

# **A Is for Alibi Study Guide**

**A Is for Alibi by Sue Grafton**

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## Plot Summary

The murder Kinsey Millhone is asked to solve is eight years old, and Kinsey is doubtful that there is anything further to add to the case, but agrees to look into it as it is unlikely for a recently released prisoner on parole would ask to have things stirred up if she were really the guilty party. Nikki Fife claims to be innocent of the crime and says she waited until she was released from prison so that she could find someone who would really help her to find the true killer of her husband. Kinsey is not entirely sure she wants the case, but agrees to look into it a little bit to see if there is anything that did not come out at the trial. After visiting her old friend, Con Dolan, at the police station where she is able to review the case files, Kinsey discovers that there was something more after all to the case. Not only was Laurence Fife killed with powdered oleander, but a young twenty-four-year-old accountant in West Los Angeles died four days later of the same poison. The coincidence is too much to miss, but rather than appearing to clear Nikki of her husband's murder, Detective Dolan believes that Nikki is guilty of not one but two murders.

Kinsey decides to take the case because she truly believes that Nikki is not guilty and that there is a murderer who got away with murder not once, but twice. As she delves into the files and lives of the people involved, Kinsey is met with deceit, deception, misdirection, and hostility. One thing about Kinsey is that when she feels that there is a miscarriage of justice going on she will work night and day to correct it. Her understanding of Nikki Fife's case changes almost on a daily basis and the old facts that she brings to light are making someone nervous. Within a short time of taking the case and interviewing possible suspects or witnesses, one woman, Sharon Napier, is shot to death in her apartment. Kinsey sleeps through her appointment with Sharon and feels somehow responsible for her death, as if she had led the murderer to Sharon.

Following leads that take her from Santa Teresa to Las Vegas to Los Angeles to Salton Sea, Kinsey is determined to discover who the murderer is. Because of the similarities in the two poisoning deaths, the police and Kinsey originally believe that there is only one murderer, but as more and more details about the case come to light, Kinsey realizes that there is very likely more than one person who has committed murder, and neither one of them has yet been caught. Nikki Fife is truly innocent of the murder of her husband.

Kinsey is very involved in the case, and as a result becomes involved with the people linked to the case. She becomes very close to her client, Nikki, and Nikki's deaf son. She starts a physical relationship with a potential suspect, Charlie Scorsoni, and is uneasy about it, feeling that getting romantically involved with a possible suspect is simply bad business. It turns out that her intuition is correct. Laurence Fife's first wife, Gwen, is the one who poisoned Laurence. However, when Gwen is killed the day after Kinsey confronts her about the murder of her former husband, Kinsey realizes that there really is a second murderer and the only one left is Charlie Scorsoni, an estate attorney who has found it easier to skim off the funds of his deceased clients than to make all of his money honestly. When Laurence was killed with oleander, Charlie determines that in



order to get the young, tenacious, and increasingly suspicious accountant out of the picture, he would have to carry out a copy-cat murder of Libby Glass and hope that both murders get pinned on the same suspect.

Unfortunately for Charlie, Kinsey unravels the entire story, delving deeply into the lives of people she has never met before, to come to the truth of the whole event. Once she determines that Charlie is guilty, she has to find proof, which she finds at John Powers's home. John is Charlie's law partner. Charlie has used John's black Lincoln to run down and murder Gwen Fife. Kinsey finds damage on the Lincoln that is consistent with a hit and run accident. The chase is on at this point, when Charlie shows up and chases Kinsey into the ocean, onto a beach, and finally into a dumpster where Kinsey must turn on her former lover and shoot him to death.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The book, *A is for Alibi*, by Sue Grafton is a murder mystery featuring private investigator, Kinsey Millhone, in her debut role. Kinsey Millhone is a private investigator working in the modern-day town of Santa Teresa, California. She is approached by a woman who wishes for Kinsey to find her husband's real killer. The woman is Nikki Fife and it is her husband who was killed. Nikki has just spent eight years in prison for a murder she claims not to have committed. The story unfolds as Kinsey investigates an eight-year-old murder thinking that the trail has long grown cold, and becomes deeply involved in dangerous events that might possibly put Kinsey's own life in jeopardy.

