

# **Devil in a Blue Dress Study Guide**

## **Devil in a Blue Dress by Walter Mosley**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Devil in a Blue Dress Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Social Sensitivity.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Key Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>



## Plot Summary

*Devil in a Blue Dress* by Walter Mosley takes place in Los Angeles following World War II. The main character, Easy Rawlins, has just been fired from his job at an airplane manufacturing plant. Feeling squeezed financially and afraid to forfeit his humble home, Easy agrees to work for an unsavory white man named DeWitt Albright. Easy's old friend from Texas, a former boxer named Joppy, arranges the first meeting between Easy and Albright.

Albright hires Easy to find a beautiful white woman named Daphne Monet on behalf of a client who was Daphne's lover before the couple had a falling out. Easy begins his search for the woman at John's place, a former speakeasy that is popular among blacks who migrated from the South. Outside the bar, a white man who will later be identified as Richard McGee, tries to get Easy to help him gain entrance to the bar. Inside the bar, Easy talks with his friend, Odell Jones, and a mean-spirited acquaintance named Junior Fornay. Later, Easy goes home with his former coworker Dupree and Dupree's date, Coretta. While Dupree sleeps off a hangover in the bedroom, Easy and Coretta become intimate in the living room. Coretta tells Easy that Daphne Monet is her friend, and he asks Coretta questions about the white woman. She agrees to make contact with Daphne on Easy's behalf, for a small fee.

Later that morning, Easy returns home to find a letter from his old friend Mouse, an extremely violent man. Mouse, who has been kicked out of the house by his wife in Houston, says that he wants to visit L.A. Easy fears seeing Mouse again, because he still feels guilty for not stopping Mouse from murdering Mouse's stepfather years earlier.

Two white cops arrest Easy for Coretta's murder and rough him up before letting him go for lack of evidence. Outside the police station, Easy is accosted by a man riding in a chauffeured car. The man, named Teran, is famous for recently dropping out of a mayoral race. He has a small, filthy boy in the car with him, and it is obvious to Easy that Teran is engaging in unwholesome activities with the child.

Easy receives a call from Daphne Monet, who tells Easy that she heard from her friend Coretta that he was looking for her. She convinces him to drive her to a friend's house. When he meets Daphne, Easy thinks she is even prettier than her picture. Daphne's friend turns out to be Richard McGee, whom Easy and Daphne find dead on his bed.

Albright and two of his thugs visit Easy at his home and threaten to do him harm for not reporting everything he has learned about Daphne. Easy reluctantly tells Albright that he has seen her. Albright then orders Easy to track down Daphne's companion, Frank Green.

Easy visits Todd Carter, the jilted lover who hired Albright to find Daphne. Carter, a prominent investment banker, tells Easy that he still loves Daphne, even though she stole thirty-thousand dollars of bank funds from his home. Easy realizes that Albright wants to get his hands on Carter's stolen money.



Easy begins looking for information about Frank Green, a hijacker who deals in stolen liquor. He visits a gangster bar, a liquor store, a brothel, and a barbershop. Easy pretends that he wants to learn how to buy liquor in bulk. After several days, Frank Green appears at Easy's house to find out why Easy has been asking about him all over town. Frank almost kills Easy with a knife, but Mouse steps out from Easy's kitchen and chases Frank out of the house. Easy is surprised to see his old friend again and he puts him to work on the case, making Mouse promise not to kill anyone.

The police pick up Easy again. This time they are blaming him for Richard McGee's murder. Easy gets released after his fingerprints prove a poor match for the ones found on the murder weapon.

Easy and Mouse visit Dupree, who has just been released from jail after several days of questioning about Coretta's death. Mouse drinks heavily and threatens to shoot Easy before falling asleep. Easy takes one of Mouse's guns and heads home. There he receives a call from Daphne. Easy picks her up from her room at a motel and takes her to his friend Primo, who has a hotel with a private cottage in the back. Daphne and Easy spend the night there making love. The next day, they get to know each other better over lunch at a Chinese diner.

When Easy and Daphne return to the cottage, Albright is there with Joppy, who knocks Easy unconscious. When he wakes up, the two men and Daphne are gone. Easy tracks them down to Albright's home address, which is listed in the phone book. Through the window Easy sees Albright and Joppy getting rough with Daphne. They threaten to hurt her if she doesn't tell them where the stolen money is.

Easy jumps through the open window and exchanges gunfire with Albright. Joppy escapes but gets captured and tied up by Mouse, who runs in and shoots Albright. Mouse explains that he had been following Albright all day since seeing him break into Easy's house. Mouse demands that Daphne share the loot between the three of them. To scare her into submission he shoots Joppy. He also exposes Daphne's secret: She is a fair-skinned black woman and the half-sister of Frank Green.

Easy, Mouse and Daphne drive to the YWCA locker where she has hidden the stash and split the money three ways. Later, Easy waits with Daphne as she catches a taxi to leave town. She tells Easy that she can no longer be with him since he knows her secret.

The next day Easy visits Carter and demands help to convince the police of his innocence as a reward for saving Daphne's life. Easy also threatens to expose Daphne's secret if Carter doesn't help him. Carter helps get the cases against Easy dropped, whereupon Easy tells the police he knows that Junior killed McGee.

In the final chapter, Easy tends his flower garden while chatting with his guest, Odell. He tells Odell that he has invested in a rental property and started working as a private detective.



## Chapters 1-2 Summary

The novel begins in a Joppy's bar, a black Los Angeles watering hole, in 1948. Most of the patrons are butchers, whose smell keeps other patrons out. A white man wearing a white linen suit and a Panama straw hat walks in. but looks out of place. Joppy, who is working behind the bar, suddenly seems uncharacteristically nervous and deferential.

The narrator, Easy, is drinking at the bar. Easy's only dealings with white men have occurred during World War II in Europe. Joppy introduces the man in the white suit to Easy as Mr. Albright. Joppy explains to Albright that Easy comes from Houston and was just let by Champion Aircraft. Albright, who has a southern drawl, expresses sympathy and offers Easy a job.

Albright's line of work is hazy. A former lawyer, he now makes a living out of doing favors for friends, and for "friends of friends." He wants Easy to help him find someone. Easy is at first reluctant, but Albright reminds Easy that he has a mortgage to pay. Albright advises Easy to talk it over with Joppy and then meet him at his office after seven o'clock.

Easy notices that the white man leaves the bar without paying for his drink. Joppy does not protest.

Joppy assures Easy that Albright isn't a gangster, but rather a "businessman" who sometimes deals outside the law. He says that Easy might even learn something from Albright. When Easy asks what kind of business does, Joppy answers, "Whatever the market can bear."

Easy is jealous of Joppy's success as a business owner. Even though his bar is never full, Joppy has enough regular customers to make it a business someone would be willing to buy if he needed to sell. However, Easy is proud of owning his own home, which has several fruit trees. Owning a home makes him feel "just as good as any white man."

Easy feels nervous about getting involved with Albright, because the white man reminds him of Mouse, a dangerous, charming "businessman" from Houston. Joppy promises that if Easy starts to get a bad feeling about Albright, all he needs to do is talk to Joppy and Joppy will help fix the situation.

## Chapters 1-2 Analysis

From their first meeting, Easy has no illusions about Albright's character. His distrust is obvious from the way he describes Albright's handshake: "His grip was strong but slithery, like a snake coiling around my hand." When Albright talks about the coldness of big businesses in relation to Easy's job loss, Easy sees through the fake empathy. Easy cuts off Albright's speech and tells him that his employment problem is his own business.



On the other hand, Easy shows no skepticism about Joppy, who is an old friend from Houston. Yet to the objective observer, Joppy's dialogue seems as insincere as Albright's. He brags to Albright at great length about Easy's qualifications as a war hero, as though trying to sell Easy. When Easy asks Joppy whether Albright is a gangster, Joppy implausibly says that Albright is simply a "businessman." Joppy's remarks in the opening chapters foreshadow his role as a deceitful figure later in the book.

### Chapter 3 Summary

Easy drives back to his beloved house, which is so tiny it has just three rooms. Dewitt Albright, a big man who seems full of violence, scares Easy. However, Easy is even more afraid of losing his house.

At Albright's office building, Easy encounters a white security guard. Flustered by the man's skin color and authority, Easy initially finds it difficult to explain why he is there. Finally, the guard leads Easy through a courtyard and into the basement of the building. Two men, who appear to be an "India Indian" and a Chinaman, guard Albright's office. They want to pat Easy down to check him for weapons, but Easy refuses. Mr. Albright steps out and tells the men to let Easy in anyway.

Albright keeps a bottle of Wild Turkey on his desk. Easy notices that he keeps a gun under his arm in a white leather shoulder holster. Albright asks Easy to find Daphne Monet, a beautiful white woman who frequents jazz clubs in Watts. Albright says this is a favor for a friend of his, a man who has had a falling out with Monet but wants to reconcile. He assures Easy that no harm will come to the woman, and he gives Easy one hundred dollars to start.

