

The High Window Study Guide

The High Window by Raymond Chandler

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Plot Summary

"A High Window" is a murder mystery by Raymond Chandler featuring the wise-talking and tough private detective Philip Marlowe. Recounted from the point of view of Marlowe, the novel opens as he is called to the lavish Pasadena home of Mrs. Elizabeth Bright Murdock, an imposing older woman who wants to hire him to retrieve a valuable coin that has been stolen from her deceased second husband's collection. She suspects her daughter-in-law Linda Murdock, the former nightclub singer that her son Leslie Murdock married over her objections, did it. She tells Marlowe that Linda disappeared about the time the coin was taken. She wants Linda to be found and the coin returned without any publicity or police involvement.

Marlowe takes the case, which is soon complicated when a second private detective named Phillips, apparently also hired by Leslie Murdock, approaches Marlowe for help but whom Marlowe finds dead before he can learn anything. Another figure connected to the case, a coin dealer named Elisha Morningstar, is also found dead by Marlowe.

As the police breathe down Marlowe's neck in their investigation of the Phillips murder, Marlowe follows the trail of clues to the home of Alex Morny, where he discovers Morny's wife is having an affair with a man named Louis Vannier. The plot becomes more complex when Alex Morny hires Marlowe to investigate Vannier to get him away from his wife and he finds Linda Murdock, working again as a nightclub singer in Morny's club, who tells him that Mrs. Murdock knows Vannier very well. Meanwhile a homicide detective named Jesse Breeze pressures Marlowe to give up the name of his client or face arrest as a material witness to the Phillips murder.

Vannier himself turns up dead, apparently of suicide, although Mrs. Murdock's emotionally disturbed secretary Merle Davis comes to Marlowe to confess to killing him. Marlowe learns that in fact Vannier had been blackmailing Mrs. Murdock for years with evidence that she had pushed her first husband Horace Bright out of a window. Mrs. Murdock had also manipulated the susceptible Davis into believing she had actually pushed Bright. Phillips and Morningstar had been murdered by Vannier when a scheme to counterfeit the valuable coin taken from Mrs. Murdock went sour. Leslie Murdock, who had actually stolen the coin as part of the scheme, then killed Vannier when he would not hand over the blackmail evidence.

Marlowe solves the mystery but does not turn his client or her son over to the police. Instead, he follows his own internal code of justice and personally escorts Merle Davis back to her parents in Wichita after assuring her she had never killed anyone.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

As the book opens, private detective Philip Marlowe arrives at the door of an expansive brick house in Pasadena. He has been called to the house by Mrs. Elizabeth Bright Murdock, who is interested in employing him. Marlowe knocks at the front door, which is answered by the maid, a sour woman who asks sharply what he wants. He replies he has come to see Mrs. Murdock and the maid barks back "which one?" Not knowing there were two Mrs. Murdocks at the house, Marlowe answers that he has an appointment with Mrs. Elizabeth Bright Murdock. The maid rudely shuts the door.

After a short period of time, Marlowe is shown into the house and taken to a large elaborately decorated room full of old fashioned furniture and countless small figurines and clocks. The maid walks him through the room to a door at the end, which she opens, announcing him by name.

In Chapter 2, Marlowe is shown into a small room furnished as an office. At a desk sits a "thin fragile-looking blondish girl" who introduces herself as Miss Davis, Mrs. Murdock's private secretary. Miss Davis tells Marlowe she has been asked to have him provide some references. Marlowe is slightly put out by the request, but gives her some names. Marlowe looks her over carefully as she completes her calls to the people he names. She is pale, but looks healthy. She has her hair drawn back tightly and wears no makeup. She has large dark-blue eyes.

Davis finishes her calls and asks him to wait. Halfway to the door, she stops and moves back to her desk, closing a drawer that is partly open, then continues out the door. Once she is gone, Marlowe goes to the desk and looks in the drawer where he sees a small automatic pistol. He closes the drawer and sits back down. Davis returns after a few minutes and tells him that Mrs. Murdock will see him.

Marlowe is shown into a dark room where it takes a moment for his eyes to adjust. He sees Mrs. Murdock, an elderly woman with silver hair, sitting among several pillows on a lounge chair and sipping port wine from a glass. She leaves Marlowe standing as she finishes the wine in her glass and pours some more, then asks him to sit down.

Mrs. Murdock admits she knows little about the work of private detectives and asks Marlowe his rates. He answers that it depends on the job, but he charges \$25 a day plus expenses. Mrs. Murdock replies that seems high and he responds that you get what you pay for.

After this slightly sharp exchange, Mrs. Murdock provides Marlowe with the details of what she wants him to do. A valuable coin has been taken from the collection of her deceased husband. It is called the Brasher Doubloon, a gold coin issued in America in the 18th century, and is estimated to be worth about \$10,000. It has been taken by her



daughter-in-law, Linda Murdock, a former nightclub singer and the wife of her foolish son, Leslie. Linda disappeared about a week earlier, she tells him. She wants Linda found and the coin returned without any involvement from the police. She discovered the coin was missing when she received a call from a coin dealer named Elisha Morningstar who asked if it might be for sale. This made her suspicious, as reputable coin dealers who knew about the coin also would know that the terms of her husband's will forbid it from being sold. She suspects that someone offered to sell the coin to Morningstar and that he was trying to verify its authenticity.

When Marlowe suggests her son might know where Linda is, Mrs. Murdock angrily forbids him from speaking to her son about the matter. She insists he had nothing to do with the disappearance of the coin. She calls Miss Davis and has him make out a check for \$250 to Marlowe to retain his services.

Back in the office, Marlowe casually puts his hand on Miss Davis' arm, causing her to jump and angrily tell him never to touch her. She is nearly in tears, but composes herself. Marlowe notices she wipes her eyes with a man's handkerchief with "L.M." embroidered on it.

Miss Davis tells Marlowe she knows little about Linda Murdock except that she once shared an apartment with another nightclub performer named Lois Magic. She had only seen Lois Magic once when she came to the house with a man named Vannier, she tells Marlowe.

Marlowe leaves the house and drives off in his car. He notices a man wearing a porkpie hat with a boldly-colored hatband pulling away in a tan car as he leaves the Murdock house. The car follows him for a while until Marlowe makes a quick U-turn and the tan car drives on.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Nearly all the characters in the novel are introduced or mentioned in the first two chapters. Marlowe, the private detective who is the main figure in the story, appears at the very beginning and he soon meets his employer, the imperious Mrs. Murdock, and her secretary Merle Davis. Leslie Murdock and his possibly gold-digging wife Linda, along with her friend Lois and a man named Vannier are all mentioned and these characters will prove to be central figures in the larger mystery. The man in the bold hat is glimpsed here, and he will also have a role to play.

The setting is lavish and refined at the Murdock house, but there is a hint of danger as well as the suggestion that Miss Davis is perhaps not what she seems when Marlowe discovers she keeps a gun in her desk. The man in the bold hat who is apparently tailing Marlowe is also a tantalizing clue that there is a deeper mystery than appears on the surface.

Marlowe is established as a very observant character, a fitting trait for a detective. He makes note of small details such as the kind of plants growing around the house and

the style in which it is decorated. His descriptions not only enrich the setting for the reader, they can be used to establish clues that later prove to be significant.



Chapters 3-5

Chapters 3-5 Summary

As Chapter 3 opens, Marlowe has returned to his office, made up of a simply-furnished inner office and a small reception room. He takes out a phone book and looks up the number of Elisha Morningstar, finding the number and address of his office. A tall, well-dressed man comes into Marlowe's office, Leslie Murdock. He has learned that Marlowe is working for his mother and wants to know what she hired him to do. Marlowe is cagey and does not tell him. He determines that Murdock found out about his hiring from Merle Davis.

Murdock guesses that Marlowe is looking for evidence to support a divorce between him and his wife. Marlowe does not give any solid answer to this. Murdock then guesses that it may have to do with someone called "Morny," who he says had promised not to call his mother. Seizing on the slip-up, Marlowe asks Murdock how much he owes Morny and Murdock replies \$12,000. He immediately realizes that if Alex Morny had called his mother he would have told her the amount he owed and so Marlowe must not be working on that. Marlowe still gives no definite answer.