*A is for Alibi* opens with Kinsey Millhone returning to her office for a camera to find Nikki Fife waiting for Kinsey outside of her office door. Kinsey recognizes Nikki from her trial eight years before when Nikki had been convicted of killing her husband of four years, Laurence Fife. After establishing that Kinsey has never had a personal relationship with her late, philandering husband, Nikki attempts to hire Kinsey to find her husband's real killer. According to Nikki, she became disenchanted with her husband only six months into their marriage when she discovered that he was cheating on her. At first this bothered Nikki to the point that she would follow Laurence around, but after a while she realized that it was futile to try and change him, so she decided she wanted to move on with her own life. What helped to convict Nikki, however, was the diary that she had kept during the time she wanted to stop Laurence's cheating, detailing the extent of her surveillance. Kinsey agrees to consider the case, but warns Nikki that the case is so old and that there may not be any new evidence, in which case she will likely turn the case down. After Nikki leaves, Kinsey goes out to take some photos of a sidewalk for another case she is handling.

At this point, Kinsey rehashes in her mind everything she could possibly remember about the case. Laurence Fife had done a lot of divorce work, he was the best there was; he was methodical, calculating, knew every loophole and almost always won, and won big. A lot of people hated him, most of them the men who lost to him in court, and then the women who lost him when he tired of their affairs. Kinsey further remembers that the night before Laurence died he had been having drinks with his partner Charlie Scorsoni and Nikki had been at a Junior League meeting, arriving home before Laurence, who arrived around midnight. Laurence had taken his usual allergy medicine and two hours later he was in severe distress with stomach pain. By morning he was dead. His allergy capsule had been tampered with, filled with powdered oleander. His murder trial made it seem very likely that Nikki had very good reason for wanting her husband dead.



## Chapter 1 Analysis

The main character, Kinsey Millhone, is introduced at the beginning of the story. She is a private investigator in Santa Teresa, California. She meets Nikki Fife, who is waiting for Kinsey outside of her office. Kinsey is serious about her job and is fair enough to give this potential client a hearing, despite what she knows about the case. Kinsey lets Nikki tell her side of the story, bringing up the diary, which seemed to disprove Nikki's tale of tragic loss turned to indifference, hence her innocence. Kinsey agrees to think about it and let her know if she sees enough merit in the case to take it.

The case is murder, the motive is husband cheating on his wife. There is a certain amount of foreshadowing here about relationships and loss of trust. There is also a symbolic picture drawn with the book opening with Kinsey at her office. Work is the most important thing in Kinsey's life, more important than people. Yet, her work involves people. It is as if she lives through the people she meets in her work without having to make a permanent commitment.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Santa Teresa is a town of beautiful architecture, flowering plants, and meandering streets. Even the homes of the "poor" are not very shabby. In the middle of the town is the Santa Teresa police station where Kinsey goes to meet with Detective Con Dolan, who was the investigator for Laurence Fife's death eight years ago. Con's appearance is deceiving; he appears to be a wino off the street, but is one of the sharpest cops that Kinsey knows. Very few people can out-think Con Dolan. Kinsey spars verbally with Con for a while before he calls for the Fife murder file for her to review. Once Kinsey gets into the file, she realizes why Con is so sure that Nikki is guilty. At first she thinks that two files had gotten mixed up, but as she reads and re-reads, she realizes that not only did Laurence Fife die from oleander poisoning, but so did a young female accountant in West Los Angeles four days after Laurence died. After Kinsey reads the files, she questions Dolan again, asking him why the DA did not try to convict Nikki on the second murder charge. Dolan tells Kinsey that the DA had enough to convict Nikki on her husband's murder and he did not want to confuse the issues, but Dolan also tells Kinsey that he believes that Nikki is guilty of both murders, but they were never able to place Nikki at the crime scene and were never able to even prove that Nikki and Libby knew one another.

Dolan is pleased at Kinsey's surprise. He feels that the additional information will help Kinsey to see that her client is actually guilty. Kinsey still protests that she does not believe that Nikki is guilty of Laurence's murder and that Dolan will have a very hard time convincing her that Nikki actually committed a second murder. Dolan's response tells a lot about how he feels about Kinsey, that he believes her to be basically honest and that if she finds any information that will help them to charge Nikki with Libby's murder, then he knows that Kinsey will give it to them. He gives Kinsey the compliment of calling her a young but basically good investigator.

Leaving the police station, Kinsey returns to her office to ponder the new findings of the case. She already knew that she was going to take the case. This was no simple rehashing of previous evidence, there was new information that had never really even seen the light of day. Not only was one murder not properly avenged, but now there were two.

After having a glass of sour wine at her office, Kinsey heads for home, calling it a little cubbyhole. She likes it because it is not full of stucco, red Spanish tile, and flowering vines. It is simple and safe, just as her landlord Henry Pitts at eighty-one is safe. Kinsey believes herself to be half in love with Henry.