Before Easy leaves Albright's office, the white man tells him stories about his past. These prove that Albright knows what it is like to kill a man face to face.

### Chapter 3 Analysis

When Easy first met Albright, he noticed the white man's snakelike grip. In chapter three, Mosley continues to allude to the Biblical account of man's fall. Easy's home is his paradise, complete with a yard of flowerbeds and fruit trees. In Albright's office, Easy is struck by the fact that his all-white ensemble, which could connote purity, is spoiled by a large black pistol hidden in a shoulder holster. Instead of forbidden fruit, Albright tempts Easy with a bottle of whiskey.

### Chapters 4-5 Summary

Easy starts his search at John's place, a bar without a liquor license at Central Avenue and Eighty-ninth Place. The entrance to the bar is on the back wall of a small grocery store. In the store, a large white man offers Easy \$20 to help him get into the bar, but Easy says that a "no" at John's is final.



Hattie, the woman behind the candy counter, charges Easy to get into the club, and she tells him that "Holiday" played there the previous week. On that same night, Hattie says, a chauffeur named Howard Green was beaten to death outside the bar, after leaving to do some "business."

John's place is populated by southern Negroes who moved to L.A. after the war. Junior Fornay, a man from Houston, says hello to Easy. Easy tells him that he got fired from Champion for refusing to work an extra shift. Easy buys Junior a beer, and Junior tells him that Howard Green had been doing some illegal work for a recent mayoral candidate, Matthew Teran. Teran had suddenly dropped out of the race without explanation. Junior reminisces about a time that he almost killed Easy in a drunken rage, until Mouse pulled Junior off. He notes that Mouse is now married to EttaMae.

Easy remembers the last time he saw Mouse was four years ago in Houston. After bumping into each other on the street, Easy and Mouse drank all night in Myrtle's saloon. Mouse tells Easy that Navrochet, the real son of Mouse's stepfather (whom Mouse killed), pulled a gun on Mouse. Mouse opened his pants and urinated on Navrochet's shoes. Then he took advantage of Navrochet's shock and shot him. In this flashback from four years earlier, Mouse's story convinces Easy that he needs to find someplace else to live, so Easy leaves Texas the next day.

At John's place, Easy notices that Frank Green, a known gangster and hijacker, is dressed all in black. Easy speculates that Frank will be stealing liquor or cigarettes from a delivery truck tonight.

Easy asks Junior whether he has seen a white girl named something like Delia or Dahlia. (Easy doesn't say "Daphne," because he doesn't want to make it obvious that he knows much about the woman.) Junior doesn't let on that he has, and Easy goes to sit near the band.

Easy sits next to Odell Jones, a quiet, religious man who is nonetheless a regular at the bar. A big man in blue pinstripes and a ten-gallon hat shouts a hello to Easy. He is Dupree, a machinist at the Champion plant. Dupree is on a date with a small, quiet, buxom woman named Coretta. He tells Easy that the boss regrets firing him and advises Easy to ask for his job back.

## Chapters 4-5 Summary

Chapters four and five serve to set the scene of Easy's Los Angeles. It is a dark, gritty milieu populated by Southern blacks who enjoy jazz and liquor. Before Easy enters John's place, he learns that a man has been murdered there in recent days. This knowledge gives the bar a sinister edge, which is heightened by the presence of "Knifehands" Frank Green. Unlike Albright, who dresses in a color indicating purity, Frank advertises his criminal ways with an all-black hijacker's uniform.



## Chapters 6-7 Summary

Easy helps Coretta take Dupree back to her place. As he sleeps in the bed, Coretta and Easy talk and drink on the sofa. Coretta moves closer to Easy and shows him her breasts, but Easy turns her down. Before he leaves the apartment, though, Coretta tells him that she knows Daphne. Then she straddles Easy on the couch and tells him the name of Daphne's boyfriend. In return, she gets him to tell her why he is looking for Daphne. Coretta makes him promise to give her a ten-dollar reward when he finds the white woman.

Easy gets home and checks his mail. There is a letter from Mouse. Easy is scared and reads the letter in his closet. Mouse says that EttaMae has thrown him out for cheating on her with a woman named Lucinda. He notes that their son LaMarque is big and beautiful. Mouse says that he wants to come and visit Easy. Easy recalls that he and Mouse grew up as best friends.

Easy's thoughts take the form of a flashback. Before his marriage, Mouse gets Easy to drive him, in a stolen car, to a distant town to ask his stepfather for the inheritance Mouse's mother promised him before her death. Mouse and a young man named Clifton hold up Reese, the stepfather, and Reese shoots Clifton dead, before Mouse shoots Reese and takes his thousand dollars. Although Easy plays no part in the crime, Mouse tells him what happened and gives Easy three-hundred dollars of the money. Easy accepts the "blood money" out of fear that Mouse will kill Easy if he expresses disapproval. Right after that, Easy joins the army as a way to get out of Houston.

Leaving his thoughts of the past, Easy notes that the letter carries a postmark from two weeks earlier. He spends the day drinking and staring out his front window. He decides to pretend that the letter never arrived and hope that EttaMae has let Mouse move back into his home.

That night, Easy gets a call from Albright. Easy tells him that he knows where Daphne is, and the two men arrange to meet at the merry-go-round on the Santa Monica pier an hour later.

## Chapters 6-7 Analysis

In chapter 6, Mosley presents the fallibility of Easy's character. He is easily seduced by Coretta once she sets her attention on him. While engaging in intimate activities with Coretta, Easy remains sharply aware that he is betraying his friend Dupree. Easy's ability to discern right action from wrong will distinguish him from other characters in the novel.

Chapter 7 provides the reader an introduction to Mouse, a character that acts as a foil to Easy. Whereas Easy is basically a virtuous person, Mouse acts beyond the bounds of right and wrong. Easy has killed men in war out of necessity, but Mouse has killed for personal gain and even relished the violence. Easy and Mouse have such opposite natures that their close friendship seems mysterious. Mosley does not trace the start of





Easy and Mouse's boyhood relations, so the reader is left to wonder what aspects of Mouse's personality might have initially attracted Easy.

## Chapters 8-9 Summary

Easy is unhappy about going to Santa Monica at night, because it is a white community. At the pier, he tries to avoid the white kids and "any ugliness," but a teenage girl approaches him. She says her name is Barbara Moskowitz and that she is Jewish. A boy named Herman yells at Easy for talking to her. A bunch of white boys then circle him, waving sticks. Suddenly Mr. Albright appears and threatens to kill Herman and shoot off the other boys' testicles. He makes Herman get down on his knees and apologize before letting the kids go.

Albright drives Easy down the coast in his white Cadillac. Easy, who has no doubt that Albright would have killed the kids at the pier, tells him that Daphne is probably with a man named Frank Green, who lives at Skyler and Eighty-third. Easy says that Frank is a gangster that hijacks liquor and cigarettes and then sells the stolen goods. Albright asks for Daphne's photograph. Easy lies and says that he left it at home by mistake. Albright gives him one hundred dollars and a card containing an address where Easy can find more work.

Easy shows up at his old workplace, a hangar where airplanes are constructed in Santa Monica. He sees Dupree, who says that Coretta is missing.

Easy meets with Mr. Benny Giacomo, his former boss. Benny expects him to apologize and ask to be rehired, but Easy is too proud to do that. He tells Benny that he needs the work, but he also says that Mr. Giacomo should show respect. In fact, Easy demands to be called "Mr Rawlins." He leaves without a job.

## Chapters 8-9 Analysis

Chapters 8 and 9 are united by their location - Santa Monica - and the discomfort that Easy feels when confronting white people there. Easy's interactions with Dewitt Albright and Benny Giacomo illustrate his own feelings about skin color. Easy treats the fair-skinned Albright more deferentially than he does Giacomo, who has the dark skin of a full-blooded Italian. After being threatened and feeling powerless at the Santa Monica Pier, Easy takes out his frustration on his former boss, a white man who feels less threatening because Easy sees that Giacomo's skin color is not much lighter than his own.

## Chapter 10 Summary

Easy gets home by noon and sees two white men in a Ford across the street. They are cops, and they are aggressive. The policemen, named Miller and Mason, handcuff Easy and drive him to a police station. In between beatings, the cops question Easy about where he went on Thursday morning after he left Coretta's apartment. Easy tells them



that he was home sleeping off a hangover. Finally, after Easy sleeps for a long time alone in a cell, the cops let him go.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Mosley places some meaningful symbolism in chapter 10. In the holding cell, Easy looks out the window and grows entranced by oleander leaves. They represent his separation from Paradise and his quiet, innocent former life. Mosley also notices that a line of ants is heading toward a dead mouse. The rodent's carcass is in the corner of the cell, so Easy figures that it was trying to escape through a crevice in the floor when a previous prisoner smashed it with his foot. Easy notes that the mouse looks as though it has been dead for several days, since about the time that Easy got fired. Clearly the mouse represents Easy and the ants stand for Albright and the police, who are tearing down Easy's spirit, which is already deflated from the loss of his job.