Marlowe asks Murdock some questions of his own. He learns that Murdock is not the son of Jasper Murdock, his mother's second husband, but of a man named Horace Bright who had lost all his money in the crash of 1929 and committed suicide by jumping from his office window. He had no money of his own except what his mother provided from Jasper Murdock's estate.

In Chapter 4, Marlowe calls Elisha Morningstar, saying he is interested in talking to him about why he called Mrs. Murdock asking about the Brasher Doubloon. Morningstar sounds suspicious on the phone, but makes an appointment for 3:00 that afternoon for Marlowe to come to his office in the Belfont Building.

Marlowe tries to find a listing for Lois Magic, but finds none. He calls several theatrical agencies but nobody has her name or number. He next calls a reporter friend to find out what he can about Alex Morny. He is told that Morny was once in pictures and now runs an elite nightclub and gambling operation in a secluded neighborhood called Idle Valley. He has a bodyguard, a tall man with a frozen eye, named Eddie Prue. Marlowe asks about Lois Magic and the man named Vannier, and his friend promises to find out what he can.

Marlowe leaves his office and is again followed by the man in the bright hat. He drives around for a bit then stops at a drugstore and calls his reporter friend from a phone booth. The man in the hat follows him in and sits at the lunch counter. Marlowe's friend tells him that Lois Magic is now married to Alex Morny and they live in a nice house near Bel-Air. Marlowe thanks him and leaves the booth, quickly ducking through the kitchen door and out through the alley, losing the man in the hat.



Chapter 5 opens as Marlowe arrives at Alex Morny's house in Bel-Air. He goes to the door and asks for Mrs. Morny but is told she is not home. He wanders over to the driveway where a tough-looking chauffeur is washing a large Cadillac. For \$2, the chauffeur tells Marlowe that Mrs. Morny is in the back yard with a "friend." As they are talking, a man in a lightweight suit comes around the corner from the back yard following a dog, who runs up to Marlowe and happily sits down at his feet. The man is Vannier, and he sharply asks what Marlowe wants. When Marlowe replies he is there to see Mrs. Morny, Vannier reluctantly leads him to the back yard.

Mrs. Morny is an attractive blond woman, relaxing in a lounge chair and sipping whiskey. Marlowe tells her he is looking for Linda Murdock and asks if she knows where she is. Lois Morny is cagey and says she has not seen her for some time. Marlowe engages her in some flirtatious banter which angers Vannier, who makes a motion as if he has a gun under his shirt and tells Marlowe to leave. Mrs. Morny seems excited at the action, and she watches as Marlowe walks away. He returns to the chauffeur and gives him his card and a description of Linda Murdock, asking him to call him if he sees her at the house.

Chapters 3-5 Analysis

Chapter 3 establishes Marlowe as someone who has little use for the wealthy, who are portrayed as idle and weak. Leslie Murdock tries to match Marlowe's toughness, but is put down. Leslie has already been described by his mother as being foolish, and he perhaps unwisely offers too much information to Marlowe as he wonders why his mother has hired him. Marlowe, by keeping cagey, manages to draw this information out from him, some of which will prove to be connected to the larger mystery. His interview with Murdock puts him on the trail of Alex Morny, which will lead him through Mrs. Morny and Vannier, the man she is having an affair with.

Elisha Morningstar is introduced in Chapter 4 and appears to be a promising lead based on his wary phone conversation. Marlowe is shown to have connections with newspaper reporters who can provide him with needed background information on the socialites he works for.

In Chapter 5, Marlowe meets Mrs. Morny and confronts Vannier at Alex Morny's house. Before and after the meeting he has an exchange with the wise-guy chauffeur, who is washing the car in the drive. Marlowe identifies with the working-class people who attend to the idle rich more than with the wealthy group from whom he gets his clients. He recognizes their motivations and slips easily into conversation with them. He is able to learn more about what is going on by asking the servants than by confronting their employers. Later he will develop a similar relationship with the elderly elevator operator who works at the Belfont Building, a character introduced in Chapter 4.



Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary

In Chapter 6, Marlowe drives back to his office and sees the familiar tan car belonging to the man in the bold hat parked nearby. He looks for a registration slip and writes down the license number of the car. He heads toward his appointment with Elisha Morningstar and sees the car is following him again. He stops at a hotel, goes into the lobby and takes a seat. Soon the man in the hat also comes in, looks around, then takes a seat nearby. Marlowe goes over and sits next to him. The man is embarrassed that he has been so obvious. He is also a private detective, he tells Marlowe, named George Anson Phillips, giving him his card. He is working on a case himself, he says, one that he is suspicious about. He was following Leslie Murdock when he went to see Marlowe, he tells him, and so thought perhaps Marlowe and he were onto similar cases. He asks if Marlowe would like to meet and talk over what they each know. Marlowe agrees to meet him that afternoon at 4:30 at Phillips' apartment. Phillips writes his home address on his business card, gives him a key and tells him to let himself in and wait if he is not home.

In Chapter 7, Marlowe keeps his appointment with Elisha Morningstar at the Belfont Building. An elderly elevator operator takes him up. Marlowe meets with Morningstar, who tells him about the Brasher Doubloon's history but is cagey at first about why he contacted Mrs. Murdock asking whether it was for sale. Marlowe suggests that someone had offered to sell the coin to him and Morningstar admits this is true. Marlowe says he is working for Mrs. Murdock who wants the coin returned. He offers \$1000 to Morningstar for its return, which makes Morningstar chuckle as he admits the person selling it only asked for \$800. Seeing an opportunity to clear \$200 for himself, Morningstar agrees to get the coin for Marlowe.

Marlowe leaves Morningstar's office and opens and shuts the door of the empty reception room outside, but stays in the room, moving behind the door to eavesdrop on him. When he hears Morningstar pick up the telephone, he quickly moves to an extension phone at the reception desk and listens in. He hears Morningstar call the Florence Apartments and ask for Mr. Anson in room 204. The apartment manager checks and returns to the phone to say that Mr. Anson is not in. Morningstar leaves no message and hangs up. Marlowe quietly slips out the door. He looks at the business card that Phillips had given him with his home address written on the back. It reads "Florence Apartments, Room 204."

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Marlowe confronts the man in the bold hat in Chapter 6. In a wry turn of events, Marlowe surprises the inept Phillips by sitting down next to him. Phillips is a partially sympathetic character, apparently not very bright but eager to get on as a private



detective. Marlowe agrees to help him, but he may hope to learn more from Phillips than he has to give up himself. Phillips has an air of desperation about him, but the resolution to their meeting is delayed because Marlowe is on his way to meet with Morningstar. This plot point allows for the development of events in the following chapters, when murder enters the plot.

Marlowe meets with Morningstar in Chapter 7, who provides some details about the Brasher Doubloon. The author uses an interesting method of exposition here. He must explain to the reader what the doubloon is and why it is important and valuable, but it is difficult to do this naturally when he has chosen to use a narrative that is driven by a first-person narrator. He has Morningstar give Marlowe a full explanation of the doubloon and its history, then remarks on what he has just done, recognizing that it was essentially a lecture of information Marlowe could have discovered at a public library. By making reference to this bit of exposition, the author maintains the immediate nature of the narrative by making the characters react naturally to this passage of somewhat unnatural dialogue.

Marlowe demonstrates a bit of tradecraft at the end of Chapter 7 when he surreptitiously listens in on Morningstar's phone conversation from the next room. The phone call comes very shortly after Marlowe has met with Philips and learned his home address. When he hears Morningstar call that same address, but ask for Phillips under a different name, the plot turns quickly on this coincidence.



Chapters 8-10

Chapters 8-10 Summary

Marlowe arrives at the Florence Apartments early for his appointment as Chapter 8 opens. He makes his way to the second floor of the run-down building and knocks at 204. There is no answer. Across the hall he hears the sound of a baseball game blaring on the radio. Through a window in the hall he sees a man sitting, smoking in the window of the Pietro Palermo funeral parlor across the street.

Using Phillips' key, Marlowe lets himself into apartment and looks around. He tries to open the bathroom door but it is partially blocked from the inside. Putting his head through the door, he sees Phillips lying dead on the bathroom floor, apparently shot in the head. Marlowe wipes off the key and puts on a table. He wipes off the doorknob and shuts the door, and walks downstairs to the manager's apartment.