## Chapter 2 Analysis

Grafton used an interesting technique in this chapter. She writes a lengthy opening paragraph describing the beauty of the Santa Teresa architecture, gorgeous homes and blue ocean with boats bobbing on the horizon. She calls it a haven for the abject rich. Immediately following this paragraph, the next one introduces the Santa Teresa Police Station and the tough detective, Con Dolan. The suggestion is that underneath the beautiful but artificial exterior lies a city where the crime of murder has been committed, and it takes a tough and clever man to figure that fact out.

It is also in this scene where Dolan reveals that Kinsey had once been a police officer but that she apparently did not like the rules and regulations that bound her activities, even though he believes that she is generally honest. There is a little bit of foreshadowing here, indicating that Kinsey is somewhat willing to bend the rules when it suits her to do so.

The last scene of chapter two shows Kinsey returning to her home, the former garage of her landlord Henry Pitts. Henry is eighty-one, a former baker, a crossword puzzle creator, and a coupon clipper who claims to pay less than seven dollars for fifty dollars worth of groceries. Kinsey states that she thinks that she is half in love with Henry, likely because Henry is safe. Just as her apartment, a converted garage made of aluminum siding is safe and unpretentious. Kinsey is still unable to make a strong commitment, either to a man or to an actual home. Her apartment is simply where she lives.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Kinsey meets with Nikki at Rosie's Bar, not too far from her studio apartment. Kinsey is obviously well acquainted with Rosie when she refers to Rosie's suspicion of Nikki. Rosie believes that Kinsey does business with Mafia types and drug dealers, and when she reaches Kinsey's table she is openly hostile toward Nikki, not letting up until both women take a bite of their food. Nikki and Kinsey discuss the murder of Libby Glass, how Laurence was once named as a correspondent in a divorce case, never leaving anything in writing after that difficult episode. Their conversation makes the connection between Libby Glass, the accountant, and Laurence's law practice. Nikki knew that Laurence was having an affair with someone at the time of his death but she honestly never knew if it were Libby Glass or someone else.

The women discuss all the other people who were involved in some way with the case; Nikki's son, Colin, Gwen, who was Laurence's previous wife before Nikki married him; and finally, Gwen's kids. Nikki is sadly realistic when she acknowledges that everyone blames her for Laurence's death, even Detective Con Dolan. Kinsey assures Nikki that she believes her to be innocent. Nikki easily writes a five thousand dollar check to secure Kinsey's services. Their conversation then turns to Sharon Napier, who had been Laurence's secretary. Nikki is puzzled by Sharon, telling Kinsey that Sharon never appeared to do any work and was disrespectful of Laurence, and yet he never fired her. There was something wrong with Sharon's behavior, but Nikki could not tell Kinsey why. Sharon was beautiful, she traveled extensively, and she testified at the trial to having witnessed one of Nikki's and Laurence's more heated arguments at the law office. Kinsey thinks that she should talk to Charlie Scorsoni, Laurence's former law partner. Once they part, Kinsey walks home and organizes all the information she has gathered onto her three by five index cards. Her system of using index cards helps Kinsey to evaluate who needs to be followed up on, backgrounds to be checked, or legal technicalities. She posts them on the bulletin board over her desk so that errors and questions can more easily be spotted.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Kinsey chooses to meet Nikki at Rosie's Bar in Kinsey's neighborhood. Because Kinsey is a bit of a loner, she looks to friends and familiar places as a home turf. By having her business meeting with Nikki at Rosie's, Kinsey feels that she is more in control of the situation. Rosie plays a little bit of a mother role, being suspicious of Kinsey's clients, bullying Kinsey and her friends into the special of the day. Kinsey enjoys Rosie's nagging. The conversation with Nikki gives Kinsey a few leads to check out, starting with Charlie Scorsoni as he had been Laurence's law partner at the time of his death. They also discuss other people who were close to Laurence, as Kinsey is working to evaluate other possible motives and opportunities for killing a divorce attorney who was

not very well liked. It seems that Laurence had plenty of enemies, but none who seemed truly intent on actually killing him.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Kinsey arrives at her office early and schedules an appointment with Charlie Scorsoni for that afternoon. In the meantime, Kinsey conducts a routine background check on him as she does for many of her jobs, but finds nothing remarkable. Charlie's office is nearby, within walking distance of her office. Once she arrives Charlie keeps her waiting, so Kinsey retaliates by grilling his secretary about anything and everything Ruth is willing to talk about. She makes a strong connection with Ruth by complimenting her on her sweater that Ruth has knitted herself. When Scorsoni finally invites Kinsey into his office she sees that the overweight man she had seen at the trial eight years before had changed into a solid, handsome, and sexy man.