## Chapters 11-12 Summary

Easy leaves the police station and starts to walk to John's place, which is fifteen blocks away. A long black Cadillac pulls up to Easy, and its white driver tells Easy that someone in the back of the car wants to talk to him. The driver offers Easy fifty dollars and a ride to wherever he wants to go. Easy refuses to get into the car until the driver tells him that his passenger will tell Easy why the cops questioned him.

As Easy enters the car, he is stung by foul body odours. The passenger is a fat white man, Matthew Teran, the man who abruptly dropped out the mayor's race. Easy recognizes Teran from the newspaper. Teran keeps a little Mexican boy who wears soiled underpants on his lap. He asks Easy where Daphne Monet is and says that it means a lot to him to find her. Then Teran asks Easy whether he knows Howard Green and whether Dupree or Coretta told Easy anything about Daphne. Teran ignores Easy's questions about why the cops had picked him up. He offers Easy some bills, but Easy refuses the money because it smells like Teran.

At John's, Easy learns that Coretta has been murdered, beaten almost beyond recognition. Odell gives Easy a ride home and advises Easy to get out of town for a "vacation." Easy decides that he can't leave his beautiful home.

That night Easy has trouble falling asleep because he sees Coretta whenever he closes his eyes. At four o'clock in the morning, he receives a call from Junior, who says he just remembered he saw Daphne last week with Frank Green.

Easy falls back to sleep but is soon wakened by a call from Daphne Monet. She speaks with an accent similar to French, saying that Coretta came and mentioned that Easy was looking for her. If Daphne wouldn't give her twenty dollars, Coretta said she would tell Easy where to find her. Daphne says that she gave Coretta her only money, and now her "friend" Frank Green is gone. Easy denies that he was on a search for Daphne. She tells him that she wants to see another man, a friend of Frank's, who may help her



find him. Easy refuses to drive her, but he promises to go to Daphne's apartment and give her money so that she can take a cab.

## Chapters 11-12 Analysis

In chapter 12 Easy has a dream that shows his innocence and his heart's desire. He dreams that he a boy again, fishing for giant catfish. He remembers that his mother told him that even the alligators knew to leave the giant catfish alone. In the dream, Easy catches one of the fish. When the phone rings, he calls to his mother to answer the phone. Of course, Easy's mother is not there to answer it. Easy's dream has taken him back in time to his youth, so that when he wakes he is still emotionally a boy at home with his mother. The catfish could represent a number of characters in the novel whom Easy hopes to "catch" or gain dominion. Easy wants to grab hold of Daphne to complete his assignment for Albright, but he also wants to gain the upper hand in dealings with powerful white men such as Miller, Mason, Giacomo, and Albright.

## Chapters 13 Summary

Easy meets Daphne at her home, a duplex that used to be half of a larger single-family home. Easy finds her extremely beautiful, even better looking than in her picture. She reaches out to touch the bruises on Easy's face and offers to clean them for him. She convinces Easy to drive her to her friend Richard's house, saying that she is afraid to go alone in a taxi. Before they leave, she grabs what she says is Richard's suitcase.

Easy drives Daphne to a small A-frame house in Hollywood. They see that the door is open. They find Richard lying in his bed, dead with a butcher's knife in his chest. Easy recognizes him as the drunken white man he had met in front of John's place. Easy crouches down, trying not to gag, when he sees something on the floor and picks it up in his handkerchief.

As soon as Richard is found dead, Daphne's French accent switches off. She goes to the carport and pushes Richard's suitcase into the trunk of a pink Studebaker. Daphne says that they need to get away before the police arrive. She plans to abandon the car and take a bus to somewhere far away. Then she gives Easy a long, deep kiss.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Daphne Monet's home is decorated with brown carpets, a brown sofa, a brown chair, brown walls and brown curtains. Her decorating scheme serves as a symbol for her interest in brown-skinned African Americans. The only object that is not brown, a gilded coffee table topped by clear glass, represents Daphne's transparently phoney persona, which includes the fake French accent that disappears in her panic after finding Richard McGee's dead body.



## Chapters 14-15 Summary

Easy gets advice from a voice in his head, a voice that comes to him when times are hardest. The voice tells Easy that he needs to stop letting people walk all over him, that he can't run away, and that he must find out what happened to the dead people. It urges him to "bide his time" and "take advantage" when he can.

Easy recalls that the first time he heard the voice was in the Army. Initially during the war he served in a desk job, doing statistics work. Later he volunteered for action in response to comments by some white soldiers that it was the "white boys that were saving Europe." In a racially mixed regiment, blacks, whites, and even Japanese-Americans learned to fight alongside each other with respect, if not genuine appreciation.

When Easy first heard the voice he was outside Normandy, trapped in a barn by a sniper that has already killed his buddies. The voice told Easy that he needs to wait until nightfall and then find the gunman and kill him. Easy did that and survived the war.

Easy arrives home to find that a white Cadillac is parked outside. Manny and Shariff stand outside his door, and inside Mr. Albright has made himself some coffee. Albright wants information. His attitude toward Easy has changed from pleasant to menacing, and he reminds Easy that Easy "belongs" to him. Albright threatens to kill Easy, and the voice in Easy's head counsels him to bide his time.

Easy spills all he knows about meeting Daphne and finding the dead man in his Hollywood home. Albright asks whether Daphne had a brown suitcase and seems relieved when Easy says that she did. Easy tells him that Daphne put the suitcase in the Studebaker.

Albright thinks that Frank Green will be the key to finding Daphne again. He tells Easy that if he can find Frank, their dealings will be finished. Easy figures that Albright plans to kill Easy once he completes this task. He agrees to find Frank on the condition that Albright gives him another hundred dollars.

## Chapters 14-15 Analysis

Mosley makes it clear in chapter 15 that Easy is gaining strength as a character. When Easy first met Albright in his office, he felt intimidated and had a sense that he must accept the whiskey that Albright offered him. In this chapter, after Albright has broken into Easy's house and threatened to kill him, Easy nonetheless stands up to Albright. Albright orders Easy to get him some whiskey, but Easy tells him to get it himself. He is guided to say that by the voice in his head. Albright is surprised by Easy's response and praises him for being a "brave man."



## Chapters 16-17 Summary

Easy sleeps all day and into the evening, having nightmares about death and violence. When he awakens, he runs to the telephone and thinks about whom he can call. He decides against Joppy and Odell and calls Mouse's wife instead. He asks Etta where he can find Mouse, but she says she doesn't know because they have broken up. Still frightened, Easy sits at the front window and stares at his apple tree until he falls asleep again.

Easy received a business card from DeWitt Albright that says "MAXIM BAXTER/Personnel Director/Lion Investments." Easy puts on his best suit and heads to the company's office. He recognizes the name Carter, who Daphne had spoken to him about, on a company plaque. Two elderly female secretaries refuse to let Easy talk to Mr. Baxter and demand to know his reason for the visit. Easy tells them that he has news for Mr. Todd Carter, the company's president, which he would like to convey through Mr. Baxter on behalf of Mr. DeWitt Albright. The secretaries demand more information, so Easy tells them that he has been hired to find the girlfriend that ditched Mr. Carter.

Mr. Baxter, the vice-president, escorts Easy into his office and tells him that he should send his employment application via the postal service. Easy tells him that he needs to talk to Carter or else Carter may be running Lion from a jail cell soon. Easy doesn't know what he means by that, but the statement shocks Baxter into calling Carter.

Easy takes a private elevator up to Carter's huge office, which has a massive desk, couches and a crystal decanter filled with expensive brandy. Easy explains the murder of Coretta and how he and Daphne found a dead man's body. Carter says that he loves Daphne and wants to marry her. He says that Daphne stole thirty thousand dollars in bank funds from his home, but that he forgives her for that. He says that some people were blackmailing Daphne to attack his reputation but refuses to say what they "have on her." Carter tells Easy that Richard McGee, the dead man, was a blackmailer and a homosexual pimp who dealt in young boys for wealthy pedophiles. Carter also tells Easy that Daphne comes from a New Orleans family that traces its ancestry back to Napoleon.

Carter speaks to Easy as though they are best friends. He tells Easy that he loves Daphne and will do anything to get her back. Carter offers Easy one thousand dollars to find her. He gives Easy what he has on hand - one hundred and seventy-some dollars - as a retainer.

## Chapters 16-17 Analysis

Throughout the novel Easy has worried that the man for whom he is finding Daphne will do her harm, but Carter seems incapable of violence to her. He loves Daphne without constraint, even though she stole a colossal sum of money from him. Easy is initially impressed that Carter shares his feelings to Easy like a buddy, but then he realizes that Carter could be talking to a lapdog. He is so far beyond worrying about power that he



treats everyone as an inferior, regardless of race. Easy notes that he prefers the reactions of white men who are at least threatened enough by Easy to treat him with disrespect.