In Chapter 9, the apartment manager opens his door in response to Marlowe's knock. Marlowe tells him he is an insurance investigator and shows him a phony business card. Marlowe says he is interested in the man living in apartment 204 and wants the manager to let him in to look over the room. Reluctantly, the manager agrees and they go upstairs. As they are about to unlock the door, a scream erupts from the apartment across the hall and the manager bangs on the door. A young woman opens the door with evidence of a fresh black eye. The manager yells at her to keep the noise down or he will call the police. A man named Hench comes to the door, drunk and angry and takes a swing at the manager, who dodges the blow and hits him back, pulling a gun. The woman attacks the manager while Hench makes a move toward the pillow of his bed, pulling out a gun of his own. Hench is confused, however. He sits looking at the gun in his open hand and says to himself that it isn't his gun. Marlowe takes it from him and sniffs it. It has been fired recently.

Chapter 10 takes place in Hench's apartment. Hench, his girlfriend and Marlowe are sitting in the apartment with Lt. Jesse Breeze, a homicide detective. Breeze tells them Phillips has been dead about two hours and was shot with a gun like the one Hench found under his pillow which he claims is not his. Hench replies that he and his girlfriend had gone out for lunch about 3:30 and may have left their door open. The young woman says nothing.

Breeze goes over a possible chain of events. The killer probably fired the gun shortly before Hench and his girlfriend left, the sound being covered by the noise of the baseball game they had on the radio. As he was leaving, the killer saw the door open at Hench's apartment and discovered Hench's gun under his pillow, swapping the guns. Breeze does not like his theory, however, and tells Hench and his girlfriend they will have to be taken to the police station for questioning. They leave with some officers and Breeze and Marlowe are alone in the apartment.



Chapters 8-10 Analysis

The mystery takes a sinister turn in Chapter 8 when the worried private detective Marlowe has just met turns up shot dead in his own apartment. Marlowe's reaction is cool. He carefully removes any evidence that he has been in Phillips' apartment, but then in Chapter 9 tries to manipulate the apartment manager into going into the apartment, apparently with the intention of pretending to discover the body with the manager present as a witness.

Marlowe's plan goes awry, however, when the fight between Phillips' neighbors draws the manager's attention. The plot zigzags quickly in these two chapters, which are framed by two surprises. The first is the discovery of Phillips' body, and the second is the discovery of the probable murder weapon in the apartment next door.

Lt. Breeze is introduced in Chapter 10, and he will become Marlowe's chief adversary. Breeze maintains a detached attitude, but Marlowe considers him dangerous as he is a man of calm determination and steady habits.

The character of Palermo is glimpsed in Chapter 8. He will have a small role in the mystery, but not so large as might be hinted here. Part of Chandler's technique is to introduce characters and events that may appear to the reader to be relevant, but in the end have no real bearing on the solution to the mystery. This keeps the plot from becoming too predictable and delays the discovery of the truth until the story builds to a suitable dramatic climax. The character of Hench is another of these "false leads."



Chapters 11-14

Chapters 11-14 Summary

In Chapter 11, Breeze asks Marlowe to go over his versions of events again. He is skeptical, believing that Marlowe is not telling the whole truth. He wonders why he did not report the body when he found it and instead gave the manager a false name and tried to have him discover the body. Marlowe does not tell Breeze the details of his case and Breeze threatens to hold him as a material witness, but reluctantly lets him go after getting his home address.

Marlowe returns to his office in Chapter 12 to find a note from a delivery service that there is a package for him ready to be delivered at his convenience. He calls the delivery company and has a drink while he waits. Ten minutes later a delivery boy brings him the package. It is a small box with neat printing on it but no indication who sent it. Inside is the Brasher Doubloon. Marlowe hides the coin in his tobacco pouch and tries to find Elisha Morningstar's home phone number in the book, but it is not listed. He puts on his holster and gun under his jacket and is about to leave the office when the phone rings. A voice whispers "Too bad for you, Marlowe," and the line goes dead. Marlowe leaves his office.

In Chapter 13, Marlowe drives to a drugstore to use the pay phone to call Mrs. Murdock. Merle Davis answers the phone and says Mrs. Murdock is resting, but Marlowe insists on talking to her. When Mrs. Murdock comes to the phone, he tells her that Morningstar had been offered the Brasher Doubloon for \$800. He asks her if she knows Phillips, and she says she does not.

Marlowe tells her he offered Morningstar \$1000 for the doubloon and she surprises him by replying that she has no more need for his service as the coin has been returned to her. She does not explain further but tells him he can keep the retainer she has already paid him and can come to her house the next day if he likes. She hangs up sharply and Marlowe leaves the drugstore.

In Chapter 14 Marlowe takes the coin to a pawn shop and pawns it for \$15, mailing the pawn ticket to himself in an envelope. He returns to the Belfont Building in hope of finding the building manager who can give him Morningstar's home number or address. The elderly elevator operator tells him that he should find Morningstar in his office, as he has not yet come down on the elevator. Marlowe goes to his office and finds him dead. He wipes off the doorknob and walks down a flight of stairs before catching the elevator again. On the floor below he casually notices an office for a dental supply company. Marlowe leaves the building and calls a hospital from the corner phone booth without giving his name.



Chapters 11-14 Analysis

The conflict between Marlowe and Breeze steps up in Chapter 11 as Breeze continues to question Marlowe about why he had come to see Phillips and why he lied to the manager. Breeze does not appear to really think Marlowe is guilty, but correctly assumes that Marlowe is not revealing all he knows about the matter. It is not the last time Breeze will clash with Marlowe.

The plot takes another strange twist when Marlowe returns to his office in Chapter 12 and receives a package that contains the Brasher Doubloon. Immediately afterward he receives a mysterious and threatening phone call. The two events seem possibly to be related, but this is more misdirection by the author.

In Chapter 13, the plot twists yet again. It appears that Marlowe has essentially completed his case for Mrs. Murdock by finding the doubloon, yet he does not reveal this to her when he calls her. Instead he tells her about Morningstar's offer. It may be that Marlowe hopes to profit in the sale of the coin back to her himself, but the question is left open when she surprisingly tells him the coin has been returned. He still does not let on that he believes he has the coin in his own possession.

Chapter 14 is a mirror of Chapter 8. Marlowe discovers the body of Elisha Morningstar in much the same way he discovered Phillips. His reaction is similar, as well. He removes evidence that he was present and then reports the crime anonymously. The only two people he knows to be involved somehow with the coin have been killed, and he himself has received a threatening sounding phone call.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

Marlowe is at home in Chapter 15, working through chess problems and having a drink when Lt. Breeze knocks at his door along with another detective named Spangler. They walk into Marlowe's apartment uninvited and take a seat while Marlowe sarcastically offers them a drink. Breeze explains they still expect Marlowe to tell them everything he knows about the Phillips case, but Marlowe resents being pressured and says so.

Breeze tries to put him at ease and asks to use his phone. He dials and gives his name and Marlowe's phone number to someone on the line, then hangs up. Breeze has checked on Marlowe with some cops he knows, he tells him. He doesn't think Marlowe is a murderer, he says, but he thinks he knows more than he is telling.

the phone rings and Marlowe looks at the cops, who don't move. He answers it. There is a woman on the line saying she needs his help right away. Marlowe asks her for more information as he tries to recognize her voice and she gives her name as Gladys Crane. Then the line goes dead.

The phone rings again and Marlowe answers is saying "You want to talk to Breeze, don't you?" (p. 92) The man on the line is surprised but confirms he is calling for Breeze. Marlowe leaves the room and goes to the kitchen to mix three drinks.

He returns and confronts Breeze about his trickery. He guesses that they had the girl call to hear his voice to see if she recognized it. Breeze admits this is true and returns to pressing Marlowe on what he knows about Phillips. Marlowe repeats his story again without telling anything about the job he is on or who he works for. He does not trust cops, he tells Breeze, and he relates a story about a murder case called the "Cassidy Case" where two men were found dead, a wealthy man and his assistant. The murder scene had been tampered with to make it look like a murder by the assistant who then committed suicide when it was most likely the other way around.

Breeze smiles calmly and asks him to make his point. Marlowe says "Until you guys own your own souls you don't own mine." (p. 86) He does not trust the police to take the facts as they are and follow the logical consequences.

Marlowe returns to his kitchen to mix some more drinks in Chapter 16. Spangler follows him in and tries to make friendly conversation with him. He asks more about the Cassidy Case and Marlowe gruffly tells him there is no case, that he made it up.