Charlie does not like Nikki re-opening the case and says that it is because Laurence was his friend and does not wish to have all the hurts re-opened. He gives Kinsey some background on their past history. Laurence had a rich and easy life, whereas Scorsoni had to fight for everything. They talk about Gwen, her bitterness over her divorce from Laurence, and that she has a dog grooming facility now. Sharon Napier is also discussed, and Charlie has nothing good to say about her, saying instead that she was worthless as a secretary and that he finally had to get his own secretary to get the work done. He does tell Kinsey that Sharon owes him money that he had advanced against her salary and when she skipped town Charlie was left unpaid. He would like the money back, and he tells Kinsey to remind Sharon that he has not forgotten about old times. Their discussion then turns to Libby Glass. At first Charlie denies having any knowledge of her, but then admits he may have met her in passing, but that he did not know her very well. He does not seem to be surprised when Kinsey passes word on about Libby's death coming just four days after Laurence's death, and claims not to have known anything about it at the time, that it was news to him.

After Kinsey leaves Scorsoni's office she picks up the pictures of the sidewalk for Marcia Threadgill's case against California Fidelity. She travels to Marcia's apartment and does surveillance for a little while from her car, making a snap judgment that anyone who has as ugly a plant hanging from her porch as Marcia does that they would likely have an inclination to defraud an insurance company as well. With nothing going on at Marcia's apartment, Kinsey stops in at the credit bureau to have a friend try to find information on Sharon Napier's present location. Detail work gets the job done.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

When Kinsey goes to see Charlie Scorsoni, her welcome is not very warm. Charlie is not very excited about the fact that Nikki has hired Kinsey to reopen the case regarding his former partner's murder. He says that it is because Laurence was his friend, but he does not really divulge any more than that. Kinsey and Charlie continue to talk. When



Kinsey brings up Libby Glass, Charlie says that he does not know her. Kinsey relates the details of Libby's murder: that she was poisoned with oleander, and the fact that it happened only four days after Laurence died. Charlie gives the distinct impression that he is unaware of the case, and in fact, even says that it was news to him. When the discussion turns to Sharon Napier, future events are foreshadowed when Charlie tells Kinsey to tell Sharon that he would like his money back and to let her know that he has not forgotten about old times. The day-to-day details about Kinsey's other case and the visit to the credit bureau demonstrate just how routine much of Kinsey's work really is, that one day is much like the next, checking and cross checking, filling in blanks, detail work. The interview with Charlie leaves Kinsey feeling unsure about him and about how he fits into the case.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

The next day finds Kinsey out and about again, noting that the Santa Teresa weather is pretty uniform, making it difficult to know what part of the year one is in. She heads to K-9 Korner for an interview with Gwen Fife, finding her to be tall, slim, in her mid-forties, with shoulder length gray hair. She does not seem upset that Kinsey is asking questions, and continues to calmly work on the dogs during the interview. Kinsey is surprised that Gwen does not even inspect her private investigator ID. Gwen does not seem too taken aback at the reopening of the case, but she does state that she considered it to be finished business. Gwen discusses her marriage to Fife in front of the other workers, who are very well acquainted with Gwen's story. Gwen calls Fife a "son of a bitch", but indicates that he could be charming when he wanted something. She recalls her marriage and how she was so perfectly made up, dressed the right way, hair in a French twist, and how she was dutiful, could cook, took care of her home and both children. She states everything in a very matter of fact manner. She does not seem bitter as Scorsoni suspected she would be. She admits that when the marriage ended she was angry at herself for buying into the nonsense of it all.

What Gwen is bitter about is the divorce and about losing the custody of her two kids. They came back to her after Laurence's death, but were almost in college by then. She criticizes how tough a disciplinarian Laurence was and how it made the kids become withdrawn and defensive. She was shocked at how they took his death. Through Gwen, Kinsey discovers that the son Laurence had with Nikki, Colin, is deaf. Kinsey asks permission to talk to the kids, and at first Gwen is startled, but then gives her permission. She wants to know if the result was fair, and Gwen figures that Laurence got what he deserved and that Nikki must have gotten a fair trial, so yes, justice has been served. When asked who else might have motive to kill Laurence, Gwen admitted that she thought Nikki had a good reason to kill Laurence but so did half a dozen others, besides herself. She said Laurence alienated a lot of people and that "(W)e could have formed a club and sent out a newsletter."

