Colonel Fawcett spent Sir Michael's money on *women / gambling*.
 - Colonel Fawcett was in the *library / dining room* at 9.30 p.m.
 - Angela Everett likes her whisky with *water / ice*.
 - Sir Michael was *25 / 30* years older than Angela Everett.
 - Angela says Sir Michael left her *50,000 / 100,000* pounds in his will.
 - Andrew Cavell says Sir Michael was *lazy / hardworking*.
 - Andrew Cavell says he *respected / hated* Sir Michael.

Pages 35–44

- 7 Read Mrs Flack's description of what happened. Put the events in order.

Events from a week ago (1–4).

- Mrs Flack read the letter from Angela in her room.
- Mrs Flack found a letter from Angela Everett on Sir Michael's desk.
- Mrs Flack returned the letter to Sir Michael's desk.
- Sir Michael came into the study and surprised Mrs Flack.

- 8 Now put the events from tonight (1–7).

- Mrs Flack took coffee to Sir Michael in the study.
- Colonel Fawcett and Andrew Cavell broke down the door.
- Mrs Flack served dinner at 8 p.m.
- They found Sir Michael's body in the study.
- Sir Michael did not answer the door.
- Mrs Flack took coffee to Colonel Fawcett.
- Mrs Flack called for help.

Pages 45–59

- 9 Choose the right sentence. Write 1 or 2.

- In Sir Michael's letter, he told Andrew Cavell that he
 - loved Angela Everett.
 - was not leaving money to Angela Everett.
- After hearing about the letter, Angela tells everybody in the study that she did not
 - love Sir Michael.
 - want his money.

- At 3 a.m., K went
 - upstairs to the bedroom.
 - downstairs to the study.
- K stops Colonel Fawcett in the study by
 - calling his name.
 - hitting him.
- Colonel Fawcett tells K that Sir Michael
 - made the mechanism in the fridge.
 - put the mechanism in the fridge.
- Mrs Flack
 - planned the murder for a long time.
 - just thought of her plan that night.

- 10 Write the correct names from below.

- designed many mechanisms in the army.
- is good at fighting.
- is taken away to the police station.
- calls Sir Michael a 'pig'.
- does not want to believe that Mrs Flack is guilty.
- does not say anything when he sees the bow and Mrs Flack in the study.
 - K
 - Lady Elizabeth
 - Sir Michael
 - Andrew Cavell
 - Mrs Flack
 - Angela Everett

After reading

- Choose one of the characters and write a speech about Sir Michael from that person's perspective. This could be a speech that would be used at Sir Michael's funeral.
- Write a newspaper report about the murder. Be sure to include answers to the key questions: Who? Why? How?
- Sir Michael designed an interesting mechanism. Design a new invention that could be helpful in your life. For example, it could be something to help you do your work or chores, or help you travel from place to place, etc.
- Imagine life one year later for one of the characters in this story. What is this person's life like? How has Sir Michael's death changed things for this person?

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Pages 1–8

1 Match the person with his or her description (1–7).

- a Sir Michael is
 - b Lady Elizabeth is
 - c Colonel Fawcett is
 - d Angela Everett is
 - e Andrew Cavell is
 - f Nancy Flack is
 - g Katrina Kirby is
- 1) Sir Michael's longtime friend from the army
 - 2) a longtime housekeeper for the Cavell and Gray families
 - 3) a rich businessperson who was murdered
 - 4) Sir Michael's wife
 - 5) a young detective
 - 6) a boss at Cavell and Company and a brother of Lady Elizabeth
 - 7) a young secretary

Pages 9–19

2 Write the time for each of these events. Use the times in the box.

5.00	7.00	7.05	7.30	8.50
	9.10	9.30	10.00	

- a Lady Elizabeth talks to her brother about her husband and his secretary.
- b Sir Michael and Angela arrive at the house.
- c Lady Elizabeth has tea with Colonel Fawcett and Andrew Cavell in the library.
- d Sir Michael has a drink in the library with the four others.
- e K investigates the crime scene.
- f Mrs Flack knocks on the study door but Sir Michael does not answer.
- g Lady Elizabeth talks to her husband about his secretary.
- h Sir Michael has a bath.