## Chapter 18 Summary

Easy looks for Frank Green. Since Frank deals in liquor, Easy starts with a place that sells it, Ricardo's Pool Room. Ricardo's is a hangout for criminals that Easy has visited with Joppy a few times. Easy asks for whiskey, and the manager, Rosetta, advises him to go to a real bar instead. He says that Joppy sent him there to get some whiskey, and Rosetta tells him to go to Frank Green for wholesale liquor deals. She says she hasn't seen Frank for a few days.

Easy then goes to Vernie's, a whorehouse. There he orders a bottle of liquor and pretends to be amazed by how cheap it is. Darcie, the hostess, says that someone else does the buying.

At the brothel, Easy drinks with his friend Ronald, a thirty-four-year-old man with nine sons and a wife who doesn't believe in birth control. Ronald gets drunk and protests when Easy drives him home. When they get to Ronald's house, his pregnant wife opens the door carrying two babies and surrounded by young boys. Easy realizes that Ronald doesn't stand a chance of happiness with that brood.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

In chapter 18, Easy's character transforms from a person who does things because he has to into a character who chooses his own actions. He says that his two days of looking for Frank are what turn him into a detective. Easy seems to start enjoying the hunt for Frank. In this chapter, he focuses more on his own cleverness in getting people to talk about Frank than on the inherent danger in searching for a known killer whose nickname is "Knifehands."

## Chapters 19-20 Summary

Even though it is Wednesday and not Thursday, his regular day for a haircut, Easy decides to go to the barbershop and dig up information on Frank Green. Outside the barbershop stands Zeppo, a half Negro, half Italian palsied drunk. Ernest, the barber, plays Italian operas for Zeppo, out of pity for him.

While Easy is getting his hair cut, two men, Jackson and Lenny, get into a fight over a woman. Ernest threatens them with a straight razor, and Easy quickly leaves without getting his shave. Jackson, who happens to be an employee of Frank Green, joins Easy, and they duck down an alley to avoid Lenny. Zeppo walks into the alley and asks Jackson whether he is selling. Jackson says that Frank has gotten too big for a small employee like himself, and Easy says that's a shame because he wanted to buy a





couple of cases for a party he plans to throw. Jackson seems suspicious of Easy, but he agrees to take Zeppo and Easy to a place where they can buy liquor at a discount.

Jackson takes Zeppo and Easy to Abe's liquor store, which is owned by Abe and Johnny, two Jews who survived Auschwitz. Easy remembers the sight of concentration camp prisoners after they were liberated after the war. He recounts a story about a forty-six pound twelve-year-old boy who was saved by a Sergeant Vincent LeRoy, who carried him on his back to the evacuation center. Vincent and the other men gave the boy chocolate and sweets, and the boy quickly died from overindulging in rich food.

From Jackson, Easy learns that Frank delivers to Abe's on Thursdays. Easy puts a deposit on two cases of whiskey and says that he will have to pick them up on Thursday. After some haggling, Easy agrees to come on Friday instead, so that the store won't lose its inventory by Thursday. Jackson seems sceptical that Easy is really having a party, but Easy invites him to come over to his party that Saturday night.

## Chapters 19-20 Analysis

Easy's memory of the young concentration camp survivor is one of the most poignant passages in the novel. Until this chapter, the narrator has referred to World War II only to show how fighting toughened his character. The reader learns, however, that memories of the war made Easy open the caring part of his soul. Throughout the novel, Easy's concern for others is a defining feature that is as evident as his toughness.

## Chapter 21 Summary

Easy stops by Joppy's bar and tells him that he knows Joppy had Daphne call him. Joppy admits it and tells Easy that when Albright asked him about Daphne he recognized her right away as the girl who often came in with Frank Green when he was delivering liquor. He says that he had set Easy up to work with Albright, because he didn't want to mess with Frank Green himself. Joppy reminds Easy that he advised him not to look too hard for Daphne. Joppy says that he referred Daphne to Easy when she called *him* wanting a ride to her friend's house a few nights earlier.

Easy decides that he needs to track down Frank and tell him about Carter's reward money. When he gets home, he realizes that the gate isn't double latched, as it usually is. Then his head explodes as he suddenly gets knocked down by Frank Green. Frank says he has heard Easy's been looking for him all over town. Easy offers to give him five hundred of Carter's money and then increases it to seven-fifty.

Frank presses a blade into Easy's throat and prepares to kill him. Suddenly Easy hears Mouse's voice saying hello to Frank, whom he hasn't seen for ten years. Mouse has a pistol drawn toward Frank's head, so Frank lets Easy go. Mouse wants to just kill Frank, but Easy wants to ask him questions. He asks where Daphne is, but Frank makes it clear that he will die before giving away that information. Easy stops Mouse from shooting Frank as Frank runs from the house.



Mouse offers to help Easy, but Easy tells Mouse that he is afraid to get mixed up with him again. He says that he feels guilty for Mouse's previous actions, so Mouse agrees to do only what Easy tells him to do. They plan for Mouse to track Frank. Easy also tells him how to find Albright, Odell, and Joppy if necessary.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

After many mentions throughout the book, Mouse finally appears in this chapter. Whereas Easy's descriptions focus on Mouse's sinister lawlessness, he enters the action as a welcomed *deus ex machina*. If it weren't for Mouse's entrance in chapter 21, the hero would be dead and the novel would be over. By setting the plot in this manner, Mosley creates goodwill toward Mouse on the part of the reader, who wants the story to continue.

## Chapters 22-23 Summary

Easy tells Mouse almost everything. He doesn't share the fact that Daphne possesses thirty thousand stolen dollars, and he doesn't name the rich white man who wants to find her. Easy warns Mouse that Frank Green is dangerous with a knife. However, Mouse isn't afraid of Frank.

In the morning, Mason and Miller stop by Easy's house. Mouse says that he was just about to leave and explains to the cops that he has visited Easy to pick up some money Easy owed him. The policemen ask Mouse where he lives and works. Mouse lies easily, giving them the name Navrochet and two Los Angeles addresses. Thinking that they can track him down later, Mason and Miller let Mouse leave.

The policemen interrogate Easy in his home. They ask him what he knows about Richard McGee, Howard Green, and Matthew Teran. They tell Easy that on the night Easy was arrested, Teran called the precinct to ask the police whether they had found the killer of his driver, Howard Green. The police inform Easy that Teran has been found dead with a bullet wound. Miller tells Easy that they will take his fingerprint and see if it matches the print on the knife that was found in Richard McGee's chest.

At the police station, Easy gets fingerprinted and then interrogated some more. He worries that the police will try to frame him for McGee's murder. Finally, in the afternoon, the results of the fingerprint test arrive, proving Easy is innocent.

Mouse, who has hot-wired Easy's car, picks him outside the police station. He tells Easy that he knows where Dupree is staying, but Easy wants to stop somewhere before paying Dupree a visit.

Easy and Mouse stop at Junior Fornay's apartment. Easy takes out his handkerchief and shows Junior the Zapatas cigarette that he found on the floor of McGee's house. Easy says that he knows Junior killed the man, since he is the only person cheap enough to smoke Mexican cigarettes.





Under threat of being killed by Mouse, Junior confesses that he killed McGee. He says that he drove the white man home after he passed out on the pavement in front of John's bar. McGee paid him one hundred dollars for information on where to find Daphne but rescinded the offer unless Junior would also pass a message to Frank Green. Afraid of Frank, Fornay refused. Then McGee left the other room; Junior figured McGee was planning to kill him, so he killed McGee first. Fornay tells Easy that the secret McGee wanted to pass to Daphne involved some knowledge he had that could be used against her. Easy is disgusted by Fornay, and the voice in his head says that Fornay doesn't deserve to live.

### **Chapters 22-23 Analysis**

Junior Fornay mentioned earlier in the book that he would have killed Easy back in Houston if Mouse had not interceded. Now again Mouse works to create a positive outcome between the two men. Junior is in several ways a foil for Easy's character. He lacks Easy's courage, good sense, and penchant for just action. The fact that Easy is able to connect Junior to McGee's murder illustrates the hero's cunning and his promise as a private detective.

### **Chapters 24-25 Summary**

Easy and Mouse visit Dupree, who is staying with his sister, Bula, in Compton. Dupree has no information on Coretta's death, and he swears that he will kill her murderer. Bula's whiskey flows freely, and by the end of the evening everyone is drunk. Mouse challenges Easy to a contest to see who can draw his gun and shoot the other faster. Easy tells him that he has no gun, and Mouse says that's reason enough to shoot him. But then Mouse falls asleep. Easy takes one of Mouse's smaller pistols and leaves him a note to let him know he has it.