## Chapter 5 Analysis

After talking with Charlie Scorsoni, Kinsey expected to find Gwen a miserable, bitter woman, happy to talk badly about her former husband. Rather, she finds a confident, successful, and attractive woman who seems to have come into her own in the world. Gwen works as a dog groomer, and while it never says exactly, the reader gets the idea that Gwen is the proprietor of the K-9 Korner and not just an employee. The first episode of Kinsey's dislike of dogs occurs in this chapter, with Kinsey having to conduct an interview as Gwen continues to groom dogs as they are having a very busy dog grooming day. Gwen is very open about her marriage, how it was a farce from beginning to end and that when the divorce finally came she was happy for it. What she



did not expect was to lose custody of her two children to Laurence, and that little fact is where her bitterness and hatred come in. Gwen seemed to laugh a lot at the end of the interview and Kinsey cannot tell if it is because Gwen has very high spirits or if talking to a private detective makes her nervous, as it does many people. Kinsey is surprised by how much she admires Gwen, but is suspicious that she has not told Kinsey everything she knows.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Wanting to see the scene of the original crime, Kinsey asks Nikki if they can meet at the Fife residence in Montebello, the part of town known for its very wealthy residents. Kinsey gets there first and looks around the outside only to be chased back into her car by a pair of Embden geese. Nikki has no fear of the pair, having brought some breadcrumbs for them. The house is a showpiece without any personality. Nikki admits to having decorated it with malice as she did not want the house. When Laurence insisted on buying it anyway and putting it in Nikki's name for tax purposes, she took a subtle revenge. Nikki tells Kinsey that she has not yet slept in the house she and Laurence had shared before his death but is living in the beach house that Laurence's mother had left to her because Laurence and his mother did not get along.

They talk a bit about Charlie Scorsoni, with Kinsey sharing her feelings that Scorsoni seems like an odd friend for the elegant and successful Laurence Fife. Nikki corroborates Scorsoni's story of having to fight his way to the top and that he admired Laurence immensely. Kinsey wonders if Charlie could have been responsible for Laurence's death, and Nikki reveals that while in prison she has considered everyone in the role of Laurence's murderer, but somehow she does not see how Charlie would have had a motive. They then discuss Gwen, the wife Laurence cheated on with Nikki before divorcing Gwen. Nikki admits to feeling badly about Gwen and that she had fanned Laurence's hatred of his former wife to more solidly ensure her position as his new wife. Kinsey learns that the divorce occurred because Gwen had had an affair and that Laurence punished her with all the skill he had as a divorce attorney to get back at her. Nikki never knew who Gwen's lover was.

The women then turn to the subject of the medication that was key in Laurence's death. He had been taking HistaDril, an allergy capsule, because he was allergic to dogs. But, because their son Colin was deaf, they found that a German Shepherd was a big help in caring for the boy. In Nikki's opinion, her former husband really loved her son.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

One of Kinsey's traits as an investigator is to get a first hand view of the scene of the crime, it is part of a good investigative technique. She gets Nikki to meet her at the Montebello home where Laurence died from taking his oleander laced allergy capsule. Kinsey is struck by several things, including just how successful Laurence Fife had been as a divorce attorney, because only the wealthiest of the wealthy live in Montebello. She is also struck by how impersonal the house feels, and Nikki admits to extracting a certain revenge from her husband for not listening to her opinion about the house. She also delves more deeply into Nikki's feelings about her husband and how she really felt about him, about his former wife, Gwen, and her own role in that divorce. Nikki admits





that she originally thought Gwen really deserved everything she got, but when the tables started to turn and Laurence started cheating on her, she was really able to empathize with Gwen. Nikki does not quite come out and say it, but the reader suspects that she regrets that Gwen lost her kids in the divorce. Kinsey also learns that the Fifes had gotten a dog for Colin in order to help to protect him. Laurence's allergy to dogs is the reason he started taking the allergy medicine in the first place. This is also where the reader finds out that Bruno, the German Shepherd, was killed by a car just outside the house on the road.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

On her way home from Montebello, Kinsey stops in at the Montebello pharmacy and interviews the pharmacist who remembers Laurence, his allergy to dogs, and that he regularly filled his prescription for HistaDril at the Montebello Pharmacy, but he has no ideas as to who doctored Laurence's allergy capsules.