They return to the front room and Breeze tells Marlowe what he knows about Phillips. He had been a deputy, but was no good at it, then a store clerk, which he also failed at. A few days before he told the man he shared an office with he would be out of town and took the apartment at the Florence under the name Anson. Breeze says they searched his office and found little except a small notebook with very neat, small printing in it.



Marlowe is interested in this bit of information, but says nothing. Breeze also tells him that Palermo, the man across the street from the apartment saw a tall blonde leaving the building at about 3:30. Marlowe has no idea who she might be.

Breeze grows impatient with Marlowe. He tells him he will give him until noon the next day, about twelve hours, to decide to talk to him, otherwise he'll arrest him as a material witness.

Breeze and Spangler leave. Soon the phone rings. It is the same harsh whispering voice he heard on the earlier call at his office. The man asks Marlowe if he is interested in making \$500. He should come to the Idle Valley Club owned by Alex Morny and ask for Eddie Prue. Marlowe leaves for the club.

In Chapter 17, Marlowe arrives at a guard shack on a secluded road. He is stopped and asked his name and where he is going. It is a private neighborhood, the guard says, and Marlowe tells him he is there to see Eddie Prue. The guard makes a call and lets Marlowe through.

He drives to a plain-looking building that has no signs indicating it is a nightclub. He steps inside the lobby, which is elaborately decorated and busy with well-dressed patrons. Marlowe goes into the bar and tells the bartender he is there to see Prue.

Chapters 15-17 Analysis

Marlowe's hobby of working through chess problems illustrates something about his character in Chapters 15 and 16. He sets up classic championship chess matches and works through them to study the moves and observe the problems each player faced and how he worked his way out of them. This is similar to how Marlowe goes about his business as a private detective, carefully observing the moves of the people he watches and trying to determine their connections and motivations.

The chess match also acts as a metaphor for Marlowe's interaction with Jesse Breeze. Marlowe moves back and forth between his front room and kitchen as Breeze calmly sits and intimidates him. It is like a chess piece moving back and forth to escape the threat of a more powerful piece. At the end of their encounter, Breeze puts Marlowe in "check" by issuing an ultimatum that he must make a move by noon the next day or he will quite literally be "captured" by being arrested as a material witness.

Chapter 17 sets up an encounter between Marlowe and Alex Morny which will both complicate the plot and simplify some of the loose threads.



Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

Marlowe sits in the bar with a drink in Chapter 18 and listens to the woman on stage singing. He overhears someone at another table mention that the woman is Linda Conquest. He is about to get up when a large man with a frozen eye, Eddie Prue, comes to his table and tells him to follow him.

Marlowe is shown into the office of Alex Morny, who talks tough to him while Prue sits nearby. Morny is angry that he had bothered his wife at home and questioned his chauffeur, but he says he might have use for Marlowe. Marlowe is not intimidated by Morny, and he mentions that he knows someone who looks like Eddie Prue had been seen following a man who had been found dead that afternoon.

Morny asks who was killed and Marlowe tells him. He also mentions that a tall bond was seen round the time of death. Morny perks up at this and asks for more information. He is concerned that Marlowe has talked to the police and wants to know what he has told them. Marlowe gives him the outline of his encounter with Phillips.

Morny gradually warms to Marlowe and says he wants to hire him to get Vannier away from his wife. He believes Vannier is up to something, and gives Marlowe a slip of paper that Vannier dropped at his house while he was there. It is a receipt for dental supplies signed by Vannier. It makes little sense to Marlowe, but he keeps the paper. He tells Morny he would like to speak to Linda Conquest. Morny reluctantly agrees. He and Prue leave the office and Marlowe ponders the bill from the dental supply company again. Soon Linda comes into the office and shuts the door.

Chapter 19 is Marlowe's brief meeting with Linda. He tells her about his case and she denies having taken the doubloon. She also mentions she is willing to give Leslie Murdock a divorce for \$25,000.

They speak about Mrs. Murdock, who Linda says had made living with her unbearable. She tells Marlowe more about Merle, whom Mrs. Murdock bullies in public but treats like a dear child in private. Something traumatic had happened to Merle in her past, she guesses, and Mrs. Murdock uses it to dominate here.

Marlowe tells her about the two murders apparently associated with the doubloon and Linda does not believe him. He lets her think he is fooling. He also asks what she knows about a man named Vannier, who he does not think involved with the Murdock case.

Linda corrects him. Vannier knows Mrs. Murdock very well, she says. He called many times while she was living there and always asked for Merle. Marlowe is surprised at the connection.



Later, back at his apartment in Hollywood, Marlowe looks again at the bill for dental supplies. It is for 30 lbs. of crystobolite and 25 lbs. of albastone from someone named Teager, a name that seems familiar to him. He looks it up in the phone book and it suddenly hits him that he remembers the name from when he was walking through the Belfont Building after finding Morningstar dead. Teager Dental Laboratories was in the same building.

Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Chapter 18 ties some of the seemingly disparate threads of the plot together. Marlowe is called before Alex Morny, who is supposedly angry that he barged in on his wife earlier but in reality wants to hire Marlowe to find something incriminating about Vannier in order to get him away from his wife. This twist in the story comes just as it seems Marlowe has completed his job for Mrs. Murdock. He has the doubloon back, although she claims she has already had it returned, and he has found Linda Murdock, who has returned to singing in a nightclub under her stage name. In Chapter 19 he is surprised to learn from Linda that Vannier is connected with Mrs. Murdock and possibly with Merle Davis in some way. He receives another tantalizing clue from Morny, a bill to Vannier for dental supplies from a company in the same building as Elisha Morningstar's office.



Chapters 20-22

Chapters 20-22 Summary

In Chapter 20, Marlowe returns to Mrs. Murdock and explains about the two dead men he has found, but does not mention that he has found Linda Murdock or that he has the Brasher Doubloon. She denies knowing anything about them or that they are connected to her. Marlowe explains that he has been given until noon to provide the police with the name of his client or be arrested. She tells him she expects him to not betray her confidence, and that she expects to pay extra for his silence. He replies that when murder is involved, things change. He cannot afford to get on the wrong side of the police or his career will be over.

Mrs. Murdock maintains her steely attitude, but appears to be somewhat shaken to learn the police are involved. As she is sipping some port she begins to choke. Marlowe slaps her on the back and calls for Merle to bring some water. As Mrs. Murdock is recovering, she agrees to speak with the police. It will be humiliating, she says, because it was her own son who took the coin and then returned it.

Mrs. Murdock calls Merle Davis and Leslie into her room to have her son explain everything to Marlowe. Leslie said he owed Morny twelve thousand dollars and took the coin as collateral to give to Morny. Morny had promised not to sell the coin until he had a chance to get the money to pay him back. When Leslie learned that Elisha Morningstar had called Mrs. Murdock about the coin being for sale, he assumed that Morny had approached him about selling it. He went to see Morny, he explains, and told him that the coin could not be sold because Jasper Murdock's will prevented it. Morny gave the coin back to him, he says, and he returned it to his mother.

Leslie and Merle leave the room and Marlowe tells her he does not believe the story. He adds that he has found Linda Murdock, which pleases Mrs. Murdock. She is more pleased when she learns Linda may be involved with the two murders and that Leslie's story was to cover for her. Marlowe makes a wisecrack about her pleasure at this and Mrs. Murdock throws him out of her room.

In Chapter 22, Merle Davis rushes after Marlowe as he is leaving the house, begging not to go but to stay and help Mrs. Murdock. She is crying, and he instinctively puts his arm around her shoulders, which causes her to tense up in panic. He asks her what is wrong, guessing that some man once touched her in a way that disturbed her. She admits this is true and hints that it was in fact Horace Bright who had disturbed her.

Marlowe returns to Mrs. Murdock and asks her why Merle is so frightened. Mrs. Murdock invites him to find out for himself. As he is leaving again, Marlowe encounters Leslie Murdock. He tells Leslie he thinks his story is false and that he may be covering up for his wife. Murdock admits nothing.

Chapters 20-22 Analysis

Marlowe gets an apparent resolution to the mystery with Leslie Murdock's explanation, but he does not believe it. His encounter with Merle after his fiery interchange with Mrs. Murdock provokes him to confront her again, when she practically dares him to uncover what had made Merle so disturbed. This vague exchange between them is elaborated more fully toward the end of the book when it is learned that Mrs. Murdock is being blackmailed for a crime that Merle Davis believes she herself committed.