When he gets home, Easy receives a phone call from Daphne. She needs to talk to him, so Easy agrees to pick her up at a motel. He leaves a note for Mouse to let him know that he can be found at the hotel of a friend named Primo.

At the Sunrise Motel, Easy convinces the Mexican Indian woman at the front desk to tell him Daphne's room number, but she tells him that entering a lady's room is against motel policy. Daphne greets him at the door in a bath towel and gets him to take her rent money to the motel's landlady.

Easy drives Daphne to Primo's establishment. It is a dilapidated old mansion that serves as a hotel. Easy and Primo, who is Mexican, know each other from working together as gardeners. Primo rents Easy a little house behind the mansion. In the cottage, Daphne focuses on the cut in Easy's neck that he got from Frank and the bruises on his face from the police. She soothingly undresses him to give him a bath.



## Chapters 24-25 Analysis

In chapter 25, Mosley returns to the Garden of Eden motif. Primo, who is a gardener by trade, has surrounded the coach house with flowering bushes, honeysuckle, snapdragons, and passion fruit. These plants are fitting adornments to the setting, because here Easy will receive the greatest temptation of the novel. The cottage itself is decorated to give the occupants a false sense of security. It is basically a glass house, lined with many windows. Yet long white curtains make Daphne and Easy believe that they are in a place that is private and isolated.

## Chapters 26-27 Summary

After bathing Easy, Daphne urinates in front of him and then makes love to him. She says that she loves to make his body hurt. In the afternoon, after a long night of intimacy, Easy begins asking Daphne questions about Albright and the dead people. Daphne explains that Teran gave up his mayoral campaign because Todd Carter would not bless his candidacy. Carter's opinion matters a great deal because of his wealth and influence. She says that Richard McGee, who had sold a little Mexican boy to Teran, was her former boyfriend. According to Daphne, Teran, Howard Green and McGee were working against her to trouble Carter. Daphne says that Joppy killed Howard Green because she had offered him one thousand dollars to make sure that Albright didn't find her. She figures that he killed Coretta because Coretta was helping Easy find Daphne. Easy realizes that what she says is true, because Joppy possesses the strength and violence to beat people to death.

Daphne says that she cannot explain her relationship with Frank Green and that she loves Carter too much to be with him. Easy tells her that Carter will pay him one thousand dollars to have her back, so she offers Easy two thousand to bring her to Frank. She tells Easy that she has loved him since first sight.

Easy and Daphne go to a Chinese diner for lunch. Seeing her in her blue dress, he decides that he loves her a little bit, too. She tells him a story about going to the zoo as a fourteen-year-old girl with her father. They see zebras mating, and later, in the car, her father kisses her like a lover. All year they go to the zoo and act like lovers, and then the father leaves the family and is never heard from again. She says that he had to leave because he knew her too well, and she says that she also had to leave Carter because he knew her too well.

Returning to Primo's, Easy thinks that Daphne is too deep for him. He decides to extricate himself from her and get his money from Carter as soon as possible. When he and Daphne enter the cottage, Easy gets greeted by Albright and hit on the head.

## Chapters 26-27 Analysis

In these chapters, Easy learns that Daphne has a secret terrible enough that Teran used it to wreck her fiancy, Todd Carter. Her strange story of going to the zoo with her



father provides clues to Daphne's secret. The story involves animals that are black and white, the threat of incest, and a family member who goes missing. Easy may think that Daphne is too deep for comprehension, but the reader is likely to suspect the nature of Daphne's secret at this point.

## Chapters 28-29 Summary

Easy revives when Primo pours a bucket of water over him. Primo says that he had let Easy's friend Joppy and a white man in a white suit wait for him at the cottage. He says that they took the girl. Easy can't find Mouse and feels directionless without him. The voice in Easy's head tells him to sneak up on Joppy and Albright. Easy looks for them at Joppy's place and at Albright's office before heading toward Albright's house in the Malibu Hills.

Looking through the window of Albright's house, Easy sees DeWitt and Joppy standing over Daphne, who is naked on the couch. The men are threatening to hurt her if she doesn't tell them where the stolen money is. Easy enters the room but before he can shoot, Albright senses him and starts shooting in Easy's direction. Joppy flees through the back door. Mouse, who enters through that door, shoots Albright in the back. Albright hurls himself out through a window.

Easy hugs Mouse gratefully. Mouse explains that he saw Albright leaving Easy's house and followed him all day. Mouse shows Easy that Joppy is tied up in the kitchen. Then he demands that Daphne, whom he calls Ruby, give him some of her loot.

Mouse informs Daphne that Frank was beaten to death by Joppy. She crumples at the news. Easy is surprised to learn that Daphne and Frank are half-siblings.

Daphne refuses to give up her money, so to prove how dangerous he is, Mouse shoots Joppy in the groin. Then he shoots him in the head before walking out the front door, expecting Daphne and Easy to follow him.

Daphne asks Easy if she can use his gun to kill Mouse, but he says no. Easy places Mouse's jammed pistol in Joppy's hand to confuse the police. As Mouse, Easy and Daphne drive away, Easy asks Daphne whether she killed Teran and she admits that she did, after trying to buy him off and seeing him put his hand in the Mexican boy's drawers. She says that she brought the boy to her place.

Daphne has the bag in a locker at the YWCA. Mouse splits the cash evenly among the three of them. . As Easy waits with Daphne for her to catch a cab, she tells him to keep his hands off her, since now he knows that she is black. She says that her father molested her repeatedly until Frank killed him. She makes Easy promise to bury Frank and to take care of the Mexican boy.

Later, Easy asks why Mouse killed Joppy, and he answers that Joppy was the cause of all of Easy's pain. Mouse confesses that he killed Frank to keep him from killing Easy.



Mouse tells Easy that Easy is just like Daphne, because he tries to live by white people's rules.

### **Chapters 28-29 Analysis**

The violence that has been foreshadowed in Easy's memories from Houston and from Mouse's drunken threat to shoot Easy comes to fruition at last. Although he acts without regard to the law, Mouse is not the lawless man that Easy imagines. Mouse operates within an internal ethical framework, only killing Joppy and Frank Green out of his affection for Easy. Whereas Easy acts as a rule-follower under the oppression of white men's guidelines, Mouse does not let himself be ruled by a society that has given his race no voice in creating laws.

### **Chapters 30-31 Summary**

Dewitt's dead body is found slumped over his steering wheel near Santa Barbara. At Daphne's apartment, Easy finds the boy in the dirty underwear eating from a bag of flour. He brings the boy to Primo, who already has a big family and is a good father to his children.

Easy visits Todd Carter to tell him Daphne has left town and that the police will keep interrogating him as their only suspect. Easy adds that he will have to break down and tell them that Daphne is a black woman. Easy says that she will likely kill herself if her secret makes the newspapers. He asks Carter to use his City Hall connections and help him stay out of jail as a reward for Easy's helping Daphne escape with her life.

That afternoon Easy and Carter meet with the chief of police and the deputy mayor. Easy tells the story he has prepared. He says that Albright hired him to find Frank and Howard Green, two suspects in the thirty-thousand-dollar theft. He claims that the two men, who in fact just happened to have the same surname, were cousins. The Greens, Easy says, were hired by Teran to steal money from Carter in revenge for Carter's making him pull out of the race for mayor. According to Easy, Joppy killed them and their associate Coretta to get to the money. Easy says that he got this information from Albright.

On the way out of City Hall, Easy runs into Mason and Miller, who threaten to arrest him every other day if he doesn't tell them who killed Richard McGee. He advises them to test Junior Fornay against the fingerprint.

Three months later, Easy waters his flowers as Odell sips a beer. Odell asks how Easy can survive without a job. Easy tells him that he has been working as a private detective and that he has become a landlord, renting a second house that he bought on auction.

Easy asks Odell what he thinks of turning in one man for one crime but not another man, who has committed many crimes. Odell says that he figures one of the guys just has bad luck, and the two men laugh.



## Chapters 30-31 Analysis

The novel could have ended with Easy enjoying a visit with Mouse, a violent criminal, or with Dupree, a friend who makes poor choices regarding money and women. However, Easy shares his garden and beer with "deacon" Odell, a sensible man of peace and good citizenship. In this final scene, Mosley leaves the impression that Easy will continue on the path of careful thought and right action.



# Characters

## Easy Rawlins

Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins is the protagonist of the novel. He is a twenty-eight -year old black man from Texas who now resides in Los Angeles. Easy's circle of acquaintances is small in L.A. and he interacts mainly with other Southern black transplants, including many people he knew in Texas. The events of the novel force Easy to widen his circle of acquaintances to include white people and gangsters of various ethnic backgrounds.

Easy enlisted in the U.S. military and served for five years in Europe during World War II. His wartime experiences left Easy with the knowledge of what it means to kill another human being and an awareness of how white men act during times of distress. At the end of the war, Easy took part in liberating Jewish survivors from concentration camps, and this experience gave him a heightened sense of empathy toward humanity.