Kinsey's next stop is to spy on Marcia Threadgill, her other case, and is surprised to see that a hanging plant that had been dead is now replaced with a huge plant. If Marcia had managed to lift that new plant up to the hook on that patio then she is not as disabled as she is claiming. Kinsey is angry at herself for missing the opportunity to nail Marcia when she hoisted that plant to its new hook. Watching through her binoculars, Kinsey watches Ms. Threadgill putter among her plants on the patio. Kinsey tries to interview one of the neighbors in Marcia's apartment to get more information about Marcia's alleged condition by pretending to be from the next door building, but is rebuffed by the savvy elderly neighbor.

Going for a three mile jog most days is part of Kinsey's routine, and she takes her run before going to meet Gwen. Midway through her run, Charlie Scorsoni pulls up next to her in his blue Mercedes. He wants to apologize for cutting their interview short yesterday. He claims he wants to get on Kinsey's good side so that she will not suspect him. Kinsey tells him he is out of luck, that she suspects everyone. However, back at her apartment over a beer, Charlie shares his feelings that if Nikki did not kill Laurence, then as his friend, Charlie wants to help find out who really did. He is angered when Kinsey refuses to give him information, saying he knows all about client privilege. He then disarms Kinsey by revealing that he did know Libby Glass and that he suspected that Laurence was having an affair with her. Charlie claims he only wants to help Kinsey with her case. They rehash the night Laurence died and there is no doubt that whoever poisoned Laurence Fife had to have access to his home as he never took his allergy pill anywhere else. Kinsey ponders whether Libby Glass had come up to see Laurence at any time, and if that is how she was killed, being self-administered, a four-day time span in their deaths could then be explained. Charlie claims to have no knowledge of Libby's possible visit to Santa Teresa but does tell Kinsey that Laurence traveled to Los Angeles the week before he died. Kinsey finds herself strongly attracted to Charlie and knows it is not wise to get involved with someone in a current case.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Kinsey's activities in interviewing the pharmacist about Laurence's allergy capsule prescription and then stopping by Marcia Threadgill's apartment complex to do surveillance again demonstrate how dedicated Kinsey is to her job. As a self-employed investigator, she is paid to get results and there is no one checking that she is making



good use of her time. The reader really has to admire just how dedicated she is to her work. The other trait that the reader learns is that Kinsey has a very persistent sense of justice and when she feels that a miscarriage of justice has occurred she is upset and angry over that. She is beginning to feel that Nikki has suffered a miscarriage of justice.

Charlie's surprise visit while Kinsey is on her three mile run suggests that Kinsey is not the only good investigator at determining a person's schedule and what they might do next. It could be a coincidence that Charlie is simply driving by and happens to see Kinsey during her jog, but the meeting seems more deliberate, even contrived. After the very cool meeting with Charlie in his office, his behavior with Kinsey is a little suspect. The reader wonders just why he is so interested in helping Kinsey with the case now.

A careful reader will also see that when Charlie mentions Libby Glass this time, he admits that he never heard much about her death, whereas in his office he denies any knowledge of her death, as illustrated by his conversation with Kinsey on the two separate occasions: "He didn't seem to react with any particular shock or dismay. He made a skeptical pull at his lower lip and then shrugged. 'It's a new one on me but I'll take your word for it,' he said" (Chap. 4, p. 31) "I never heard much about her death. I don't even think it hit the papers here. He was down in Los Angeles though, I do know that. About a week and a half before he died" (Chap. 7, p. 65).



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Gwen and Kinsey meet for dinner at the Palm Garden restaurant to continue their earlier interview. Gwen suspects that Kinsey has been talking to Charlie Scorsoni about her, but is surprised that Charlie does not suspect her of murdering her former husband. She provides Kinsey with her children's contact information and Kinsey assures Gwen that she will try not to upset them. The conversation then turns to a discussion of Gwen's relationship with Laurence. Gwen was a virgin when she met Laurence and never knew anything other than Laurence. She did not realize that his sexual prowess was less than exceptional until she had her affair with a man who felt that she could do no wrong. Gwen says that the affair was wonderful for her, but that she did not want to jeopardize her marriage and risk losing her kids, so she broke it off. Laurence found out by forcing Gwen to confess to the affair. He divorced her anyway, taking everything he possibly could from her, including her beloved kids. Gwen is still bitter about that. She refuses to divulge the name of her lover, claiming only to want to protect him. Kinsey then asks Gwen why Laurence was so unfaithful and Gwen reveals that Laurence used sex to dominate women. When asked who could have hated him so much, Gwen says that she feels he made a lot of enemies and was not good at relationships. She mentions his affair with Charlotte Mercer, the wife of a judge, and that Charlotte did not like being dumped by her lover.

