

# **The Cat Who Turned on and Off Study Guide**

**The Cat Who Turned on and Off by Lilian Jackson Braun**

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# Plot Summary

This mystery novel is one of a series of stories about the exploits of newspaper reporter Jim Qwilleran and his two intuitive and troublemaking Siamese cats. As they settle into their new life in a small Midwestern town, the unusual trio of investigators is drawn into the mystery surrounding the death of a respected antiques dealer. As they draw closer to the truth, the narrative explores themes related to the inevitability of justice and the value of trust.

The novel begins with a narration of Qwilleran's journey through a rough-looking part of his new hometown, a neighborhood that his cab driver calls Junktown because of its associations with both junk/antique dealers and with drugs or "junk." At his rooming house, Qwilleran feeds the two cats, Koko and YumYum, and as a result of his interactions with them, realizes that Junktown is a possible source for a potentially lucrative newspaper article. He discusses his idea with his friend and editor, who tells him that there has recently been a mysterious death in the area. This intrigues Qwilleran even more and he begins his investigations.

No sooner does Qwilleran arrive in Junktown than he meets, and feels attracted to, the beautiful and enigmatic antique dealer Mary Duckworth, who reveals that she was involved with the murder victim, a highly respected dealer named Andrew Glanz. Shortly after meeting her, Qwilleran attends an auction, during which the contents of Glanz' shop are sold off. At the auction he meets the chatty Iris Cobb, yet another dealer in the area, who tells him she has an apartment for rent and identifies several of the other dealers in the area. After the auction, Qwilleran visits the apartment and agrees to rent it, quickly collecting the cats and the rest of his possessions and moving in that day.

Over the next few days, Qwilleran continues his investigations of the Junktown community, meeting several of the dealers and putting together a more complete picture of Glanz, of the night he was murdered, and of the community in general. In the meantime, he becomes increasingly involved with the troubled Mary Duckworth, who eventually reveals that she is not who she says she is and who has what she feels are compelling reasons for concealing her identity.

As Qwilleran's investigations continue, he uncovers several possible motives and suspects in the case. One of those suspects is Iris' husband C.C. who, Qwilleran discovers, had a confrontational relationship with Glanz and who himself, narration reveals, is eventually murdered.

As Qwilleran considers a wide range of suspects and circumstances, his attention comes to rest on a particular individual and a particular situation. The individual is eccentric dealer Ben Nicholas, and the situation is the presence of a drug dealer operating in the Junktown area. As Qwilleran draws closer to both the truth and to Mary Duckworth, Koko and YumYum bring unexpected clues and insights to Qwilleran's attention.



A narrow escape from death at an abandoned theater and witnessing Ben Nicholas' surprising generosity are among the final pieces of the puzzle that Qwilleran uncovers that eventually lead him to the strong suspicion that Nicholas is the killer. A confrontation with the dealer, along with input from Koko, confirms those suspicions and Nicholas is arrested. The book concludes with the hint that as they have discovered the situation's various truths, as well as illuminated some of their own personal ones, Qwilleran and Mary have become close enough for intimacy. This hint is reinforced by the helpful Koko's turning off of the lights.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

This mystery novel is one of a series of stories about the exploits of newspaper reporter Jim Qwilleran and his two intuitive and troublemaking Siamese cats. As they settle into their new life in a small Midwestern town, the unusual trio of investigators is drawn into the mystery surrounding the death of a respected antiques dealer. As they draw closer to the truth, the narrative explores themes related to the inevitability of justice and the value of trust.

On a wintry evening not long before Christmas, a man later identified as Qwilleran takes a cab ride from the local Press Club to his seedy hotel, telling the good-natured and inquisitive cabbie that he is new in town and that he is employed by the Daily Fluxion, a local newspaper. As the cab drives through a slummy part of town, the cabby identifies it as Junktown, saying that is full of drug addicts and warns Qwilleran to steer clear. At the hotel, Qwilleran takes some turkey that he snuck out of the Press Club restaurant and feeds it to his two Siamese cats, Koko, a larger and dominant male and the smaller female whose name is later revealed to be YumYum. As they eat, he reads a memo from the Fluxion's editor reminding staff of a Christmas writing contest with a substantial cash prize. Qwilleran reflects on how much he could use the money and on what might be interesting to write about. The female cat pulls a piece of garbage out of the trash bin and then another, dropping both in Qwilleran's lap. His rhetorical question about why she keeps bringing him junk triggers an idea for the writing contest, he could write about Christmas in Junktown. As he speaks aloud of his excitement, Koko restlessly prowls the room, eventually settling into a little self-made nest on the bed.

When Qwilleran presents his idea to his editor and friend Arch Riker, he is surprised to hear that Junktown is called what it is because it is home to a concentration of antique and junk shops and not junkies or drug addicts. When Qwilleran resists the idea of writing about junk dealers, thinking that such a soft story would never win him the writing competition, Riker says that the publishers would look kindly on just such a story. In passing, he also reveals that one of the dealers there was recently killed and that there is a public auction of the stock in his store that afternoon.

Reluctantly, Qwilleran agrees to pursue the story. When he takes a cab into Junktown, he discovers that most of the stores are closed and is told by a passing drunk that the padlocked shop on the corner has been closed ever since the death of the owner, a death the drunk says was the result of a stabbing. As Qwilleran continues his search for an open shop, he grows uneasy. When he finds the open Blue Dragon Antiques and ventures inside. Conversation with the mysterious and beautiful owner, Miss Duckworth, reveals that she knew the dead dealer, whom she named Andrew Glanz, she believes his death resulted from a fall off a ladder. When Qwilleran, in an effort to calm the suddenly agitated Miss Duckworth, comments on a large coat of arms hanging on the wall, Miss Duckworth easily lifts it down to show it to him. After putting it back on the



wall, she agrees to give Qwilleran a photo of Glanz to run in what Qwilleran says will be a positive article about the Glanz auction. As she fetches the photo from her upstairs apartment, Qwilleran overhears the two customers refer to Miss Duckworth as Glanz' girlfriend and to his mysterious death. After Miss Duckworth returns with the photo and as she consults with the customers, Qwilleran takes another look at the coat of arms, realizes how heavy it is, and recalls how easily Miss Duckworth lifted it down.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

These first two chapters introduce several of the novel's most important elements. The first, of course, is the mysterious death of Andrew Glanz, the circumstances of which are the primary motivation for both the action and the thematic explorations of the book. Other elements introduced here, all of which foreshadow important developments later in the narrative include the references to Junktown and the various meanings of its name, the appearance of the mysterious and attractive Miss Duckworth, and the appearance of the Mackintosh Coat of Arms.

Another important and related element introduced in this section is the relationship between Qwilleran and his cats. Aside from his evident respect for them and his indulgence of their finicky tastes, the most important component of their relationship illustrated here is defined by YumYum's "playing" with the contents of the trash bin. In other words, in the same way her actions trigger Qwilleran's thought and deductive processes here, the actions and reactions of both her and KoKo trigger similar thoughts and deductions throughout the novel.

Finally, this section also introduces an emotion-defined subplot of Qwilleran's loneliness and his need to bring some warmth into his somewhat troubled life. This aspect of the book is never explicitly defined but is instead hinted at in the quality of the language used, which suggests isolation, feeling haunted, a mild degree of suffering and, particularly in the scene with Miss Duckworth, an eagerness for a relationship that goes beyond the formal. In other words, while the plot of the novel takes Qwilleran on a journey from mystery to truth, the sub-plot of the novel takes him on a journey from a sense of being lost to a sense of being found. This takes place in terms of both relationships and in terms of a home. By the end of the novel, Qwilleran and the cats have settled into a friendly and welcoming apartment in which they feel like they belong.