Easy is smart and ambitious. He recently completed his high school degree in night school. Easy was employed by Champion Aircraft until two days before the start of the novel, but got fired from that job when he refused to work overtime. Although Easy's boss acknowledges that he is a top worker, Easy turns his back on the job because he feels that he does not receive a sufficient amount of respect.

During the course of the novel, Easy develops his skills as a private detective. He learns how to find information through subtle questioning and hones his skills at predicting what violent men may do. Easy is guided in his detective work by a voice that serves to guide his actions and avoid getting killed.

Mosley does not describe Easy's appearance. However, it can be inferred that he is an attractive man. Women, including Daphne and Coretta, find Easy irresistible and aggressively pursue sexual relations with him. Easy has only minor qualms about getting involved with women who should be "off limits." Coretta is his friend's girlfriend, and Daphne's fiancy has hired Easy to find her. Easy also refers to a sexual relationship he had with his best friend Mouse's wife shortly before they were married.

## Joppy Shag

Joppy Shag, a former heavyweight boxer in his late forties, runs a bar in Los Angeles. Joppy's bar is on one floor of a butchers' warehouse, and the smell of his butcher patrons keeps non-butchers away. Joppy's uncle owned a bar in Houston, and he retired at the same time that Joppy started his bar. Joppy placed his uncle's old marble bar in his establishment, and he views it as a lucky charm. Joppy has hands like catchers' mitts, and his biceps strain the sleeves of any shirt. His face shows the wear and tear of old boxing matches.



## Mr. Albright

Dewitt Albright is a former lawyer from Georgia. He has strawberry-blond hair and the palest eyes Easy has ever seen. He wears an off-white linen suit, a Panama straw hat, bone shoes and white socks. He always carries a gun in a holster under his shoulder. Mr. Albright speaks with the light drawl of a well-to-do Southern gentleman.

## Manny

Manny works for Albright and guards his office. He is possibly Chinese, but his origin is unknown because he was raised in a Jersey City orphanage.

## Shariff

Shariff works for Albright, and he tries to frisk Easy when Easy visits Albright's office. He has very dark skin, like an East India.

## Mouse

Easy grew up with Mouse, and they were best friends. However, Mouse has a mean streak and a capacity for violence that scares him. Mouse's nickname comes from his rodent-like facial features. He killed his stepfather and a man named Joe T. Mouse gets kicked out his home by his wife, EllaMae, for failing to shower after being unfaithful to her. He and EllaMae have a young son.

## Frank Green

Frank Green is a gangster and a hijacker. He robs trucks carrying liquor and cigarettes and then sells the stolen items on the black market. Green is known as "Knifehand" because he is quick to pull a knife and is ready to cut down any man he meets.

## Hattie Parsons

Hattie Parsons is a thin woman with watery eyes who runs the counter at the corner grocery that serves as a front to John's place. She decides who gets let into the bar and who stays out.

## Junior Fornay

Junior Fornay and Easy fought once back in Houston, but they are on friendly terms now. Easy probably would have died during their fight if Mouse hadn't pulled Junior off him. Junior smokes Mexican cigarettes called Zapatas and frequents John's place.



## Odell Jones

Odell Jones is a quiet, religious man. He serves as a school janitor. His head is the shape and color of a red pecan. Odell always wears an old gray tweed jacket and threadbare brown wool pants. He is about fifty years old.

## Dupree

Dupree, a 62-year-old muscular man, is big and friendly. He is book smart but always poor from spending money on women and liquor. Dupree worked with Easy at the Champion plant. In spite of his lucrative job as a machinist, Dupree has been kicked out his apartment for not paying rent.

## Coretta

Coretta is a buxom, short, quiet woman. She says that she always has at least two boyfriends. She is very attentive to men. Coretta gives Easy information on Daphne Monet as she gets intimate with him at her apartment, while her date sleeps off his hangover in the next room.

## Benny Giacomo

Benny is Easy's old boss at the Champion plant. He fires Easy for not agreeing to work overtime. Benny makes his employees call him "Mr. Giacomo," but, according to Easy, he does not give his workers much respect in return. He has dark skin and salt-and-pepper hair. He has closely set eyes and hunched shoulders.

## Mason and Miller

Mason and Miller are two policemen who bring Easy in for questioning after the deaths of Coretta and Richard McGee. They are brutal and racist. They tell Easy that a "nigger" should not expect gentle questioning.

## Daphne Monet

Daphne Monet is a beautiful white-skinned woman who prefers the company of blacks. She has very pale brown hair and eyes that seem to change from green to blue. She wears French dresses and speaks with an adopted French accent. Her eyes are closely set - a fact that causes her to look vulnerable. Daphne smells like Ivory soap.



## Rosetta

Rosetta tends bar at Ricardo's Pool Room, a deadly hangout for criminals. Her husband, Ricardo, stays upstairs drinking since losing both his legs to diabetes, and her son hustles opponents at the pool table. Rosetta warns Easy to stay out of Ricardo's.



## Objects/Places

### Joppy's Marble Bar

The top of Joppy's bar consists of a marble slab. Joppy inherited it from his uncle, who also owned a bar. The marble bar is precious to Joppy, and he polishes it with a rag frequently.

### Easy's Trees

Easy's tiny house has a yard with fruit trees, including an avocado tree, an apple tree, a pomegranate tree, and a banana tree. It makes Easy proud to know that he owns those trees and their fruit.

### Albright's Liquor Bottle

Dewitt Albright keeps a bottle of Wild Turkey on his office desk. He says that the benefit of being his own boss is that he gets to keep the liquor in the open, rather than tucked in a desk drawer.

### The Picture of Daphne Monet

Albright gives Easy this photo so that Easy can track down Daphne. The picture is black and white but has been touched up with color like the photos of jazz singers displayed in front of nightclubs. Easy finds the woman beautiful and keeps the photograph longer than he should.

### John's Place

John's place, a former speakeasy, is a bar without a liquor license at Central Avenue and Eighty-ninth Place. Patrons who know the password can enter the bar through a door in the back wall of a small corner grocery store. The bar is frequented by blacks who enjoy liquor and music.

### The Brown Suitcase

The brown suitcase contains thirty thousand dollars. This money is bank funds that Daphne stole from Todd Carter's residence. The suitcase's location is a mystery throughout most of the novel. Daphne keeps it in a locker at the YWCA.



## **Mouse's Pistol**

Mouse carries a black pistol at all times. It is the largest pistol imaginable, and it represents Mouse's capacity for violence.

## **The Carousel at the Santa Monica Pier**

Albright instructs Easy to meet him at the carousel at the Santa Monica pier. To white children, the carousel is a fun object, but it frightens Easy because he knows he can get into trouble for joining the all-white crowd there at night.

## **Junior's Cigarette**

After finding Richard McGee dead in his bed, Easy notices a Mexican cigarette on the bedroom floor. He knows that it belongs to Junior, and Junior must have killed McGee.

## **Primo's Cottage**

Primo's cottage is the setting for the one night of lovemaking that Easy and Daphne share. They feel that they are hidden safely in the cottage, but Albright and Joppy find them there easily.



# Social Sensitivity

Devil in a Blue Dress Mosley explores racial tensions and cultural history by means of a plot set in Los Angeles of 1948. The narrator is the hard-boiled detective character Easy Rawlins, an African American veteran of World War II, currently out of work.

Like many of the characters who frequent the bars and other seedy venues of the story, Easy had left the segregated South to find work in California, but found disillusionment instead.

"Life was still hard in L. A. and if you worked every day you still found yourself on the bottom." White workers get better treatment "because they didn't come from a place where men were always called boys."

Financial need causes Easy to agree to work for a disreputable white man interested in finding a blond woman often seen in the clubs of Watts, a predominantly African American district. Easy's subsequent travels through "dark streets" highlight the contemporary issues of qualitative deterioration in African American neighborhoods and inequities in the justice system.

The white policemen whom Easy encounters adhere to a double standard and lack understanding of his community. "The police didn't care about crime among Negroes," but "to kill a white man was a real crime." Easy has problems with police brutality that evoke images of the Watts/Los Angeles riots of the 1960s and 1992.

Although racism remains his central concern, Mosley raises various ethnic issues. As Easy does business with two Jewish liquor store owners, he recalls the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps he helped free during the war.

He sees a kinship between African Americans and persecuted Jews. When he visits the neighborhood called El Barrio, Easy thinks of how "a Mexican and a Negro once considered themselves the same . . . just another couple of unlucky stiff left holding the short end of the stick."

In the end, Easy's struggles have a universal quality. Mosley depicts a money-grubbing as well as racist society, with a privileged class on top and determined to stay there. "The law," Easy is told, "is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead." Easy represents the ordinary worker of any era, confronted by scant opportunities and little money to live on.