Chapters 23-26

Chapters 23-26 Summary

In Chapter 23 Marlowe keeps his appointment with Lt. Breeze at the police station, although he is a few hours late. Breeze and Spangler are smug. Breeze tells Marlowe that Hench has confessed to killing Phillips. Marlowe is skeptical.

Breeze explains that Hench was excitable when he was taken in and was put under sedation. He told the police he wanted to talk to Palermo, and Palermo was brought to see him. After speaking with Hench privately, Palermo came out of the room and told the police Hench wanted to confess to the killing and that he felt sorry for Hench and would pay for him to have a lawyer. Hench made a full confession, claiming he was angry at Phillips after he made a pass at his girlfriend. The case is closed as far as Breeze is concerned, so he tells Marlowe although he'd like to know who he is working for he doesn't feel like he can force him. Marlowe leaves in disgust.

Marlowe goes to see Palermo in Chapter 24. Palermo has a bodyguard named Tony who sits in on the conversation. Marlowe says he knows Palermo got Hench to confess to the killing and wonders why. Palermo says he will tell him if he promises not to tell the police and hints that Tony would make sure his promise was kept. Marlowe agrees and Palermo explains that he has a "brother" in trouble who is staying at the apartments across the street where Hench and Phillips lived. He knew that a murder investigation would result in police going through the whole place, so he went to Hench and proposed that he confess to get the cops off the trail. He would hire a lawyer for Hench who would later retract his confession claiming he was drunk. This would buy time for his brother to get away.

In Chapter 25, Marlowe returns to the Belfont Building to learn what he can about Teager. He is surprised that the elevator operator, named Pop Grandy is more talkative. He tells Marlowe he remembers that he was there the day before and that he rode up to the eighth floor but got back on at the sixth floor, just before the cops showed up. He did not tell this to the cops, he says. Marlowe gives him five dollars and asks about Teager. Grandy says he was not in that day, and looks the other way as Marlowe borrows his pass key to get into Teager's office. Teager has cleaned out his desk, he discovers. He returns the key to Grandy.

In Chapter 26, Marlowe goes to Teager's home but there is nobody there. He learns from a neighbor that Mr. and Mrs. Teager had left suddenly late the night before on a vacation. He returns to his office and receives a phone call from the manager of his apartment building who says there is a hysterical young woman at the desk asking to be let into his apartment. Her name is Merle Davis. Marlowe tells the manager to let her in.



Chapters 23-26 Analysis

Chapter 23 appears to resolve the mystery even further when Hench confesses to murdering Phillips. None of it rings true to Marlowe, who is disturbed that Breeze seems so willing to accept Hench's confession despite the evidence that he had nothing to do with it. Breeze will admit in the final chapter that he never did believe Hench but wanted to put pressure on Marlowe to get Hench off the hook if he knew who was guilty.

Chapter 24 follows up on the Palermo lead, which proves to have nothing to do directly with the case. The character of Palermo adds color to the story and temporarily suggests another thread of mystery behind the ultimate plot, but the thread ends in this chapter with Palermo's explanation.

Marlowe takes advantage of his easy rapport with working-class characters in Chapter 26 when the elevator operator helps him investigate Teager's involvement and his sudden disappearance. Marlowe is amused that he is taken in by his own trick of pretending not to notice or know anything when he is actually observing everything. Pop Grandy, the elevator operator pulls the same act.

Events build toward the final conclusion of the story when Marlowe learns that a distraught Merle Davis has arrived at his doorstep.



Chapters 27-30

Chapters 27-30 Summary

Marlowe arrives at his apartment in Chapter 27. Merle Davis is distraught and confused. She tells Marlowe she has been to see Mr. Vannier at his home. She goes there on errands from time to time, she tells him, to take him money from Mrs. Murdock. Marlowe distracts her for a moment and looks in her handbag where he finds the small gun he had seen in her desk before. He takes it out without her seeing and gently asks her some more questions. She is vague in her replies, but he understands her to say that she was taking \$500 to Vannier at his house and that he was sitting in his armchair leering at her. She says she put a gun close to his head and shot him, turned off the lamp and left the house.

Marlowe goes to the kitchen and looks at her gun more closely. It has not been fired, and he sees that a bullet of the wrong caliber has been jammed in the breech so the gun could not be fired. He calls a doctor he knows personally and asks him to come over. He makes Merle comfortable and looks again in her handbag. There is \$500 in cash and a receipt for Vannier to sign reading "payment on account." He puts the money in his pocket.

Dr. Carl Moss arrives in Chapter 28. He asks Merle a few questions, then speaks privately with Marlowe. He tells Marlowe she possibly believes she killed a man, but may be acting. He believes she is repressing some traumatic event and may wish to be punished for it. Marlowe is impatient at the doctor's jargon-filled diagnosis but listens. The doctor proposes sedating her and letting her stay at Marlowe's apartment and calls for a nurse. Marlowe takes the keys to Merle's car, which he finds outside, and drives away toward Vannier's house.

Marlowe arrives at Vannier's bungalow in Chapter 29 and finds him dead in an armchair dressed in his pajamas. He has been shot in the temple and the scene seems to have been arranged to look like suicide. He has been dead some time. Marlowe looks around the room and finds a picture that has been knocked off the wall, cracking the frame. He finds a photograph hidden behind the picture that appears to show a man leaning out of a high window. As he looks more carefully he sees that the man is not leaning but falling from the window. It is Horace Bright. Written on the cardboard behind the picture is an account of money received totaling over \$11,000. Marlowe puts the photograph in his pocket. He hears someone approaching the house and hides behind a long curtain.

Alex Morny and his wife Lois enter the house in Chapter 30 as Marlowe hides and listens. Lois cries out at the sight of Vannier's body, but Morny is contemptuous. He says he knows she was at the house the night before and he sees her lipstick on cigarette butts in the ashtray. He tells her he knows she killed Vannier. She admits that she did shoot him and then wiped her prints off the gun and put Vannier's on it. Morny tells her to pick up the gun and show him how she did it, which she does, putting her



prints back on the gun. He takes it and puts it back where it was, with her prints on it and says he is going to turn her in. She insults him, he slaps her, and they leave.

Chapters 27-30 Analysis

The extent of Merle Davis' emotional and mental instability reaches a climax in Chapter 27 when she claims to have murdered Vannier. Marlowe quickly deduces that she did not kill him but that he was probably really dead.

Although Marlowe says he has no intention of altering the murder scene when he goes to Vannier's house, he ends up doing just that after overhearing Morny's attempt to frame his wife. Although Lois Morny scornfully says she will take the blame, Marlowe does not believe she is guilty. He tries to undo the frame up that Morny arranges by making the murder look like a suicide again.

The turning point of the mystery takes place in Chapter 29 when Marlowe finds the photographic evidence that Horace Bright was pushed from the high window he is believed to have jumped or fallen from accidentally. The evidence actually shows Mrs. Murdock on the picture behind Bright, however the author does not reveal this to the reader at this point but holds that twist in reserve for the final chapters.



Chapters 31-32

Chapters 31-32 Summary

Marlowe comes out of his hiding place in Chapter 31. He wipes off the gun and puts Vannier's prints back on it, then leaves. As he walks from his car to his apartment, Eddie Prue speaks to him from a parked car. He asks if Marlowe has followed up on the dental supplies receipt. Marlowe says he learned that the supplies on the receipt are used to make molds for gold inlays in teeth, but asks Eddie why he gave him the receipt, pretending that he does not know about the possible connection between Teager and Morningstar. Prue grows impatient with Marlowe's dumb act and drives off.

Marlowe returns to his apartment and greets the nurse that Dr. Moss has had stay there. Merle is resting in his bed and he speaks with her, telling her that he is going to take her home to Wichita at Mrs. Murdock's expense. Merle remarks that this is very kind of her. Marlowe leaves and goes back to the pawn shop, redeeming the ticket for the gold coin.

In Chapter 32, Marlowe goes to see Mrs. Murdock. He confronts her with what he knows about Vannier and she admits she was paying him blackmail money. Marlowe submits that it was Merle Davis who pushed Horace Bright out the window. He guesses she was his secretary and that he made a pass at her, and she overreacted. Mrs. Murdock admits this is true and that she has been paying Vannier to keep it quiet. Marlowe tells her about Merle thinking she had killed Vannier, but adds that it looks like suicide, although Alex Morny is trying to frame his wife for it. This seems to please Mrs. Murdock. She says nothing when Marlowe tells her he is taking Merle back to Wichita using the \$500 she was going to pay to Vannier. As Marlowe is leaving, he runs into Leslie Murdock.