# Chapters 3, 4 and 5

## Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Summary

At the auction, Qwilleran finds himself seated next to Iris Cobb, an antique dealer with an apartment above her store. As Qwilleran expresses interest in renting, Iris looks around for her husband, whom she says is going to do the bidding for them both, and also identifies several other people in the room. These include Ben Nicholas and Hollis Prantz, whom she identifies as other dealers, and Russell Patch, a furniture refinisher. Throughout the auction, Qwilleran overhears nervous and gossipy conversation about whether the string of accidents counterpointing the bidding might be the work of a ghost and also about a finial, which eventually comes up for bidding at the end of the auction, to the shock of many of those in attendance. C.C. Cobb, Iris' husband purchases the item amidst gossip and hints that Glanz was impaled on it when he fell from his a stepladder.

After the auction, Qwilleran accompanies Iris to her junk shop, where he experiences C.C.'s abrasiveness. Having changed into prettier clothes, Iris takes Qwilleran up to the apartment at the back of the house. Although he is put off by the antique furnishings, Qwilleran is particularly intrigued by the one wall papered in pages torn from old books, which Iris reveals was papered by Andrew Glanz, and by Iris' mention of the house ghost, Mathilda, who keeps hiding her glasses. Over fresh homemade pie, Qwilleran tells Iris about his two cats and when she says having them will be no problem, he agrees to move in.

As Qwilleran, the easygoing Koko, and nervous YumYum move into their new home, Qwilleran is surprised to see that the Cobbs have moved out some of the antiques and replaced them with others, including a large roll-topped desk and a pot-bellied stove. After settling the cats, Qwilleran talks further with Iris who tells him that Andrew Glanz was young, attractive, well liked, generous, compassionate, responsible, and worked with a high commitment to professional integrity that some of the other dealers resented. She adds that he was also closely involved with Miss Duckworth, who discovered his body in a pool of blood impaled on the finial and who has become "moody and withdrawn" since his death.

Iris tells Qwilleran that the police believe Glanz fell off a step-ladder while trying to take down a crystal chandelier and comments that it was uncharacteristically careless of Glanz to leave a potentially dangerous item like the finial out in the open. Back in his own apartment, Qwilleran starts writing his story on Glanz, interrupted by his flamboyant neighbor, Ben Nicholas, by thoughts of Miss Duckworth's haunted eyes, and by Koko as he escapes the apartment. He makes his way to the finial from Glanz' shop, brought back to the Cobb's apartment by C.C. As he retrieves Koko, Qwilleran has the sense that there is something more to Glanz' death than meets the eye.



## Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

As the saying goes, the plot thickens in these three chapters. Important elements include the expansion of the cast of characters/potential suspects, the emerging atmosphere of spookiness, and the increasing amount of detail (as revealed by Iris) about Glanz. This detail includes the circumstances of both his life and his death, said descriptions ultimately functioning as key to developments of both plot (in that they contribute to Qwilleran's solving the mystery) and theme (see "Themes - Truth vs. Illusion"). Meanwhile, the role of the cats in Qwilleran's mystery solving process is reiterated here, as Koko visits the finial, a sure sign to both the reader and Qwilleran that there is something about both the finial and the story associated with it that isn't quite right.

(A finial is a decorative topping, or finish, very often pointed, to smaller objects like a lamp or larger, architectural objects like a gable or tower. In this case, the finial seems to be fairly substantial and quite pointed, as it is presumed by many to be the cause of Glanz' stab wound).

Meanwhile, here as in all the chapters of the book (except perhaps the final one) there are important foreshadowings that either function as valid clues or as so-called "red herrings" (false clues). Among them are the reference to Iris' missing glasses (later revealed to be a trick played by C.C. on his wife, thus a red herring), the wall papered in book pages (later revealed to be concealing a substantial sum of cash), and the appearance of the pot bellied stove (later revealed to be concealing an important clue).

Finally, in narration's passing reference to Qwilleran's being distracted by Miss Duckworth's eyes, there is development in the subplot outlined in the Analysis to Chapters 1 and 2 - specifically, Qwilleran's movement from isolation to companionship. It's important to note that development of this subplot is, for the most part, quite understated in the writing - in other words, its importance is emphasized not by a lot of attention, but by relatively little attention in an unexpected context.





# Chapters 6, 7 and 8

## Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

When Qwilleran goes to the corner store to buy some groceries for himself and the cats, he encounters Miss Duckworth who invites him back to her home for conversation. After a couple of glasses of Scotch, Miss Duckworth reveals that her real name is Mary Duxbury and that she is the daughter of a well-to-do but controlling father. She also refers again to Andy Glanz' passionate integrity and sense of right and wrong, talks about some of the rivalries between the Junktown dealers, and confesses that on the night of Andy's death the two of them had fought. She adds that she discovered the body when she went to his shop to apologize. The urgent barking of Mary's dog draws Mary and Qwilleran outside, where they discover that the drunk encountered by Qwilleran on his first visit to Junktown is dead. Back in Mary's living room, Mary confesses that she has been having regular bad dreams about being responsible for Andy's death and reveals that there was no police investigation. When Qwilleran hints that the death might be murder, Mary becomes uncomfortable. This discomfort increases when the telephone suddenly rings and the caller hangs up when Qwilleran answers. Mary suggests that because a male voice answered, the friends most likely to call hung up. Qwilleran, however, senses that she is lying.

After a night of dreams about the Mackintosh Coat of Arms, after breakfast with Iris Cobb, in which she gossips about how Russell Patch was fired for drunkenness by Andy Glanz, and after discovering that both his toothbrush and the feather from his hat are missing, Qwilleran sets off exploring his new neighborhood. He finds himself drawn to a house at the end of the street, where he finds the Jaguar-driving Russell Patch at work on a refinishing project. As they talk, Patch reveals that he was not fired by Glanz for drinking, but quit because he could not work with Glanz' self-righteous integrity. He also reveals that C.C. Cobb had to pay a substantial fine after being caught by police removing furnishings from a repossessed home. Patch suggests that this situation was the result of Glanz informing the police of Cobb's intentions. After talking with Patch, Qwilleran talks with Arch Riker, telling him about the mystery surrounding Glanz' death. Riker tells him to not get involved and just write the nice and safe story about Christmas among the antique dealers. This makes Qwilleran all the more determined to find out the truth about Glanz' death.

As he continues his explorations of the neighborhood, Qwilleran has lunch with the proprietors of the Three Weird Sisters Antique shop. They are three daughters, Cluthra, Amberina, and Ivrene of the same mother but different fathers and named after exotic types of glass. While Qwilleran finds all three sisters beautiful but he finds the youngest nicknamed Ivy the most intriguing because of her apparent willingness and ability to speak what the other sisters perceive as uncomfortable truths. After being told by the sisters that Mary Duckworth wants to see him, he leaves, resolving to talk to Ivy alone later and realizing that he needs to consult with Koko. "There was a game they played," the author comments, "with the unabridged dictionary. The cat dug his claws into the



book, and Qwilleran opened to the page indicated, where the catchwords at the top of the columns usually offered some sort of useful clue.. a few months ago, Qwilleran had been credited with finding a stolen jade collection, but the credit belonged chiefly to Koko and Noah Webster." At the apartment, however, Qwilleran discovers that Koko does not want to play. As he puts the book away, the author describes how Koko is in fact more interested in watching Ben Nicholas outside in the yard. Meanwhile, Qwilleran discovers that Yum Yum has found a toothbrush, which he later realizes, however, has a different colored handle from the one he lost).

## Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

There are several clues and elements of foreshadowing in this section, all of which contribute in one way or another to Qwilleran's deepening interest in and understanding of the circumstances of Glanz' death. In this context, it is interesting to consider a standard rule not just of mystery writing but of writing in general that the more emphasis an idea, situation, character or comment gets, the more the author wants the reader to pay attention to it. It is important to note, however, that in the context of mystery stories, this attention can either be valid or a distraction, leading one to focus instead on the red herring.

Meanwhile, as the narrative is starting to explore previously concealed truths in relation to the plot, it continues to explore previously concealed truths in relation to its characters. The most noteworthy example here is Mary Duckworth, whose revelations of her true identity, while a potential clue to Glanz' death are noteworthy as a function of the book's primary thematic exploration, which is the relationship and tension between truth and illusion. This theme is also explored, almost in passing, by Riker's insistence that Qwilleran write his happy and safe Christmas story. This is an illusion that conceals the various darker truths that Qwilleran is coming to understand lies at the secret heart of Junktown.

Finally, this section defines the investigative relationship between Qwilleran and the cats even further. On the one hand, there is the game played with Koko, which can perhaps be seen as an authorial suggestion that what is instinctive and subconscious should not be rushed, but should instead simply be allowed. This idea is supported by the fact that Qwilleran misses the clue provided by Koko in the aftermath of the dictionary experiment, including the attention Koko pays to Ben Nicholas in the yard. In other words, Qwilleran is so focused on "making something happen" that he misses what is actually important. Meanwhile, YumYum plays her part in developing the man and cats relationship, and in the eventual resolution of the mystery, by bringing in the toothbrush. The toothbrush eventually becomes an important clue in revealing the truth of what is going on in the Cobb house.



# Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12

## Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Summary

When Qwilleran visits Mary, he is surprised to find that she is once again being cool and distant, saying she regrets being as honest as she was at their first meeting. His words and his presence however convince her to relax and she responds more openly to Qwilleran's questioning about the layout of Glanz' store and the arrangement of ladder and furniture when she found the body. She also reveals her frustration with getting respect from the civic government. She talks Qwilleran into purchasing the Mackintosh coat of arms but reluctantly rejects his invitation to dinner as she is dining with family. As he is taking the heavy coat of arms to his apartment, Qwilleran overhears an argument over the price of an antique between C.C. Cobb and someone who seems to be Russell Patch. After dropping off the coat of arms, Qwilleran goes out to interview another local dealer, the colorful and chatty Sylvia Katzenhide. As she is speaking well of Glanz' support for her and his gentlemanly nature, she inadvertently drops the hint that he was involved with a woman other than Miss Duckworth. She realizes however that she said too much and Qwilleran leaves, heading for the shop run by Ben Nicholas.

As he visits Ben's shop, Qwilleran is put off by the dealer's over-dramatic way of speaking, by the fact that the missing feather from his hat is now in Ben's, and by the rude behavior of a young and irritable customer asking for horse brasses. As he leaves, wondering how the feather got from his hat to Ben's, he is suddenly knocked to his knees by a sudden avalanche of snow from Ben's roof. Limping home to the apartment, he feeds the cats their supper and tries to find someone to dine with at the Press Club that night, but is unable to find a date. He goes to the Club anyway, bringing back some roast beef for the cats and noticing that of all the identical houses on the block, only Ben's roof lost its snow. He spends some time working on his Junktown story, only to be interrupted by the arrival of Iris Cobb, dressed and made. She is flirty and comes bearing fresh brownies and coffee. As they sit and chat, Iris reveals that her first husband died of "a rare botulism", and that she is able to tell fortunes through reading palms, convincing the reluctant Qwilleran to let her read his. Before she can actually get started however, they are distracted by the cats who chase each other around the apartment and knock over the cream and sugar that Iris had brought in with the coffee. As Iris runs to get a towel, the cats settle down, calm once again.

The next day, as he is nursing his injured knee, Qwilleran is invited to dinner at the Cobbs', where he witnesses the playful banter between husband and wife, including a playful argument about Iris having recorded C.C. snoring on a tape machine. He is also lectured by C.C. on how the city is making life difficult for the residents of Junktown to improve the area. After C.C. goes out to try to salvage some quality wood paneling from a soon-to-be abandoned house, Iris asks Qwilleran to see if the Daily Fluxion can help convince the city to let the citizens of Junktown hold a Christmas block party. Qwilleran agrees to try, and returns to his apartment, where he discovers evidence that someone



was in there. He suspects Ben Nicholas, but is told by Iris Cobb that no one else has a key.

Early the next morning, Qwilleran is awakened by Iris Cobb, who worriedly tells him C.C. did not come home. After taking a cab to the building C.C. was searching, they discover Cobb's car abandoned and C.C.'s body at the foot of a flight of stairs, crushed beneath a large piece of oak paneling. Iris cries out that he must have slipped and fallen down the stairs. Police arrive, having been tipped to their presence by their cab driver. When Qwilleran explains that he is a newspaperman, the police become less suspicious and ask him and Iris to accompany them to the station.

## Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

The most important element of this section is the introduction of a new angle to the mystery, the relationship between the people of Junktown and the civic government. This functions on a pair of important levels as a further means for defining the confrontational aggression of C.C. Cobb and as a foreshadowing of important movements in the relationship between Mary and Qwilleran. The latter is particularly important, in that those movements are important components of two of the narrative's key theme.

Meanwhile, while this section continues to introduce both legitimate clues and red herrings, there are two worthy of particular note. The first is the reference to horse brasses, which is an important piece of evidence that contributes substantially to Qwilleran's ultimate understanding of the truth about Glanz' murder. The second is the reference to the snow falling from Ben Nicholas' roof, a circumstance which, because it gets so much attention, seems to be quite significant, but the circumstances of which are never explained. On the one hand, it could be another red herring. On the other hand, however, because Ben Nicholas eventually turns out to be the murderer, there's the very real sense that the snow slide was not an accident, but in fact a deliberate attempt to sabotage the investigation.

Finally, two of the book's main subplots are developed further in this section. The first is the "city versus Junktown" plot, an interesting development that is developed through the character of C.C. but is eventually resolved through the character of Mary. The second subplot developed here is the "Qwilleran's loneliness" subplot, which is further defined through the reference to his inability to find someone to have dinner with him and also the reference to Iris Cobb's flirtatiousness. While this particular circumstance seems to suggest that Iris recognizes Qwilleran's need for companionship, there is also the possibility that her actions in fact suggest loneliness within her own marriage which, if true, adds an additional level of poignancy to her helpless sense of grief and loss at C.C.'s death. The point must be made that these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive and if considered together, make Iris a much more complex character than she first appears.



# Chapters 13, 14 and 15

## Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Summary

After the visit to the police station, Qwilleran leaves Iris in the care of Mary and calls Riker with the news of C.C.'s death. Conversation reveals that the house where he died was once the home of a former mayor. Riker also agrees to have the Fluxion do a story on the Block Party, and to send a photographer. Qwilleran does some research, and later tells Mary that Ellsworth was rumored to have left a substantial fortune hidden somewhere in the house. As they speculate that C.C. may have been searching for the fortune and that he may have been killed by another searcher, Mary reveals that C.C. had been having an affair with Cluthra who is one of the Three Weird Sisters. At the same time, Qwilleran notices that Mary seems happier and more relaxed than usual, but when he comments on it and asks why, she tells him she'll explain later. After Mary leaves, Qwilleran realizes that Koko has been leaving things for him, and surmises that they have come from under the bathtub, which he can't bend down and investigate just yet because of his injured knee. That afternoon, Qwilleran searches the Ellsworth House, and discovers evidence that suggests that "every dealer in Junktown had been through the Ellsworth house at one time or another." He also discovers two car-shaped patches of ground in the back of the house clear of the snow that fell the night of C.C.'s death. One, he surmises, was left by C.C.'s car, the other by the dealer who presumably killed him.