# Techniques

An important aspect of Mosley's fiction is its realism, enhanced by first person narration and tough language.

Easy is a unique, creatively conceived hard-boiled detective character based upon real people, as many of Mosley's characters are. Easy particularly reflects the storytelling and people Mosley knew in childhood. Easy's status as a disillusioned World War II veteran echoes that of Mosley's father Leroy Mosley, who returned proudly from service abroad to confront racism.

Critics praise Mosley's realistic characterizations and dialogue, with its shifts from dialect to "white English," as well as the cadence of the word flow.

Mosley effectively utilizes imagery and symbolism. Easy's desolate feelings in a jail cell are enhanced, for example, through his observation of a line of black ants traveling some distance to a corner containing the crushed corpse of a mouse. The rodent's appearance provokes a comparison between the time of its death and the time of Easy's being fired from his job.

Thoughts of becoming one with the darkness and slipping out of the cell precede a poignant line that evokes reader empathy and reinforces the perception of human values that transcend race: "It's only now that I realize how lonely and hungry I was then." A wry contrast is included in the description of a "beautiful" California day.

"Big white clouds sailed eastward toward the San Bernardino mountain range," Easy notes. "There were still traces of snow on the peaks and there was the lingering scent of burning trash in the air."

Critical commentary on *Devil in a Blue Dress* mentions Mosley's use of color. The color white recurs in the initial depiction of DeWitt Albright who has a white skin and wears a white suit, indicating that he is an intrusive element in the scene of Joppy's bar. Daphne's shifting identities are conveyed in the way her eye color alternates between green and blue.

Although Easy associates Daphne with Ivory soap, the smell of which hovers about her, her attachment to the African American community is hinted at in the living-room decor of her duplex, which is mostly brown.



# Themes

## Themes

Easy Rawlins finds himself questioning for his social and cultural identity in a shifting racist milieu. His feelings of alienation, to no small degree, stem from his experiences in World War II, in a prejudice-ridden and segregated United States Army that eventually grew desperate enough to let African Americans fight. Five years of war rendered Easy "used to white people," both men and women. "I ate with them and slept with them, and I killed enough blue-eyed young men to know that they were just as afraid to die as I was." Easy can no longer readily submit to 1930s-style prejudice and injustice.

After being fired from Champion Aircraft for failing to show enough subservience to a white boss, Easy receives an offer to do some detective work. Acceptance will enable Easy to keep up the mortgage payments on a house in Watts, his stake in the American dream. Easy aspires to get ahead, a state he associates with accumulating money for himself because banks and big business have no sympathy for the worker. "I got the idea, somehow, that if I got enough money then maybe I could buy my own life back."

DeWitt Albright, a white gangster, wants Easy to find Daphne Monet, a white-skinned woman who has disappeared. The search takes Easy down "mean streets" filled with men made tough and angry by the white establishment, and into a white neighborhood he feels uncomfortable in. Inevitably Easy tangles with a legal system he knows to be morally bankrupt enough to be bought: "I thought that there might be some justice for a black man if he had the money to grease it."

The novel includes a good deal of police brutality, underscoring the theme of separation between the African American community and the lawenforcement system. "Back in those days there wasn't one Negro in a hundred who'd talk to the police. And those that did were just as likely to lie as anything else." Easy knows about police seizures and beatings of African Americans on whims. But here again, Easy cannot follow the old, prewar protocols, and shows no fear to threatening cops.

## Pride of Ownership

Easy sees his house, small though it is, as the most important part of his life. Easy has worked hard to afford his house. It has productive trees and flowers, which represent his connection to the land as well as his potential for economic growth. Ironically, Easy sells himself to Albright in order to make the mortgage payment on his home.

It becomes clear to Easy that Albright feels he owns him when Easy comes home to find Albright in his house, sitting on Easy's furniture and drinking Easy's coffee. Easy's property has become Albright's in the white man's mind. Easy tells Albright that he has no excuse for breaking into his home, and he asks Albright what he would do if Easy broke into *his* home. Albright answers, "I'd tear your nigger head out by its root."



This feeling of ownership enables Albright to arrange a meeting in Santa Monica, in spite of Easy's discomfort with the meeting place. Because he "owns" Easy, Albright can also order him to look for Frank Green in addition to Daphne Monet. Struggling to remain his own man, Easy demands an extra hundred dollars for finding Green.

The relationship between Carter and Daphne is just the opposite of the one between Albright and Easy. Carter truly loves Daphne and does not wish to possess her. In fact, he allows her to steal thirty thousand dollars from him without retribution. One factor for Carter's generous attitude is that he does not think of people in terms of black and white. He knows and accepts Daphne for the black woman she is. In other words, he does not have the slave master mentality that Easy attributes to many of the book's white characters.

Easy says that working in a factory is like working for a slave master. Just as a plantation boss would have "owned" the slaves' labor and could have ordered them to do any work at any time, Easy's Champion boss Mr. Giacomo demands that Easy work overtime. When Easy refuses, Giacomo ends their working relationship.

## Easy's Growth as a Detective

From the start of the novel, Easy shows a cunning mind. When assigned to find Daphne Monet, he asks patrons of John's whether they have encountered a woman named Dahlia or Delilah. Later, when he must locate Frank Green, Easy does not go around to bars asking where he can find the man but rather how he can buy himself some bulk whiskey.

Easy says that he has worked previously as a gardener and as a machinist. Instead of returning to these calm professions, Easy finds himself drawn to the excitement and danger of detective work. By the end of the novel he has successfully concluded not only the Daphne Monet case but also found people on behalf of Mary White and Ricardo.

Easy's progress as a detective is made possible by his growing acceptance of violence. During World War II, Easy initially shied away from the battlefield. After working behind the desk as a statistician, however, he began to feel guilty about not sharing in the bloodshed of battle. Easy's war experiences have left him accustomed to violence, but still Easy does not carry a gun or engage in fights. While working on the Daphne Monet case, however, Easy gets threatened by Albright, the police, and Frank Green. Plus, there is an additional threat of violence from the unknown person who has mysteriously killed Coretta and Howard Green. After even his friend Mouse threatens to shoot him, Easy then starts to carry a gun. He uses that gun in pursuit of Joppy and Albright.

By the end of the novel, Easy starts a new career as a private detective. Unlike his previous jobs, detective work carries the threat of violence and requires him to have a gun. At the story's close, Easy has accepted that the capacity to do violence is a necessity in his chosen career.



## Child Abuse

The Mexican boy that Easy encounters in the car with Matthew Teran is clearly being abused, for he is dirty and has no clothes. Teran, whose physical filthiness mirrors the dirt inside his mind, touches the boy in an inappropriate manner. Later Easy learns that the five-year-old boy was turned into a prostitute by Richard McGee. Daphne, who herself was a victim of sexual abuse as a child, feels drawn to the boy and manages to liberate the boy from child prostitution when she kills Teran.

Daphne's sexual abuse happened at the hands of her father. It started with a "lovers" kiss after seeing animals mate during a trip to the zoo. Daphne says that her father forced himself into her bed on many nights, until Frank Green freed her by killing the man. She loves Frank as a brother and honors him as the man who killed her abusive father.

The close relationship that Daphne shared with her father, and the subsequent loss that she felt when he was gone, may be a reason for Daphne's sexual involvement with many male characters in the novel. She seems incapable of dealing with a man in a manner that is nonsexual. For instance, from the moment she meets Easy, Daphne sees him not simply as a man who can provide protection and assistance but as someone with whom she wants to become sexually intimate.





# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told in the first person. Easy Rawlins narrates the story in a compelling manner, mixing his tale of the story's action with personal musings about big ideas. For instance, when he first meets Albright, Easy feels a moment of fear. That fear is natural to him as a black American living in a racist society where whites have much more power. In the next moment, however, Easy feels calmer as he recalls his experiences fighting the Germans in World War II. "I ate with them and slept with them," Easy narrates, "and I killed enough blue-eyed men to know that they were just as afraid to die as I was." In similar passages throughout the novel, Mosley enables his narrator's history to be told while moving the plot forward.

## Setting

The primary setting for the novel is Los Angeles. Much of the novel takes place in Watts, a black section of the city. Mosley depicts the neighborhood as a lively one that is frequented by colorful criminals, notable jazz musicians, and honest working class people who are mostly down on their luck.

Although many of the novel's crimes happen in Watts, Easy feels safer there than he does in upscale white areas. When he goes to the pier in Santa Monica, Easy knows to say as little as possible to the white teenager who acts friendly toward him. Even still, he gets in trouble for having the audacity to talk to a white girl. Later, when Easy drives around Hollywood with the light-skinned Daphne Monet in his car, he is keenly aware that his race will be an issue if he gets pulled over by the police.