Chapters 31-32 Analysis

Some characters see through Marlowe's "dumb act" and Eddie Prue is one of them in Chapter 31. Their exchange is not central to the story, but does give the author an opportunity to realistically hint at the importance of the dental supply receipt which is for materials to make accurate molds for gold.

Chapter 32 is Marlowe's final confrontation with Mrs. Murdock. He tells her what he has learned about her being blackmailed, but even though he presumably knows she is the one who actually pushed Horace Bright, he pretends that he thinks it is Merle Davis. He also tells her that Vannier apparently committed suicide, and lets her believe that it may have been murder and that Linda Murdock may have been involved. At this point, however, he knows that it was really Leslie Murdock who killed Vannier. He conceals this information from Mrs. Murdock and tells her instead what she wants to hear. The reader at this point also knows only what Marlowe has explained to Mrs. Murdock and

although the reader is aware that Vannier's death is not fully what it appears to be, the details are still hidden.



Chapters 33-36

Chapters 33-36 Summary

In Chapters 33 and 34, Marlowe sits down with a nervous Leslie Murdock and explains everything he has figured out. He knows Leslie didn't take the doubloon to give to Morny, he took it to give to Vannier, who had a scheme with Teager to make a counterfeit and try to sell it. They hired Phillips to approach Morningstar with the coin to see if it would pass. Morningstar recognized the counterfeit as the Brasher Doubloon, which complicated matters and threatened to uncover the scheme. Phillips got scared and sent the counterfeit coin to Marlowe, and when Vannier came after the coin he killed Phillips when he claimed not to have it. Vannier next went to Morningstar looking for the coin. When Morningstar didn't have it Vannier killed him, too. The only other person who knew about the plot was him, Marlowe explains to Murdock, proposing that Vannier called him to his house by threatening to reveal his involvement with the counterfeit scheme. Marlowe guesses that Vannier told Murdock he had evidence against his family and that he would reveal it if Murdock did not keep quiet about the coin.

Murdock listens wearily to Marlowe's confession. He admits that he did go to Vannier's the night before and had pulled a gun on him demanding to see the evidence he had against the family. When Murdock went for his own gun, Murdock took it from him and held it to his head. The gun went off accidentally, he tells Marlowe. To his surprise, Marlowe says he is not going to turn Murdock in to the cops. If they figure it out on their own, he'll cooperate, he said, but that is all. He says he is going to take Merle back to Wichita, and that he knows she never killed anyone.

In Chapter 35, Merle and Marlowe are packed and ready to go to Wichita. He gently explains to her that she did not kill Vannier and that she never pushed Horace Bright out the window, although Mrs. Murdock had made her believe she was responsible for it. It had been Mrs. Murdock who pushed him to get his life insurance money, and then made Merle think she had done it. He shows her the photograph, and she replies that he should never show it to Mrs. Murdock for it would upset her. He tears it up, not telling her he also has the negative. He is astonished that she would still want to protect Mrs. Murdock.

Chapter 36 opens as Marlowe has returned from his trip taking Merle back to her parents. He drops in on Lt. Breeze and learns they had solved the Phillips and Morningstar murders and pinned them to Vannier through Hench's gun. Vannier they decided was a suicide. Breeze has some kind words for Marlowe before he returns to his apartment to have a drink and work through another chess match.



Chapters 33-36 Analysis

Chapters 33 and 34 are a detailed explanation of how everything in the mystery ties up. Vannier killed Phillips and Morningstar and Leslie Murdock killed Vannier over his blackmailing of Mrs. Murdock.

This section contains an amusing self-reference on page 174 when Leslie Murdock says, "Get on with it. I have a feeling you are going to be very brilliant. Remorseless flow of logic and intuition and all that rot. Just like a detective in a book." Marlowe is in fact a "detective in a book," and these two chapters contain exactly the kind of intricate explanation expected at the end of a mystery novel. The author seems to be joking that in the end his book is no different than any other, except that it is because the characters almost seem to be aware they are characters in a book. Marlowe responds in a similar style when he says, "Sure. Taking the evidence piece by piece, putting it all together in a neat pattern, sneaking in an odd bit I had on my hip here and there, analyzing the motives and characters and making them out to be quite different from what anybody - or I myself for that matter - thought them to be up to this golden moment—and finally making a sort of world-weary pounce on the least promising suspect."

Leslie Murdock does seem to be the "least promising suspect," as he has been depicted as an effeminate and weak-willed "mama's boy" who is unlikely to have the willpower to murder someone. Indeed, he explains he only accidentally killed Vannier while threatening him and this seems plausible.

The final twist in the plot comes when Marlowe tells Murdock he knows Merle Davis didn't kill Horace Bright. It was Mrs. Murdock who actually pushed him and then bullied the unbalanced Merle Davis into thinking she was the guilty one. The underlying fact is that Mrs. Murdock killed Leslie's biological father, which may explain the odd hold she has over her son. Mrs. Murdock is the real villain of the story as it wraps up, however Marlowe does not confront her with what he knows or turn her in. This may be out of his perceived duty to his client, or his own idea of justice, which also leads him to take Merle safely away and back to her parents.



Characters

Philip Marlowe

Philip Marlowe is a private detective and the protagonist in the story. He works in Los Angeles and lives in an apartment in Hollywood. Marlowe is very observant and makes note of small details. He is not married, drinks regularly, and enjoys chess.

Marlowe presents a tough persona, often making wisecracks and sarcastic remarks. He is suspicious of most people and does not trust police officers. He lives by his own moral code, which sometimes calls for withholding the truth to protect his clients, to whom he promises his loyalty. He is not above tampering with a crime scene if it serves his purpose.

Marlowe distrusts the rich socialites with whom he has to associate while working. He relates much more closely with the working-class chauffeurs, elevator operators, beat cops and bartenders he runs into. He has a consistent sense of justice which is not entirely based on the law. He shows that he has a tender side as well when he helps the addled and innocent Merle Davis get back to the Midwest to the protection of her parents.

Elizabeth Bright Murdock

Elizabeth Bright Murdock is a wealthy older woman, the widow of a man named Jasper Murdock, her second husband. She is an imperious woman who speaks directly and harshly. She claims to have asthma and steadily drinks port wine, which she says is medicinal. Mrs. Murdock hires Marlowe to get back a valuable coin she believes has been stolen from her late husband's collection by her daughter-in-law, Linda Murdock.

It is revealed that Mrs. Murdock was responsible for her first husband's death, having pushed him out a high window of his office. For several years she made her highly-strung personal secretary, Merle, believe that it had been Merle who actually pushed Horace Bright. She was being blackmailed by Louis Vannier, who had photographic evidence of her crime.

Mrs. Murdock is a ruthless woman who is also highly protective of her son, Leslie. She clashes sharply with Marlowe, who does not let himself be bullied by her.

Lt. Jesse Breeze

Lt. Breeze is a homicide detective who becomes involved with Marlowe's case while investigating the murder of George Phillips. Breeze believes correctly that Marlowe is withholding information about the case and tries to intimidate Marlowe into telling who



his client is. Breeze is a large man with a calm demeanor and careful habits. Marlowe considers him dangerous, and he proves to be Marlowe's most formidable opponent.

Louis Vannier

Louis Vannier is a wealthy playboy mixed up in various criminal schemes. He is blackmailing Mrs. Murdock over her killing of her first husband, having an affair with Lois Morny, the wife of Alex Morny, and is behind a plot to counterfeit a valuable collectible gold coin owned by Mrs. Murdock. He is responsible for killing Phillips and Morningstar and is himself eventually killed by Leslie Murdock when he refuses to hand over the evidence against Leslie's mother.

George Anson Phillips

Phillips is a private detective who is not very bright and not very good at his job. He is spotted by Marlowe as he tails him and asks for Marlowe's help, but is killed before Marlowe can meet with him. Phillips became involved in the case when he was hired by Vannier to try to sell the counterfeit doubloon to Elisha Morningstar. Before his death he sent the counterfeit coin anonymously to Marlowe.