The next day, Qwilleran is visited by Hollis Prantz, who says that he has come to look for some old radios that C.C. Cobb had promised him. Qwilleran takes him up to the Cobb's apartment where, as Prantz searches the place, he casually asks about Prantz' footwear. After Prantz leaves, and after a brief conversation with Mary about him, Qwilleran leashes Koko and takes him on a search of the building. His first stop is Cobb's apartment followed by the attic and finally, ending up at Ben's apartment. Qwilleran seems to believe that Koko is again uninterested, but fails to notice the cat playing with the tassels on Ben's scarf.

Qwilleran attends a antique dealers' meeting in the attic, where he discovers that the pattern on the sole of Russell Patch's expensive boots matches one of the patterns he found in the dust on the floor of the Ellsworth house. After Patch lies about being at the house, the conversation reveals that Cluthra believes that Mary deliberately dropped an urn on her foot, breaking it. Plans for the block party are interrupted by a sudden blare of sound from the radio in the Cobb's apartment. Investigation suggests to Qwilleran that the radio was turned on by Koko. Later, Qwilleran is visited by Mary, who is greeted with distaste by Koko and pleasure by Qwilleran, as she's bringing a heat lamp to help heal his knee. Conversation reveals that on the night Andy died, the quarrel he had with Mary was triggered by her discovery of his relationship with Cluthra. Conversation also reveals that on the night of Andy's death, Mary found a twenty dollar bill at the scene, a bill folded in the same unique way as the bill Qwilleran found in his apartment. Finally, the conversation reveals Andy was completing a sale of the light fixture destroyed on



the night of his death, that the same night Mary saw Andy arguing with C.C. Cobb, and that she believes C.C. was the one making the threatening phone calls. This is the explanation for her happiness. She believes that with C.C.'s death, the phone calls will stop. As conversation concludes, Mary pleads with Qwilleran not to write about what he has learned, saying the publicity would ruin her in terms of both her business and her family. The near-kiss resulting from her pleas triggers an outburst of hissing and yowling from the cats.

## Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Analysis

Aside from the many physical clues revealed in this section including the markings on the floor of the Ellsworth house, the missed Koko clues and the informational clues, the mystery element most emphasized in this section is the Hollis Prantz sequence. Aside from being an apparently important clue in the mystery, the sequence is also an important component of the narrative's thematic consideration of the relationship between truth and illusion.

Meanwhile, at the end of Chapter 14, the narrative includes a reiteration of a possible sub-theme first stated in Chapter 8. This is the idea that the subconscious can neither be rushed or forced. Specifically, Qwilleran's leashing of Koko can be seen as a metaphoric attempt to "leash" his own subconscious and/or his deductive powers, to force insight rather than allowing it to happen. Here, again as in Chapter 8, the attempt leads not only to failure but to a kind of blindness, in which the truth hinted at by Koko is missed because Qwilleran is too busy focusing on both his intent and his reaction to that intent not being realized. In this context, it's interesting to consider the book's title. While this section contains a literal reference to that title, there is also the sense that his instinctive clue-indicating also turns "on and off", at least in Qwilleran's mind.

Finally, two of the book's primary themes such as truth versus illusion and trust are developed in this section, specifically in the conversations between Mary and Qwilleran. In terms of the first, the truth of Glanz' nature and of Mary's reaction to that nature, becomes even more apparent as does Mary's desperation to cling to her illusions about both Glanz and their relationship. This desperate need for illusion carries through into her pleas for Qwilleran to remain quiet about the truth of her identity. It seems that Mary is unprepared to face any of the truths about her life, which is a circumstance that in turn contributes to development of the trust theme. Simply put, as she becomes more and more able and comfortable enough to trust Qwilleran, she simultaneously becomes more comfortable with the idea of letting go of her illusions, with the result that by the end of the book, she becomes both trusting and able to face the truth. The suggestion made by this transformation, it seems, is that the truth can and should be trusted. This, in turn, can be seen as a facet of the book's third primary theme, relating to the inevitability of justice.





# Chapters 16, 17 and 18

## Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Summary

As Qwilleran plans his day, narration describes how the night before Qwilleran avoided telling Mary he would not write about the murder, but did promise that he "wouldn't do anything to hurt" her. He makes arrangements to go "scrounging" or searching abandoned buildings for potential antiques with Ben Nicholas and to visit Russell Patch to listen to his expensive sound system. He then drops in on Hollis Prantz, where he gets a sense that the fellow isn't all he seems, and has an innuendo-filled conversation with Ivy, which includes the suggestion that Iris Cobb murdered her first husband. Later that afternoon, Qwilleran visits the Fluxion offices where he is told by Riker that he has a good chance of winning the writing prize and that his investigations of the deaths in Junktown are to be on his own time. Finally, he visits yet another dealer, Mrs. McGuffey, who chats about the history of the Cobb House (built by an abolitionist, someone who supported the abolition of slavery) and who reveals that Andy Glanz was writing a novel, apparently based on characters and situations in Junktown. She also reveals that although Mary was desperate to read it, Mrs. McGuffey was the only one who did.

Qwilleran's efforts to track down the manuscript of the novel through Mary's connection with Glanz' lawyer end in failure, but his conversation with her about Hollis Prantz suggests that Prantz is on some level the fraud that Qwilleran thinks he is. On his way to visit Russell Patch, Qwilleran collects Koko, whom he wants to check out Patch's apartment. When two arrive, they are met by Patch and his roommate Stan, who is first introduced as a hairdresser but is later revealed to be active in the stock market, activity which is apparently the source of the money that pays for Patch's car and expensive stereo. Meanwhile, Patch's experiment with high pitched music, intended to test Koko's reaction, sends the cat into a frenzy that results in Qwilleran leaving early and taking the traumatized feline home. Later, as he is going out to meet first Cluthra and then Ben Nicholas, Qwilleran hears the cat howling and returns to take him along on at least his first visit.

Qwilleran visits the aggressively seductive Cluthra. Their increasingly uncomfortable conversation ends early when Cluthra reacts allergically to Koko but not before she reveals that the disappearing glasses Iris thought was the work of a ghost was actually C.C. Cobb playing tricks. After dropping Koko back at the apartment, Qwilleran then joins Ben Nicholas for their late night scrounge. They arrive at the Garrick Theatre, where Ben leads Qwilleran on a search for potential product. During their search, Qwilleran notices something important in the dust on the floor, but before narration explains what, he narrowly escapes falling through some failing railings. After leaving the theater, still shaken by his narrow escape (from what he believes was a booby trap), Qwilleran accompanies Ben to a local bar, The Lion's Tail. Ben buys a round of drinks for everyone there, which is an action that Qwilleran notes for three reasons. First, Ben pays for the drinks with bills folded in the same unique way as the bill found in Qwilleran's apartment. Secondly, the "buying a round" seems to happen often, and



three, costs more money than Ben seems able to afford. Finally, this leads Qwilleran to remember conversations with C.C. Cobb which hinted that Ben had a secret source of income. The author describes the evidence that Qwilleran found on the floor of the theater such as "feathery arabesques" that he believes were made by the tassels of Ben's scarf and which, it seems, matches the "feathery" markings on the floor of the Ellsworth House. Qwilleran then goes to bed, thinking about spending Christmas Eve at the Press Club with Mary, imagining how impressed people will be when he sees them walking in together, and congratulating himself on the idea he has for her Christmas present.

## Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Analysis

Particularly important clues and red herrings in this section include the references to the manuscript, to Holliz Prantz, to the death of Iris Cobb's first husband, and to money.