Easy's house acts as an oasis from the dark, unfriendly city. Whereas the other settings are urban, Easy's home has the feel of the rural South. Easy has cultivated a bed of flowers and fruit trees. Characters frequently show up at Easy's house to intimidate him, including Mason and Miller, Albright and his thugs, as well as Frank Green. Easy remains so calmed by his little home, though, that he naively leaves a note for Mouse there as though nobody else will enter and read it.

## Language and Meaning

As a narrator, Easy tells his story in proper English. However, when he speaks to other blacks, his grammar becomes casual. For instance, Easy says in chapter two, "He got something to do with the fight?" The black characters, who have mostly all migrated from Texas, share Easy's laxity. For instance, Rosetta says, in chapter eighteen, "Why'ont you ast yo' friend anyway? He know where the whiskey grow."



Through Easy's use of language, Mosley enriches his portrait of the protagonist. His mastery of proper English shows that Easy had the intelligence and the drive to succeed in school. In fact, Easy has continued pursuing education, as a student in night classes. Easy's fluency in both standard English and casual English is a sign of his ability to operate within two societies - black and white. His ability to speak like other characters mirrors his ability to understand how others think, a skill that keeps Easy alive during interactions with dangerous people.

## Structure

The novel is comprised of 31 short chapters. Chapters one through three serve to introduce the character Easy Rawlins and the job he has taken on for Mr. Albright. From chapters four through nine, Easy attempts to do that job. In chapters ten and eleven, however, he learns that his source of information, Coretta, has been murdered. The rest of the novel centers on Easy's defending himself from violence and from getting blamed by the police from Coretta's death. It is not until he feels his own life is on the line that Easy starts to become subtle and clever in his actions, developing into a real detective.



## Quotes

"I always tried to speak proper English in my life, the kind of English they taught in school, but I found over the years that I could only truly express myself in the natural, 'uneducated' dialect of my upbringing." Page 54

"I never saw him again. I often think of how so many people have walked into my life for just a few minutes and kicked up some dust, then they're gone away. My father was like that; my mother wasn't much better." Page 60

"[Albright] was a fine host too. His liquor was good and he was pleasant enough. He told me a few stories, the kind of tales that we called 'lies' back home in Texas." Page 66

"A job in a factory is an awful lot like working on a plantation in the South. The bosses see all the workers like they're children, and everyone knows how lay children are." Page 108

"I swore to myself that I'd never look at another man's woman. I've taken that pledge many times since then." Page 110

" 'You got a right to fall down and break your face, nigger. You got a right to die,' he said. Then he hit me in the diaphragm. When I doubled over he slipped the handcuffs on behind my back and together they dragged me to the car." Page 114

"I should have taken Odell's advice right then and left California for good." Page 134

"Too bad we won't have a chance to get to know each other, Easy. Otherwise I'd let you eat this little white girl up." Page 141

"That voice is hard. It never cares if I'm scared or in danger. It just looks at all the facts and tells me what I need to do." Page 143

"I'll never forget thinking how those Germans had hurt that poor boy so terribly that he couldn't even take in anything good. That was why so many Jews back then understood the American Negro; in Europe the Jew had been a Negro for more than a thousand years." Page 185

"That girl's the devil, man," I said. 'She got evil in every pocket.'" Page 192

"I tried to look stupid; it wasn't very difficult." Page 205

"He just loved me so much that day at the zoo and he knew me, the real me, and whenever you know somebody that well you just have to leave." Page 239

"She look like she white and you think you white. But brother you don't know that you both poor niggers. And a nigger ain't never gonna be happy 'less he accept what he is." Page 253

"A man like DeWitt Albright didn't die, couldn't die. It frightened me even to think of a world that could kill a man like that; what could a world like that do to me?" Page 254

## Adaptations

An abridged audiocassette version was published in 1993, read by Paul Winfield. Also, there is an unabridged library edition of 1994, read by George C. Simms. The publisher of both is Audio Renaissance. Director Carl Franklin's 1995 film starred Denzel Washington as Easy Rawlins, Jennifer Beals as Daphne Monet, Tom Sizemore as DeWitt Albright, and Don Cheadle as Mouse. In the film the plot is simplified, and social criticism is less intense than in the novel. The film's ending projects more hope. The novel's flavor is preserved in many vivid scenes, integrated by main character voiceover.



## Key Questions

Mosley's fiction generally treats social problems that have strong contemporary interest, in spite of his historical approach. The novel is especially informative also about the historical movement of African Americans to Los Angeles. Discussion might be pursued along both contemporary and historical lines, with reference to actual events of the novel's time frame. The discussion group might gather additional factual information which would enhance the look at history.

The character Easy Rawlins should provoke stimulating discussion. A good approach to take is a comparison with other hard-boiled detective heroes, like the Continental Op of Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1929) or the protagonist in Ross Macdonald's *Blue City* (1947). These novels are of particular interest partly because their heroes are returning soldiers. Macdonald's hero, for example, encounters postwar urban corruption. The notable differences between Easy and his literary predecessors should emerge through the comparative approach.

1. After DeWitt Albright tells Easy that the law "is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead," Easy has his own ideas on the subject "but I kept them to myself."

Why does he keep them to himself?

2. How is Easy's house a symbol?

3. How has Easy been changed by his war experience?

4. How does Easy feel about moral values? Why?

5. Mouse is violent, unstable and without conscience. Why, then, does Easy keep him for a best friend? Are the reasons symbolic?

6. Why are Abe and Johnny in the story? What do they demonstrate?

7. Is Easy an insider, an outsider, or both? Explain.

8. Mosley frequently uses colors in his descriptions. Discuss his technique.

Does it work in behalf of theme in the case of Daphne? Of DeWitt Albright?

9. What kinds of racist attitudes emerge in this novel? Include those of DeWitt, Todd Carter, the police.



## Topics for Discussion

In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, many friends and acquaintances give Easy advice. Which characters are positive mentors to him? Do any characters have a negative influence on Easy?

The novel's title, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, suggests that Daphne Monet is the villain of the story. Is she a sinister character, or an innocent victim of circumstance?

Two women, Coretta and Daphne, seduce Easy. What aspects of his character make Easy so attractive to women?

What similarities do the characters who migrated from Houston to Los Angeles share? How does Mouse exemplify the Houston mentality?

Trace Easy's development as a private investigator. At what point does he start to enjoy the danger of working for Albright? When does he feel that he is learning to behave in ways that are clever and subtle?

## Literary Precedents

Mosley's work is scarcely akin to that of the so-called "classic" mystery writers like E. C. Bentley, Arthur Conan Doyle, Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, or Ellery Queen.

Those writers depict criminal activity as a disruption to a perceived stable social order, the detective hero or heroine being a puzzle-solver who restores the underlying harmony by means of a highly rational approach to evidence and clues. *Devil in a Blue Dress* and its sequels belong rather to the noir, hardboiled tradition pioneered by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and carried forward by such writers as Brett Halliday, Mickey Spillane, Chester Himes, Ross Macdonald, John D. MacDonald. Writers in this tradition typically depict society as corrupt, with the detective hero in his investigations uncovering evidence to that effect.

A nonmystery precedent to Mosley's novels is *The Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison, which treats the African American experience. An African American author of mysteries dealing with that experience is Chester Himes, whose setting is Harlem, another violent, poor, crime-ridden venue of migrants from the South. However, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965) features tough, streetwise African American cops, not private investigators.

Yet with all this said, critics generally agree that Easy Rawlins is a unique fictional creation, operating both inside and outside the hard-boiled detective tradition. Easy, although as reluctant to take on detective work as many traditional western gunfighters, is unconventionally portrayed as an unemployed aircraft worker in need of money. Unlike Himes's detectives, Easy would not consider a policeman's life.

Easy is also remarkably voluble in social and autobiographical commentary, all of which is rendered in realistic patterns of speech that have little precedent. Mosley's theme of Jewish suffering as it is understood by African Americans is his own.





## Related Titles

All of Mosley's novels are marked by themes centered on racism in society, the alienation of African Americans and the deterioration of their urban neighborhoods. Mosley's writing becomes surer with each mystery. *A Red Death* (1991) takes Easy into 1953 and the fears of the McCarthy era. He owns rental properties bought with a windfall of money from his earlier case, and which he never declared for taxes. To avoid charges, Easy agrees to do undercover FBI work against a Jewish communist engaged in charity projects at the local African American church.

People are murdered as Easy dallies with Mouse's wife and struggles with the idea of betraying a Jewish friend.

*White Butterfly* (1992) presents Easy in 1956 as a married man with two children. He grapples with marital problems while he reluctantly assists a police investigation of serial killings.

His impetus is the unjust arrest of Mouse for the crimes. *Black Betty* (1994) shows Easy in 1961, returned to a single man's life in Watts, now with two adopted children. His business income having dwindled, he accepts a fee to search for a rich family's missing housekeeper. Also he must prove to Mouse, just out of jail, that he was not the one who sold him out to the police.

# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994