Leslie Murdock

Leslie Murdock is the wealthy son of Mrs. Murdock and her first husband, Horace Bright. He lives in his mother's grand house and is married to Linda Murdock, the former Linda Conquest, a nightclub singer he married over his mother's objections. He is depicted as effeminate and weak, but turns out to be the murderer of Louis Vannier. Murdock is a gambler and is in debt to Alex Morny.

Linda Murdock

Linda Murdock is the wife of Leslie Murdock. She was a nightclub singer under the name Linda Conquest before marrying Leslie and returned to the stage after leaving his mother's house. She clashed with Mrs. Murdock and could not stand living in her house any longer. She married Leslie for money and tells Marlowe she will divorce him for \$25,000.

Alex Morny

Alex Morny is a former actor who runs a fancy nightclub and gambling operation in an exclusive neighborhood. He hires Marlowe to investigate Louis Vannier, who he knows is having an affair with his wife. He believes Vannier is involved in criminal activity and wants him exposed. He provides Marlowe with a valuable clue, a receipt to Vannier for dental supplies. Morny tries to frame his wife for Vannier's death.



Eddie Prue

Eddie Prue is a large man with one frozen eye who works as a kind of bodyguard for Alex Morny. Prue looks dumb but is smarter than he appears. He is seen to be following Phillips shortly before his death, but is eventually shown not to be the murderer.

Lois Morny

Lois Morny is the flirtatious wife of Alex Morny and a friend and former roommate of Linda Murdock. She is having an affair with Louis Vannier. Her husband tries unsuccessfully to frame her for Vannier's murder.

Merle Davis

Merle Davis is the emotionally unstable secretary of Mrs. Murdock, who bullies her in public but treats her kindly in private. She is the former secretary of Horace Bright, who once made a pass at her which greatly disturbed her. When Mrs. Murdock pushed Bright out his office window, she convinced Merle that it has been Merle who actually pushed him. When Merle discovers Vannier's body, she believes that she is the one who killed him, as well. Marlowe tells Merle she is not responsible for either murder once he solves the case, and he personally escorts her back to her parents in Wichita.

Spangler

Spangler is a homicide detective who works as an assistant to Lt. Breeze.

Hench

Hench is a petty crook who lives across the hall from Phillips and makes a false confession to his murder as a favor to Palermo.

Palermo

Palermo is a mobster who owns the building in which Phillips is found dead. To keep the cops from finding his brother who is hiding out in the same building, he convinces Hench to make a false confession then provides him with a lawyer to challenge the confession in court.



Objects/Places

Los Angeles

This is a large city in southern California where Philip Marlowe has his office. All of the action in the novel takes place in and around Los Angeles

Pasadena

This is a town near Los Angeles where Mrs. Murdock has her large comfortable house.

Hollywood

This is a neighborhood of Los Angeles where Philip Marlowe lives.

Bel-Air

This is a neighborhood of Los Angeles where Alex Morny has a large home.

Brentwood Apartments

This is the apartment building where Philip Marlowe lives. The apartments are comfortable, but not fancy.

Bunker Hill

This is a run-down part of town where George Phillips is staying in the Florence Apartments.

Florence Apartments

This is a seedy apartment building where George Phillips is killed in his apartment.

Belfont Building

This is a large and decrepit office building where Elisha Morningstar has his office. It is also the location of Teager Dental Supplies.

Idle Valley

This is a wealthy and exclusive neighborhood where Alex Morny runs his nightclub.

Vannier's Bungalow

This is a small house in Los Angeles where Louis Vannier lives and where he is murdered by Leslie Murdock.

The Brasher Doubloon

This is a rare 18th-century American gold coin left to Mrs. Murdock as part of her second husband's estate. The coin is temporarily removed by her son Leslie in order to make a mold of it as part of a scheme to counterfeit the coin.



Themes

Justice

Marlowe is not especially concerned with seeing that traditional justice is served. He sometimes alters evidence and refuses to give confidential information to the police that might aid their murder investigation. When he accidentally discovers two bodies he covers his involvement by wiping his fingerprints and other evidence from the scene. When he finds Vannier's body, he alters the crime scene to make it look like a suicide.

But Marlowe does have a code of justice to which he adheres when he sees that Merle Davis is taken back to her parents after she is taken advantage of by the wealthy Mrs. Murdock. In his scheme of justice, the strong manipulating the weak and innocent is a worse crime even than murder, and he does what he can to right the situation.

Marlowe's sense of justice seems to be tempered by his sense of duty to his client. Through his investigation he learns that Mrs. Murdock committed a murder several years before and also deduces that her son Leslie killed Louis Vannier. He does not turn them over to the police, however, and when the police conclude wrongly that Vannier's death was suicide Marlowe does not correct them. Marlowe's silence may be out of duty, but Chandler leaves open the possibility that he is also simply looking out for his own interests by avoiding involvement in a murder trial in which he would have to take part. That would anger the police when they learned he had withheld information and he needs the police to at least tolerate him in order to work as a detective. He also would lose future clients if he ever turned over a client to the police.

Marlowe's sense of justice is ambiguous. Perhaps frustrated that he cannot see legal justice through to the end, he chooses his own methods, such as helping the vulnerable Merle Davis.

The Idle Rich

Philip Marlowe finds his clients among the wealthy socialites of the Los Angeles area, but his distaste for their lifestyle forms one of the primary contrasts in the narrative. Chandler opens the story with Marlowe visiting a stately house owned by the wealthy widow who eventually employs him, Elizabeth Murdock. In the opening scene he is left waiting on the doorstep and then in the office of Mrs. Murdock's secretary while he is checked on before being allowed to speak with Mrs. Murdock. It is clear from the beginning that he bristles at the formality and the condescension he experiences among these people, particularly when he amusingly speaks to the jockey statue at the entrance to the house, pretending they are from the same class of society.

Throughout the book, the rich are depicted primarily as weak and dissipated. Leslie Murdock, for all his lip curling and snide remarks, withers immediately when Marlowe displays his physical strength. The villain Vannier seems not to back down and sends



Marlowe away from their confrontation pretending to have a gun, but Marlowe's first reaction is to criticise his fashionable summer suit.

Marlowe bonds quickly with the working-class characters he encounters, and finds they are a good source of information about the people they work for. Alex Morny's chauffeur and the elevator operator at the Belmont Building are good examples of these observant servants. He also has an immediate rapport with characters like Linda Murdock and Lois Morny, who are working class women who have married into the social set.

While Marlowe manages to uncover murder, fraud and thievery among these idle rich, the greatest crime seems to be that of Mrs. Murdock, who manipulated an innocent girl from a simple background into taking the blame for a murder she did not commit in order to protect her wealth. When Marlowe rescues this girl and returns her to her simple Midwestern home, he takes a stand against the rich.

Chess

Philip Marlowe is a devotee of the game of chess, although he is not shown to be an avid player. Instead, he has a chessboard he uses to set up and work through classic chess matches that are written in notation in a book. This is a form of relaxation for Marlowe, who speaks about the enjoyment he finds in it toward the end of the book.

"It was night. I went home and put my old house clothes on and set the chessmen out and mixed a drink and played over another Casablanca. It went fifty-nine moves. Beautiful cold remorseless chess, almost creepy in its silent implacability" (p. 192).

The suggestion is that Marlowe enjoys observing the interactions between the chessmen and the two adversaries that play out in a predictable and understandable way. This is unlike the messy and complicated way in which the mysteries he solves are played out, where conflicts can end in real death.

Marlowe is first observed at his hobby when Lt. Jesse Breeze arrives at his apartment. What follows is an interaction where each man sizes the other up, trying to get them to give up information. Their relationship is similar to two chess opponents. Breeze gives Marlowe an ultimatum to give in by noon the next day or be taken in for questioning, similar to a chess player putting his opponent in "check." When Marlowe does arrive at Breeze's office the next day he is told he is off the hook because Hench has confessed to the Phillips murder. Marlowe does not believe Hench is guilty, and later he learns that Breeze did not think so either, but used the opportunity to put more pressure on Marlowe. The two men are working toward the same goal, the resolution of the case, but from opposing sides. One of the closing scenes shows the two men resolving their apparent differences, each one thinking that he has won.

Style

Point of View

A High Window is told recounted from the point of view of Philip Marlowe, the protagonist and narrator. It is narrated from the first person, meaning that only events and conversations where the narrator is present are depicted in the book. This is a suitable point of view for a mystery novel because the reader only learns things as the detective himself learns them, providing a driving force in the narrative that keeps the reader engaged and suspends the resolution of the mystery as long as possible.