The tip on Charlotte Mercer sends Kinsey directly to the judge's wife as her next stop in her investigation. Kinsey finds a well preserved, professionally sculpted woman who has had one bourbon on the rocks too many. Charlotte gets directly to the point, asking Kinsey whether it was Gwen or Nikki who had sent her. She freely admits the affair, claiming that Laurence had originally broken it off and that he had come back like an old tomcat a few months before he died. She liked Laurence's cold remoteness during sex, claiming that she does not like a man who fawns over her. Kinsey asks Charlotte about Libby Glass, with no result. Then she asks about Sharon Napier. Charlotte says that she knew something was off there and so she actually had Sharon investigated, only to find that Laurence had had an affair—not with Sharon, but with Sharon's mother. The scandal ruined Mrs. Napier and Sharon got the job as Laurence's secretary as blackmail, getting paid for doing nothing. Kinsey is unsure of Charlotte's motives for the information about Sharon Napier and her mother and is somewhat suspicious of it.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Kinsey has developed her interviewing skills as an investigator because she is able to get Gwen to talk about all the personal information regarding her marriage, her affair, and the subsequent divorce that lost her the children she loved so much. Even though Gwen says that she is not bitter and that she is glad to have been divorced from Laurence, it is evident that even eight years later she still stings from how badly the



divorce hurt her. Charlotte Mercer is a new witness and one that might or might not have important information. The fact that she had Sharon Napier investigated because how Sharon's relationship with Laurence as his secretary simply did not ring true with her has a little bit of the sound of truth in it, but Kinsey is suspicious of Charlotte's motives. It could be that Charlotte is still hurting from having been dropped by Laurence and is only trying to put herself in the best light.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Using all her skills as a private investigator, Kinsey discovers a car registration in Sharon Napier's name having been transferred to Nevada, first Reno, then Las Vegas, leaving behind a string of debt and unpaid bills, on to Carson City and then back to Las Vegas. Kinsey contacts a friend in Las Vegas and he agrees to track down an address for Sharon.

After that detail oriented investigative work, Kinsey meets with California Fidelity, bringing them up to date on her suspicions that Marcia Threadgill is fabricating her injury and as a result is cheating them. The conversation goes nowhere, a forty-eight hundred dollar claim seems like small potatoes and probably is not worth the effort of fighting it in court. Kinsey is disgusted.

Kinsey moves on to Los Angeles, where she hopes to find information on Libby Glass. She stays in her usual super cheap motel, the Hacienda Motor Lodge on Wilshire, which is managed by Arlette, who believes that fat is beautiful. The Hacienda is almost like a home away from home for Kinsey, having stayed there about twenty times. Kinsey looks up Lyle Abernathy's address. He had been Libby's boyfriend for ten years, but she finds no listing for him. She does find a listing for Raymond Glass, who was Libby's father. Kinsey arrives at the Glass residence unannounced, explaining her interest in talking with them about Libby. What she finds is sixty-year-old Raymond in a wheelchair, unresponsive in front of the television, having been badly injured in a car accident a few years before. Grace, Libby's mother, works as a seamstress and continues work on a dress while she and Kinsey talk. All mention of Elizabeth, as Grace calls Libby, makes her sad and wistful. Kinsey listens with patience and gentleness as Libby's mother recounts how wonderful her daughter was and how much she misses her. When Kinsey asks about Lyle, hoping to get information on his whereabouts, she is stunned to discover that Grace is expecting Lyle for lunch and even more shocking is the fact that Lyle comes for lunch every day to help Grace with Raymond. Raymond is unable to care for himself and Grace is unable to move him from his chair or bed and Lyle is a big help.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Kinsey demonstrates her investigative skills and her dedication to her work, especially when it comes to battling the ravages of injustice. The fact that California Fidelity is willing to pay almost five thousand dollars for a trumped up injury infuriates Kinsey and her sense of justice. She is further affected when she meets the Glass family and sees firsthand just how devastated they are about the death of their daughter, their grief as palpable as if it had happened yesterday rather than eight years before. The one bit of

good information is that Libby's old boyfriend is still in the picture and Kinsey does not have to do any searching to find him, as he is a daily visitor to the Glass household.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Kinsey accepts Grace's invitation to stay for lunch, mainly because she is curious about Lyle. His reaction when he meets Kinsey is one of studied indifference, ignoring her after the greeting and setting about taking care of Libby's father, feeding him baby food, spooning the dribbles off of his chin. Even as she watches, Kinsey sees Raymond wet himself. Grace and Lyle do not react, which tells Kinsey that this is normal for them. Kinsey tries to talk to Lyle during lunch, but he is quiet and uncommunicative. She tells Grace that she is heading to Las Vegas to follow up on a lead but would like to stop by on her return trip to see any of Libby's belongings. Grace agrees and Kinsey leaves immediately after lunch.