Pages 20–34

3 Are these sentences right (✓) or wrong (X)?

- a Colonel Fawcett and Sir Michael were in business together.
- b Sir Michael did engineering work in the army.
- c Angela Everett thinks Lady Elizabeth murdered Sir Michael.

- d Sir Michael told Angela that he changed his will two weeks ago.
- e Angela Everett was in the library when Sir Michael's body was found.
- f Lady Elizabeth's father liked Sir Michael.
- g Andrew Cavell spoke to Sir Michael that night about gambling.
- h Andrew Cavell says he is glad that Michael Gray is dead.

Pages 35–44

4 K gives reasons that the suspects may have murdered Sir Michael. Match the person with the reason.

- a did not want to lose his house.
 - b was worried that Sir Michael would run away with the secretary.
 - c was jealous of Sir Michael's many girlfriends.
 - d was worried about the success of Cavell and Company.
 - e wanted to get lots of money from Sir Michael from his will.
- 1) Lady Elizabeth
 - 2) Colonel Fawcett
 - 3) Angela Everett
 - 4) Andrew Cavell
 - 5) Mrs Flack

Pages 45–59

5 Complete the sentences using these words.

- icicle weapon murder study fridge
dead whisky
- a Sir Michael went to the at 9 p.m.
 - b He wanted some so he poured some into a glass.
 - c Then he opened the to get some ice.
 - d This started a mechanism that sent an through his heart.
 - e Sir Michael fell to the floor. He was
 - f Minutes later, there was no in the room – only water.
 - g K wants to know who is responsible for Sir Michael's

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Book key

1 Open answers (possible answers):

- a a detective story
- b nervous, worried, frightened

2 a Sir Michael Gray

- b in his study, in his big English country house
- c She has questions because he was murdered.
She is a police detective and she has to find the murderer.

3 a ? b ✓ c ✓ d ✓ e ✗ f ✗ g ? h ✗

4 a Katrina Kirby (K)

- b Angela Everett
- c Mrs Flack
- d Lady Elizabeth
- e the police
- f K

5–6 Open answers

7 a knows

- b knows
- c believes
- d doesn't know
- e doesn't know
- f knows

8 a secretary

- b brother
- c library
- d eight

9 a doesn't say

- b says
- c doesn't say
- d says
- e says
- f says
- g doesn't say
- h says

10–11 Open answers

12 a ice > water

- b thirty > twenty-five
- c gave > lent
- d spent > lost
- e soldiers > engineers
- f dining room > library
- g Mike > Mick
- h nothing > 100,000 pounds
- i before > after
- j upstairs > outside

k Gray > Cavell

l isn't > is

m dining room > living room

13–15 Open answers

16 a Sir Michael, Mrs Flack, Angela Everett

- b Mrs Flack
- c Angela Everett

17–19 Open answers

20 a heart

- b icicle
- c nothing
- d study
- e Colonel
- f listening
- g secretary
- h solved

21–30 Open answers

Discussion activities key

1–19 Open answers

Activity worksheets key

1 a 3 b 6 c 8 d 1 e 5 f 7 g 2 h 4

2 a NO b YES c NO d NO e YES f NO
g YES

3 a sometimes > always

b 7 p.m. > 8 p.m.

c at > after

d always > sometimes

e tea > coffee

f never > sometimes

g Colonel Fawcett > Andrew Cavell

4 a 3 b 6 c 1 d 5 e 2 f 4

5 a 4 b 1 c 2 d 5 e 3

6 a gambling

b library

c ice

d 30

e 100,000

f hardworking

g hated

7 a 3 b 1 c 4 d 2

8 a 3 b 6 c 1 d 7 e 4 f 2 g 5

9 a 2 b 1 c 2 d 2 e 1 f 1

10 a 3 b 1 c 5 d 6 e 2 f 4

11–14 Open answers

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Progress test key

1 a 3 b 4 c 1 d 7 e 6 f 2 g 5

2 a 9.10 b 7.00 c 5.00 d 7.30 e 10.00 f 9.30

g 8.50 h 7.05

3 a b c d e f g h

4 a 2 b 5 c 1 d 4 e 3

5 a study

b whisky

c fridge

d icicle

e dead

f weapon

g murder