Meanwhile, the visit to the Garrick Theatre can be seen to manifest the book's thematic focus on the relationship between truth and illusion in a couple of ways. First, and perhaps most obviously, what happens during the visit can be seen as both a manifestation of the how the presence of truth can trigger desperation to preserve illusion. At the same time, the fact that the confrontation takes place in a theater can be seen as adding an additional layer of meaning. This is because theater is, and has been for centuries, been perceived as a place in which truth of human experience exists alongside the illusion of reality. One final point about the visit to the theater is that the fact that Qwilleran survives the attack can be seen as manifesting another of the book's key themes. This is the idea that justice, as a manifestation of truth, is inevitable. In other words, nothing can stop Qwilleran as an agent of both justice and truth from accomplishing his intention.





# Chapters 19 and 20

## Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

The day of the Junktown Block Party opens with bad weather that turns bright and sunny as the day wears on. Qwilleran takes a shift manning the Cobb's shop in Iris' continued absence, and in the process of making some good sales, encounters Riker's wife Rosie, an avid antique hunter searching for a Christmas present for her husband. Conversation reveals that Rosie and Arch were the couple meeting with Andy on the evening of his death, and that the chandelier they were looking at was different from the one found by Andy's body. That afternoon, after making some more sales, Qwilleran has a snack and a chat with Nicholas, at the end of which he discovers a long fair hair. Back at home, he calls Mary and asks her to come over.

Shortly after Ben leaves the house, Mary arrives. Qwilleran reveals that the hair found in Ben's apartment is from Yum Yum, and they discover a hidden compartment behind the bookshelf in Qwilleran's apartment. This was used to hide runaway slaves as they recall that the builder of the house was an abolitionist. After discussing how the cats probably went through the panel and found their way to Ben's apartment and back, Mary goes over Qwilleran's list of sales and inquiries, commenting on how strange some of them seem, referring particularly to the request for horse brasses, which she says no-one wants anymore. After she goes, Qwilleran jokingly asks the cats what they're going to show him next, and narration comments that the next morning, he was to find out. Find out he does, when Koko leads him to Glanz' manuscript hidden in the pot-bellied stove brought into his room by Iris Cobb.

## Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

At this point, as it draws closer to its thematic and narrative climaxes, the narrative picks up energy and momentum. In terms of the mystery, the pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together, with the result that both Qwilleran and the reader feel as though they're finally drawing close to an understanding of the truth of Glanz' murder. Particularly noteworthy clues are the conversation with Rosie Riker, the reference to horse brasses, and the manuscript.

Meanwhile, the unveiling of the truth of the mystery is, in fact, a manifestation of two of the book's three main themes. Layers of illusion and lies are being peeled away to reveal the truth, which itself is being made evident through newly discovered/presented facts, a course of action which from the beginning of the book (and due in part to its essential nature - see "Style - Structure") has seemed inevitable. At the same time, an important component of this process is the trust that Qwilleran and Mary are continuing to build with/between each other. There is the clear sense here that without that trust, Mary would not be as forthcoming or as frank with her insights and/or opinions. In short, this section functions with particular effectiveness to entwine theme and plot.

Finally, is there a comic irony in the fact that Glanz' manuscript is hidden in a stove? It is, when you think about it, a "hot" property.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Qwilleran reads Glanz' manuscript which, although badly written, is clearly based on the citizens of Junktown. His reading is interrupted first by a meeting at the Fluxion offices whose exact purpose is not revealed but which the reader can assume has to do with Mary's Christmas present. When Qwilleran returns home, further reading is interrupted by a conversation with Iris Cobb, who reveals that she had not been saving any radios for Hollis Prantz and who later sends her son Dennis to help Qwilleran move a new desk from the Cobb's shop into his apartment. Dennis also helps Qwilleran hang the Mackintosh coat of arms above the mantelpiece. Further reading of the manuscript reveals that one of the characters deals drugs out of his shop, triggering a train of thought in Qwilleran that leads him to deduce that the seekers of horse brasses he recently encountered (which, as discussed in the previous chapters, no-one really wants any more) are actually seeking drugs ... from Ben Nicholas.

The next day, Christmas Eve, Qwilleran prepares for a series of meetings and confrontations, the whole while being distracted by Koko, who keeps turning the lights on and off. Meanwhile, as he moves his office supplies into his new desk, he discovers the Cobbs' tape machine and tries to return it to Iris. When she says she does not want it, he takes it back to his apartment. The author then describes how Qwilleran's first attempt to find the horse brass drug dealer by sending a Fluxion copy boy incognito into Ben's shop ends in failure but how his investigations of Ben's car reveal that it is the right size and shape to fit the outline of the second car found at the Ellsworth house. When he returns to his apartment, Qwilleran discovers that the cats have brought him another clue, apparently from Ben's apartment such as a piece of folded foil. As he is opening it, he is first distracted by Koko stepping on the tape machine and starting it, filling the apartment with the sound of C.C. Cobb's snoring and then by the return of Ben Nicholas.

Qwilleran invites Ben in and as they chat, attempts to find out whether Ben was at the Ellsworth house on the night of C.C.'s death. Ben, however, does not rise to the bait. At that moment, Koko again steps on the tape machine and starts it running, playing back C.C.'s side of a late night conversation with Ben in which C.C. reveals that he has discovered Ben's practice of dealing drugs out of the Garrick Theatre and demands a share of the profits. A physical confrontation between Ben and Qwilleran ends with Qwilleran injuring his good knee and with the Mackintosh coat of arms mysteriously flying off the wall, skidding across the mantel, and knocking Ben to the floor.

After the police have taken Ben away, Mary comes over and Qwilleran explains how he deduced the nature of Ben's illegal activities and the source of his unusual prosperity from both Glanz' book and the physical evidence at the Ellsworth house. Qwilleran keeps to himself, however, the information that Hollis Prantz is in fact an undercover agent for the Narcotics Squad. Later, he explains that Andy Glanz was murdered by Ben



after revealing that Andy knew about Ben's drug dealing, and that the dead drunk was not murdered but died of natural causes. Finally, he gives Mary her Christmas present. He has made arrangements with the city, the Daily Fluxion, and her father to run a neighborhood improvement and preservation committee.

As Mary expresses her gratitude, Koko goes to the book-papered wall and starts clawing at the pages, revealing that they in fact conceal several hundred dollar bills. Conversation reveals that Andy had papered the walls and as Qwilleran suggests, used the book pages to hide "unreported income." Mary, her high ideals about Andy shattered, collapses into tears. As Qwilleran comforts her, Koko rubs against the light switch, and the room is plunged into an intimate darkness.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

As is traditionally the case in the final chapters of books of this genre, the final chapter of this book sees mysteries solved, truths revealed, and loose ends tied up. This section offers the emotional and narrative climax as the identity of Glanz' killer and the motivation for his actions are revealed, the meanings of most of the narrative's clues and red herrings are explained, and secrets are brought out into the open. It is important to note that in terms of the latter, it is not just bad secrets that are exposed such as the good secret of Qwilleran's plans for Mary's Christmas present, not to mention their mutual interest in each other is also uncovered.

Meanwhile, at the same time as the key components of the book's plot are unveiled, the narrative also emphasizes its thematic considerations, all of which are entwined with those of the plot. First, the book's consideration of truth versus illusion draws to a close with the revelation of several ultimate truths, particularly about the murder but also about the Qwilleran's Christmas present. The nature of that present, and the way in which Qwilleran presents it, offer Mary the opportunity to come out from behind the various illusions she has created around her identity and reveal the truth not only of who she is, but what she feels and wants to do about Junktown and its place in the community. This, in turn, also defines the final phase of the book's thematic exploration of trust, a situation that manifests on several levels. First, there are affirmations of Qwilleran's trust in himself and his abilities. Second, there are revealing affirmations of Qwilleran's trust in the cats. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are affirmations of the potential for and value of trust between Qwilleran and Mary.