The first person narrative also filters everything through the point of view of the main character, who in this case has definite opinions on almost everything. Marlowe is a working-class professional who works alone and is often called on to work for the wealthy socialites in the Los Angeles area. He has little use for these idle rich and his scorn is evident in the way he describes them and interacts with them. By contrast, Marlowe is sympathetic to those who are exploited by the wealthy such as their bartenders, their chauffeurs and their secretaries. He has an outlook similar to that of Robin Hood who sees his duty partly as protecting these people from those who would prey on them.

Setting

A High Window is set in California in the 1930s or 1940s in the Los Angeles area. Marlowe himself lives in an apartment in Hollywood and has an office in Los Angeles. His client lives in an affluent part of Pasadena, a nearby city. He also has occasion to visit Bel-Air and a place called Idle Valley, where he goes to Alex Morny's opulent semi-secret nightclub. Marlowe moves easily through a wide range of settings, from the lavishly decorated home of Mrs. Murdock to the flophouse apartments of Phillips and Hench. The narrative follows Marlowe as he moves around the city from place to place, talking to people and following up on leads as he works to solve the case. He lives alone but sometimes receives visitors in his comfortable but small apartment, where several chapters take place.

The story unfolds over the course a few days in the summer. The weather is hot and the California sun shines down over everything, creating an ironic contrast with the dark tone of the story. Marlowe and everyone else in the book drive large cars, as is common in California at this time.

Language and Meaning

A High Window is narrated by the main character, Philip Marlowe, a highly-observant man who has apparent disdain for many of the people he deals with through his profession. He is sarcastic and tough in his speech, always ready with a quick



comment. Since his character provides most of the background narration and much of the dialogue, the novel assumes a tone that matches Marlowe's knowing, wise-guy persona.

Chandler makes extensive use of dialogue in the novel, which is part of using a single character as a narrator. He must engage with other characters in conversation to learn the details that further the mystery plot. Chandler's other characters are often just as likely as Marlowe to engage in the same quick, sharp and often sarcastic conversation.

Aside from the quick dialogue, Marlowe is also adept at making detailed observations as might be expected of someone who is a good detective. He provides detailed descriptions of the people and settings in the novel, often using creative comparisons and the same sharp language. His description of Mrs. Murdock is an example of this: "She had a lot of face and chin. She had pewter-colored hair set in a ruthless permanent, a hard beak and large moist eyes with the sympathetic expression of wet stones. There was lace at her throat, but it was the kind of throat that would have looked better in a football sweater" (p. 9).

Structure

A High Window is a mystery novel which poses a mystery to be solved at the beginning of the story, then follows the path of the detective trying to solve that mystery until he discovers the truth. The initial mystery is presented as a simple theft of a valuable gold coin which its owner wants returned. As the detective Marlowe digs into the matter, however, the mystery deepens as he learns his client has something to hide and that there may be something at the root of the mystery that leads to the three murders that take place. These murders are spaced out through the novel, each time providing a twist in the plot.

Chandler employs many twists in the story, not all of them actually relevant to the resolution of the mystery. The confession of Hench, for example, leads Marlowe to the mobster Palermo who has his own reasons for wanting Hench to take the blame for the murder which have nothing to do with Marlowe's case. This apparent dead end is still presented to the reader as possibly connected to the case up until the point that Marlowe himself learns it is not. These side investigations give the novel more depth by adding more knowledge about the main character and entertaining the reader with his amusing descriptions and sharp banter.

The true resolution to the mystery is withheld to the last possible point in the book, even from the reader. When Marlowe returns to his client and explains everything to her, he withholds much of the truth that is known to the reader, but there is also much he has kept from the reader. This comes out in his final conversation with Leslie Murdock, the least-likely suspect who turns out to have been responsible for the missing coin and for one of the murders. The surprise that Mrs. Murdock had framed her secretary for the murder of her first husband is also revealed in the final pages.



Quotes

"All I knew about the people was that they were a Mrs. Elizabeth Bright Murdock and family and that she wanted to hire a nice clean private detective who wouldn't drop cigar ashes on the floor and never carried more than one gun" (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"At the end of the corridor, in the angle of the wall, a youngish blond man in a brown suit and a cocoa-colored straw hat with a brown and yellow tropical print band was reading the evening paper with his back to the wall. As I passed him he yawned and tucked the paper under his arm and straightened up" (Chapter 4, p. 28).

"The Belfont Building was eight stories of nothing in particular that had got itself pinched off between a large green and chromium cut rate suit emporium and a three-story and basement garage that made a noise like lion cages at feeding time. The small dark narrow lobby was as dirty as a chicken yard" (Chapter 7, p. 42).

"He was a big man, rather paunchy, wearing brown and white shoes and sloppy socks and white trousers with thin black stripes, an open neck shirt showing some ginger-colored hair at the top of his chest, and a rough sky-blue sports coat not wider at the shoulders than a two-car garage. He would be about fifty years old and the only thing about him that very much suggested cop was the calm, unwinking unwavering stare of his prominent pale blue eyes, a stare that had no thought of being rude, but that anybody but a cop would feel to be rude. Below his eyes across the top of his cheeks and the bridge of his nose there was a wide path of freckles, like a mine field on a war map" (Chapter 10, p. 60).

"I put the phone down on the shelf and opened the booth door and stuck my head out, filling my chest with what they were using for air in the drugstore. Nobody was paying any attention to me. Up front the druggist, in a pale blue smock, was chatting across the cigar counter. The counter boy was polishing glasses at the fountain. Two girls in slacks were playing the pinball machine. A tall narrow party in a black shirt and a pale yellow scarf was fumbling magazines at the rack. He didn't look like a gunman" (Chapter 13, p. 74).

"Twelve hours to tie up a situation which I didn't even begin to understand. Either that or turn up a client and let the cops go to work on her and her whole family. Hire Marlowe and get your house full of law. Why worry? Why be doubtful and confused? Why be gnawed by suspicion? Consult cockeyed, careless, clubfooted, dissipated investigator. Philip Marlowe, Glenview 7537" (Chapter 16, p. 92).

"She looked like her photo and not like it. She had the wide cool mouth, the short nose, the wide cool eyes, the dark hair parted in the middle and the broad white line between the parting. She was wearing a white coat over her dress, with the collar turned up. She



had her hands in the pockets of the coat and a cigarette in her mouth" (Chapter 19, p. 105).

"I scratched my ear. That seemed sort of non-committal. There was nothing much in her expression now except that I didn't really think she realized that I was there. I was a voice coming out of somewhere, but rather impersonal. Almost a voice in her own head" (Chapter 22, p. 123).

"I scratched my ear. That seemed sort of non-committal. There was nothing much in her expression now except that I didn't really think she realized that I was there. I was a voice coming out of somewhere, but rather impersonal. Almost a voice in her own head" (Chapter 25, p. 136).

"Yellow pajama legs were on the footstool, bare ankles, feet in dark green morocco leather slippers. My eyes ran up from the feet, slowly, carefully. A dark green figured silk robe, tied with a tasseled belt. Open above the belt showing a monogram on the pocket of the pajamas. A handkerchief neat in the pocket, two stiff points of white linen. A yellow neck, the face turned sideways, pointed at a mirror on the wall. I walked around and looked in the mirror. The face leered all right" (Chapter 29, p. 153).

"She picked her cards up again and reached down to put a black ten on a red jack, both cards that were already in the layout. Then she reached sideways to a small heavy table on which was her port. She drank some, put the glass down and gave me a hard level stare.

'I have a feeling that you are going to be insolent, Mr. Marlowe'" (Chapter 31, p. 169).

"It was night. I went home and put my old house clothes on and set the chessmen out and mixed a drink and played over another Capablanca. It went fifty-nine moves. Beautiful cold remorseless chess, almost creepy in its silent implacability" (Chapter 36, p. 192).



Topics for Discussion

How does the first person narrative structure limit the author? What does it free him to do?

Marlowe is fond of working through chess problems. What does this say about his character?

Is Marlowe a reliable narrator?

How does class difference figure into Chandler's story? Where does Marlowe fit in?

Does Marlowe act ethically? Why or why not?

How would Marlowe define justice? Was justice served by the resolution to the story?

How are women depicted in the novel?