Finally, there are several manifestations of the book's title in this section. Two are quite overt such as the description of Koko's turning on and off the light switch and the tape recorder. Another is more subtle such as the suggestion that Koko is responsible for the "turning off" of the Mackintosh coat of arms, that this small Siamese cat somehow got the large, heavy decoration off the wall, across the fireplace, and onto the suddenly dangerous Ben Nicholas. As suggested above, the "interferences" of the cats can come across as narratively convenient, but as also suggested in the consideration of the cats in "Characters", animals in general, and cats in particular, have traditionally been regarded as having a sixth sense. A key function of novels of this genre is to entertain.

The contributions of the cats to the solving of the mystery and Qwilleran's reactions to them simultaneously contribute powerfully to the potential for reader enjoyment.



# Characters

## Jim Qwilleran

Qwilleran, referred to by his last name throughout the book, is its central character and detective. The narrative does not go into extensive detail about his background. This is the third book in the series and the author seems to assume that the reader is at least passingly familiar with what has gone on in the character's life up to the point the narrative begins. Nevertheless, hints about who he was emerge in various conversations. He is an alcoholic who is divorced, unlucky in love, and lonely. Qwilleran is trying to rebuild his life after what seems to have been a significant period of dysfunction. As part of this process, he works in a job he feels is to some degree beneath him, writing what he thinks of as soft and feature-length stories of human interest for a small Midwestern town newspaper. This is in sharp contrast to the more sensational, compelling, and intense writing he did as a lead crime reporter in New York City.

Qwilleran also, again according to hints contained in various conversations, has a history of solving crimes. This is partly the result of his former job, partly due to his own curiosity and apparent talent for drawing confidences out of people, and partly thanks to the uncanny insights provided by his two allies, the cats Koko and YumYum.

All these characteristics combine to make Qwilleran almost an archetypal protagonist who is engaging, entertaining, multifaceted, and smart.

## Koko and YumYum

These two Siamese cats, Koko, a larger and dominant male and YumYum, a smaller and gentler female, are Qwilleran's allies in crime solving and are named after a pair of characters in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operetta, *The Mikado*. They are portrayed as having an almost psychic sense of both criminal activity and behavior and of the clues that Qwilleran needs to uncover the truth he's searching for. On the one hand, their perceptions and actions sometimes seem at least unlikely, at most convenient and authorial. On the other hand, the book and the style of its telling fit squarely into the mystery category that grounds its stories in realism only to a certain point. In other words, the focus is on entertainment and the cats are certainly entertaining. On the other hand, however, anyone who has had a cat or indeed a pet of any kind knows how psychic and insightful they can potentially be.

## Andrew Glanz

This character never actually appears in the narrative since his body is found dead before the narrative begins. He is however important on two levels. First, his life and



death are the prime motivators of the plot and this truth is a primary exploration of the book's central theme, relating to the tension between truth and illusion.

## **C.C. Cobb**

C.C. Cobb is the book's second murder victim who is killed in retaliation for his attempts to blackmail the murder. Portrayed as aggressive, confrontational, and outspoken, he is perhaps one of the few characters in the Junktown community who is who he says he is and acts without deceit.

## **Iris Cobb**

Iris is C.C.'s wife, a chatty, comfortable, and flirtatious woman who immediately takes interest in Qwilleran and starts treating him with an attention that is at times romantic and at times motherly. She, like her husband, is essentially who she appears to be, in spite of attempts by the author to portray her as the murderer of her first husband. In other words, this particular manifestation of the truth versus illusion theme manifests in what is known in the mystery writing and reading tradition as a "red herring" or false clue.

## **Mary Duckworth/Duxbury**

Mary is the first of Junktown's many antique dealers encountered by Qwilleran in his investigation of Andrew Glanz' murder. She is also determined to conceal the truth of who she is, of her relationship with the victim, and of her relationship with in the Junktown community. Her embodiment of the book's central theme of truth versus illusion is perhaps the most complicated and vivid of all the characters and suspects in the book.

## **Ben Nicholas**

The flamboyant Ben Nicholas is another Junktown dealer and as the ultimately revealed murderer is another vividly defined embodiment of the book's thematic focus on truth versus illusion.

## **Hollis Prantz**

Yet another dealer, Prantz is portrayed as being something of a fish out of water, ignorant and amateurish. As the narrative eventually reveals however, he is yet another embodiment of the truth versus illusion theme, although for completely different reasons than many of the other dealers.



## **Sylvia Katzenhide, Cluthra, Amberina and Ivrene, Mrs. McGuff**

These other dealers, unlike Ben Nicholas and Hollis Prantz but like the Cobbs, are essentially who they say they are. Their essential function is to provide information to Qwilleran, pointers to the truth that he uses to break through the illusions projected by Glanz, Duckworth, Nicholas, and others with a vested interest in preserving them.

## **Russell Patch**

The appropriately named Patch is a furniture restorer who surprisingly lives a life of apparent wealth and luxury while earning what many of the Junktown dealers refer to as the minimal living of the junk and antique industry. The narrative eventually reveals that his money comes from a character called Stan who is ostensibly his roommate but who is in fact, as the narrative hints heavily, his homosexual partner. Here again is another manifestation of the truth versus illusion theme, as is the heavy hint by Ivy that Patch dyes his hair.

## **Arch Riker**

Arch Riker is Qwilleran's friend, ally, colleague, and editor at the Daily Fluxion. No-nonsense and pragmatic, Riker is a voice of reason in Qwilleran's life and a voice that Qwilleran often ignores but nevertheless respects.

## **Rosie Riker**

Rosie is Arch's wife. She appears late in the action of the novel. She provides Qwilleran with an important clue about events on the night of Glanz' murder, a clue that is one of the key triggers of his final solving of the crime.





## Objects/Places

### Junktown

This is the name of the apparently run-down section of an unnamed "Midwestern community" that Qwilleran first passes through, then investigates and moves into.

### The Daily Fluxion

This is the small town newspaper where Qwilleran works as a writer of features. While he resents what he feels as a comedown in job prestige, over the course of the narrative he finds himself becoming more comfortable.

### The Blue Dragon Antique Shop, The Junkery, Three Weird Siste

These are the more narratively significant junk and antique stores in Junktown. Mary Duckworth owns The Blue Dragon and it is the place where Qwilleran finds and eventually purchases the Mackintosh Coat of Arms. The Junkery is owned and run by Iris and C.C. Cobb. It is in the same building as the apartment into which Qwilleran eventually moves and is the source for much of his furniture.

The Three Weird Sisters is run by three weird sisters, Cluthra, Amberina, and Ivrene. Ben Nicholas runs Bit O'Junk, while Sorta Camp is run by Sylvia Katzenhide. Piggin, Noggin, and Firkin is owned by Mrs. McGuffey while Tech-Tiques is owned by Hollis Prantz.

### Horse Brasses

These circular ornamentations, individualized with different designs, were once hung on the foreheads of the leather tack into which horses were harnessed. Out of fashion with horse owners and out of favor with antique collectors according to some dealers in Junktown, the term is actually more relevant to the action of the novel than the items. The term is, in fact, used as code for the drugs dealt by Ben Nicholas.

### The Mackintosh Coat of Arms

This large and heavy metalwork recreation of a traditional heraldic symbol for the Scottish Mackintosh family is first seen in Mary Duckworth's shop where Qwilleran is surprised to see how easily she lifts it. He eventually purchases the piece, takes it home, and places it over his mantelpiece. During a confrontation with Ben Nicholas, Qwilleran pushes this piece upon his opponent, effectively subduing him.



## **The Finial, the Shattered Chandelier, the Stepladder**

These three items are found at the scene of Andrew Glanz' death. All three are found near Glanz' body, apparently suggesting the cause of death. Glanz was on the ladder reaching for the chandelier when he fell and was impaled on the finial. Qwilleran eventually discovers that the entire scene was staged by murderer Ben Nicholas to cover up his actions. In other words, the finial, the chandelier, and the stepladder are all manifestations of the book's thematic focus on truth versus illusion. They are, in fact, components of an illusion constructed to obscure truth.

## **The Ellsworth House**

This location is where the body of C.C. Cobb is found. The house, once the property of a wealthy and eccentric mayor, is rumored to conceal his secret treasure. The rumor is, in the course of the narrative, neither proved nor disproved.

## **The Cobb House**

The home of C.C. and Iris Cobb, the house is the home to their shop called The Junkery and three apartments occupied by Cobbs, Ben Nicholas, and Qwilleran. A noted abolitionist built this home, which explains the hidden passage and secret room discovered by Koko and YumYum. This in turn, enables their discovery and revealing of clues that lead Qwilleran to the truth about Ben Nicholas' involvement in the murder.

## **The Feather from Qwilleran's Hat, the Folded Dollar Bill, th**

These are clues brought by Koko and YumYum through the secret passage from Ben Nicholas' apartment and found by Qwilleran in HIS, clues that eventually help him to uncover the truth of Nicholas' being the murderer. Of all of them, the folded foil is perhaps the most significant. While its contents are never actually identified, the implication is that the foil contains hard drugs. When Qwilleran discovers the foil in the same way as he discovers the clues, he has the final piece of the puzzle. This is evidence that Nicholas is a drug dealer.

## **The Pot Bellied Stove, Glanz' Manuscript**

During the course of the investigation, several witnesses tell Qwilleran that Andrew Glanz was writing a novel based on characters and situations and circumstances in Junktown. When Qwilleran discovers the manuscript in the pot-bellied stove brought to his apartment by Iris Cobb, he also discovers some previously hidden truths. These include the truth about Glanz and about members of the community.

## **The Garrick Theatre and The Lion's Tail**

These two establishments are settings for Qwilleran's discovery of key points of evidence in the case for Ben Nicholas as murderer of Andrew Glanz and C.C. Cobb. The run-down Garrick Theatre, named after legendary British actor David Garrick, is where he discovers visual evidence or marks on the floor similar to those he found in the Ellsworth House of Nicholas' guilt. It is also where Qwilleran almost dies in the collapse of an unstable floor, an accident later attributed to the fearful Nicholas. The Lion's Tail is a nearby pub where Nicholas evidently spends a great deal of time and money, frequently buying rounds of drinks for the patrons that all evidence suggests he cannot really afford. Qwilleran's presence at such a buying spree and his observation that Nicholas pays for it with the kind of uniquely folded money Qwilleran found in his apartment are among the final pieces of the puzzle of truth Qwilleran is putting together in response to the murder.

# Themes

## Truth vs. Illusion

As is arguably the case with most narratives of the genre of murder mysteries, the tension between truth and illusion is the book's primary theme. On the most apparent level, the theme is explored through Qwilleran's search for the truth buried beneath the illusions of lies and alibis, mysteries and denials, put forward by the other characters in order to protect themselves from suspicion. In other words, plot and theme are intertwined with the former dramatizing the latter and the latter motivating the former.

On another level, the theme of truth versus illusion plays out through the narrative's exploration of the life of the murder victim, Andrew Glanz. Several times, over the course of his investigation, Qwilleran encounters individuals who speak of Glanz in glowing terms, referring to his generosity, compassion, and integrity. As the investigation progresses however, Qwilleran uncovers the truth of who Glanz was. Glanz was interfering, self-righteous, and ruthless. Several other characters also embody this theme.

Finally, there are significant layers of interplay between truth and illusion in Junktown. First, there is the way the area is differently perceived by the community at large as a hotbed of crime versus how the citizens perceive it as a quaint, victimized, and intimate community. This also contracts in turn with what it truly is as the setting for a drug dealer's business. In other words, what the citizens of the area believe to be an illusion turns out to be the truth, while what they believe to be the truth turns out, in fact, to be an illusion. This is an intriguing irony, to say the least. Also, there is truth versus illusion in the nature of the businesses established in the community. As several characters point out, those businesses rely for their success on their owners' ability to convince customers that what they see such as an illusion of antiquity-defined value is in fact truth. In other words, the owners create the illusion in order to conceal the junky truth.

## The Inevitability of Justice

An important component of the truth versus illusion theme, here and in most other books of the mystery genre, is the idea that uncovering the truth is inevitable. In other words, justice will be served.

Over the decades, analysts of the genre have suggested that its popularity is the result of its tradition that killers are almost always caught. This tradition, according to those analysts, speaks to a fundamental human need for an experience of order in a day to day existence that, in many ways and for many people, is entirely DIS-ordered. In other words, when justice is served at the end of a mystery novel, the reader feels a sense of satisfaction and rightness that feels inevitable, reasonable, and above all meaningful. In other words, once truth is revealed and justice served, order is restored, a chain of



events that seems, on some unconscious and archetypal level to address a fundamental human need for things to simply make sense and to be and feel right.

The way the genre in general, and this example of the genre in particular, portrays a sense of relief, of freedom, and of returning normality tends to lend credibility to this idea. In this specific case, both Qwilleran and Mary respond to the revelation of the truth with celebration that, for them, seems to lead to a further revelation of truth such as their desire for each other and for the freedom to celebrate that desire that justice's inevitable course has enabled for them.

## Trust

There are three main manifestations of this theme, one defined by the book's genre and two by relationships of the central character.

In terms of the former, the theme of trust actually manifests at first in its opposite, mistrust and doubt. Qwilleran, like almost any detective in any story of the genre, starts out mistrusting everyone and everything, questioning and examining and considering people and facts and relationships and circumstances until he can be sure they can be trusted. Trust then builds upon trust until Qwilleran inevitably discovers the core of truth beneath the layers of untrustworthy lies and illusions he has had to sift through. It is interesting, meanwhile, to note that over the course of his investigation, almost everyone automatically trusts him. This is a convenient situation commented upon several times in the text.

In terms of the latter two manifestations of this theme, Qwilleran starts his journey out of mistrust with complete trust in his two allies, Koko and YumYum. That trust, while sometimes is timed inappropriately, ultimately proves essentially sound where the actions of the cats not only lead him to inevitable truth but also save his life. A related manifestation of trust is Qwilleran's trust in himself, both as a writer and as an investigator. It is quite worthy of note that nowhere in the book does he express doubt or uncertainty that he will get to the truth of Andrew Glanz. Finally, there is the mutual trust that grows between Qwilleran and Mary Duckworth.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is recounted from the third-person point of view of Qwilleran, who is the central character and a detective. The narrative focuses solely on his experiences, insights, and reactions with those of the other characters perceived and described according to his outlook.

There are two levels of meaning to consider here. The first is more technical, in that this point of view gives the reader a chance to essentially investigate alongside the detective, to see and hear and come to understand in the same way, with the same tools, and drawing the same conclusions. In short, it is a point of view that draws the reader in. The second level of meaning, on the other hand, is more thematic than technical in relevance where the point of view is defined by character as opposed to narrative technique.

To be specific, at the beginning of the story Qwilleran has a particular point of view on Junktown and on the culture of antiquing in general, an opinion that is at best ignorant and at its worst, simply downright negative. Over the course of his investigation, however, not only does he uncover the truth about the murder, but he also uncovers truths about how the inhabitants of Junktown feel about their community and what takes place there. In other words, he discovers the depths of their passion and commitment, and comes to respect both them and their beliefs. His point of view can be seen as evolving and yet another manifestation in the book of the way in which illusions are peeled away to reveal the deeper and sometimes surprising truths underneath.

## Setting

The book's primary setting, Junktown, is potentially familiar to many readers. The community-within-a-community, with its collection of run-down old buildings, junk and antique shops, and colorfully eccentric characters is almost archetypal in its portrayal of a part of an otherwise prosperous town that seems to have been neglected and forgotten. It could even be seen as another evocation of the book's central theme, which is a kind of truth portraying the almost-seediness that often exists within a physical and psychological stone's throw of middle and upper middle class urban prosperity. It is interesting to note how the community within which Junktown exists remains unnamed, although it is identified as being in the Midwestern United States and being significantly smaller than Qwilleran's former home in New York City. This adds to the sense of the setting's universality and the sense that it really could be anywhere.

Meanwhile, an important point to consider about the setting is the community's name, which can be seen as having three levels of meaning. The first is related to the collection of business that has made their home there. It has become a home to dealers



of "junk" or antiques. On a second level, and as the narrative eventually reveals, the community has also become a home to at least one dealer of another form of "junk" such as hard drugs. Finally, although the narrative never explicitly makes the point, there is also the sense that the term refers to the buildings and citizens of the community, all of which are viewed as "junk" by civic government and administrators. Finally, there is the book's setting in time in winter, and in the days leading up to Christmas.

## Language and Meaning

The primary use of language and meaning in this book, as it is with many books of this genre, is to draw the reader into the story. This is done in several ways. First, the writer shapes words and images to draw the reader's attention to clues, either actual or fake instances. Second, the author offers just enough information so that meaning expressed through dialogue, action and circumstance is simultaneously ambiguous and truthful. Third, the author shapes structure such as chapter to chapter, paragraph to paragraph, and line by line to heighten the reader's attention and curiosity. In the case of this particular book, one of its strengths is how it often accomplishes these three goals without drawing too much attention to the way it happens. Clues, actions, circumstances, and experiences are on various occasions revealed almost in passing without being specifically spelled out.

There are two other important points about the language used in this particular book. The first is that while the writer employs a substantial vocabulary, there is the general sense that the language used is accessible and casual. There is not a lot of self-conscious intellectualism here, with even the words that some might say are "big" words fitting into their context with grace and ease. The second is that there is also a substantial humor component here. There are several occasions where character and situation, not to mention the interaction between the two, are described in such a fashion as to be quite funny. Again, this is characteristic of many of the most successful examples of the genre, a manifestation of its apparent primary intent to entertain.

## Structure

The book's structure is essentially linear and straightforward, following the pattern of other similar novels in the genre through the establishment of the situation, revelation of a dead body, investigation of the death, revelation of the truth, and repercussions of the revelation. Most of the narrative is taken up with the third structural stage, the investigation. Here, as in most books of the genre, discovery leads to discovery, interpretation to interpretation, insight to insight. In other words, structure is a manifestation of plot, and vice-versa through the steady, step by step progression into a core experience of truth.

A related, and genre-related point about structure is that there is a sense of inevitability about the narrative and that no matter what happens the truth will be uncovered and

justice will be served. This feeling of unavoidable and inescapable, truth is, in its way, a manifestation of the book's central themes, which are the tension between truth and illusion and the inevitability of justice. This means that structure is not only a manifestation of plot, but that it is simultaneously a manifestation of theme as well.

A final structural element worthy of consideration is its chapter by chapter structure and specifically, the way many of the chapters conclude with a clue, an insight, a piece of information, or a narrative hint that draws the reader further into the mystery. Again, this is a technique common to most, if not all books of the genre and indeed to books in general, the sense that events, and the narrative of those events, is shaped in order to maximize the potential for bringing a reader actively and eagerly into both the mystery and its inevitable resolution.





## Quotes

"Without much hope [the editor] had searched the faces of the assembled staffers: the paunchy columnists, the cadaverous critics, Qwilleran on general assignment, and the specialist who handled travel, hobbies, aviation, real estate, and gardening" (pg. 6.)

"He had done Skid Row assignments in the past, and he know how to proceed: quit shaving-pick up some ratty clothes-get to know the people in the dives and on the street-and then listen" (pg. 7.)

"The newsman was convinced that Junktown was something less than real. This was the enchanted palace in the depths of the dark forest" (pg. 14.)

"Qwilleran...had a talent for sincerity that had drawn confidences from the most reticent persons" (pg. 34.)

"You're just like everyone else! You think an old neighborhood that's run down is a hotbed of crime. It's not true! We don't have any trouble" (pg. 43.)

"Between paragraphs...a pair of piercing eyes kept boring into his consciousness. He knew that kind of stare. It indicated one of two things. The elegant Miss Duckworth was either myopic-or frightened" (pg. 44.)

"... [Qwilleran] touched his moustache gingerly. There was an odd feeling in the roots of it - a tingling sensation he had experienced several times before, It always happened when there was murder in the air." p. 46

"There's something mystic about antiques. It's more than intrinsic value or beauty or age. An object that has been owned and cherished by other human beings for centuries develops a personality of its own that reaches out to you. It's like an old friend" (pg. 50.)

"Qwilleran's mind went to Koko and Yum Yum-lucky cats, asleep on their cushions, warm and well fed, with no weather to weather, no deadlines to meet, no decisions to make" (pg. 72.)

"There was something about the man's mustache that convinced people of his sincerity. Other mustaches might be villainous or supercilious or pathetic, but the outcropping on Qwilleran's upper lip inspired trust" (pg. 76.)

"When the right customer meets the right antique, something electric happens-like falling in love. I can see sparks between you and that piece of iron" (pg. 81.)

"They lie, Qwilleran thought. All these dealers lie. They're all actors, unable to tell reality from fantasy" (pg. 123.)



"No-one ever owns a cat...you share a common habitation on a basis of equal rights and mutual respect-although somehow the cat always comes out ahead of the deal. Siamese particularly have a way of getting the upper hand" (pg. 128.)

"At the Daily Fluxion that afternoon, Qwilleran walked into the Feature Department with its even rows of modern metal desks that had always looked so orderly and serene, and suddenly he found the scene cold, sterile, monotonous, and without character" (pg. 141.)

"...the long forlorn howl behind the closed door tore at his heart. As he went down the stairs, the cries became louder and more piteous...the cat needed him" (pg. 150.)

"It was a brilliant idea-so brilliant that he sat up in bed. And if the Daily Fluxion would cooperate, it would save Junktown" (pg. 159.)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss any experiences you might have had with a pet in which they have indicated unusual insight and intuition.

In what ways do the mystery's many suspects embody its central thematic exploration of truth versus illusion? Consider particularly Mary Duckworth, Hollis Prantz, and Ben Nicholas.

Consider and discuss, section by section, the various characters, actions and circumstances pointed out by the author. Which elements draw the attention of the reader to genuine clues and which are so-called "red herrings," or false clues? Explore the relationship between the latter and the former. What do you think are the genuine clues that the false clues are attempting to distract the reader from?

Also section by section, consider and discuss ways in which actions and reactions of the various characters dramatize two of the narrative's primary thematic considerations. They are the tension between truth and illusion and the value of trust.

In what ways is the book's thematic consideration of trust played out in the relationships between Mary and Qwilleran and between Mary and Andrew Glanz? In what ways does the latter experience define the former?

Discuss ways in which the book's setting during winter, and in particular around Christmas, can be seen in relation to its themes, and also to the state of mind/feeling of its central character, Qwilleran. Consider the symbolic meanings of both winter and Christmas as well as the literal circumstances of that time of year.

Discuss your response to the book's thematic consideration of the nature of justice. Do you believe the revelation of truth and the triumph of justice is inevitable? Why or why not? As ideals, are either/both reasonable or unreasonable? Place your discussion in the context of both your ideals and experiences of truth and of justice.