Outside, Kinsey waits in her car for Lyle to leave the Glass apartment. He sees Kinsey, and getting into his car he leads Kinsey to his job site. Once there he makes no attempt to disguise his reluctance to talk to Kinsey. He adopts a James Dean bad boy pose as Kinsey approaches. She asks if he is not interested in finding out who killed Libby and he diverts the conversation. Kinsey is persistent asking why he dropped his plans for law school and remarks that it might have been the dope smoking that got in the way. Finally he opens up and tells Kinsey that that he was angry at being dumped by Libby for the lawyer from Santa Teresa. Kinsey asks if it was Laurence Fife and Lyle agrees that it probably was, though he never knew his name for certain. Lyle suggests that perhaps Libby's death was a suicide, something Kinsey has not considered. She probes for more details, wondering how Libby found out about the death, and what her reaction was. Lyle says that she was upset and confused and at first wanted his company and then changed her mind. The next thing Lyle knew was that she was found dead by the apartment manager after she had been dead for about three days. Kinsey feels that Lyle is concealing something.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The dynamics of the Glass family are both repelling and sad for Kinsey. What she does wonder, however, is why Lyle is so attentive to the Glass family. After all, Libby had dumped Lyle for the attorney from Santa Teresa, likely Laurence Fife, so it stands to reason in Kinsey's mind that he would have just left the scene and moved on to something else. Kinsey really feels that Lyle is concealing something, but is not sure why. He had diverted the conversation when Kinsey asked him directly whether or not he wanted Libby's killer caught. That is strange behavior in someone who supposedly had strong feelings for the victim.





# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Kinsey immediately goes to the accounting offices of Haycraft and McNiece, where Libby was working when she was murdered. Unable to talk to anyone that day about Libby, Kinsey leaves her card with the reluctant receptionist asking for Garry Steinberg to call her when he returns.

Back at her motel, Kinsey calls Scorsoni's office, but Ruth tells her he is still in Denver. There is no answer in Denver, so Kinsey leaves him a message. A call from her friend in Las Vegas informs her of Sharon Napier's address, giving Kinsey a solid lock on a missing witness. Shortly after that, Charlie returns Kinsey's call and she updates him on her progress, even going so far as to tell him she has located Sharon in Las Vegas and that she is headed up there right away. Charlie is able to procure Kinsey's itinerary, itemizing when she will be back in Santa Teresa and that on her way back she plans to stop in Los Angeles and look at Libby's personal effects.

That night, around 7 pm, Kinsey heads to Las Vegas. She figures that after she interviews Sharon she can stop in on Gwen's grown children, Greg Fife being in Salton Sea and Diane in Claremont. Kinsey is unsure where her investigation is going at this point, but knows that she has to make a thorough investigation.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Kinsey is feeling an attachment to Charlie Scorsoni, and is flattered that he wants to know when she will be back in Santa Teresa. This feeling allows Kinsey to let her guard down and she gives Charlie a lot of information, including the fact that she has found Sharon Napier in Las Vegas. She also lets the reader know that she is not much of a sightseer, does not care for scenic wonders, such as weird rocks or holes in the ground. She starts at the beginning of a trip and moves quickly through to the end, much like she runs her investigations.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Las Vegas is not Kinsey's idea of a good time. She avoids the strip, has no wish to gamble, hates the idea of non-stop night life and the smell of fried shrimp dinners. In keeping with her thrifty ways, Kinsey books a room at the Bagdad Motel near the airport, turning down the free cup of nickels designed to entice visitors into the casino. A cab ride takes Kinsey to the strip. She seeks out the Fremont where her Las Vegas contact informed her Sharon Napier works. Discovering that Sharon will not be in until 11 am, Kinsey returns to her dingy room at the Bagdad to get some sleep. In the morning, Kinsey is feeling ill, headachy, with possible flu symptoms. She toughs it out by taking two Tylenol and getting started with her day. First she leaves the fifty dollars for her friend who located Sharon. Then she heads to Sharon's apartment to see what she can discover by peering in the windows through the gap in the curtains of the ground-floor apartment. Kinsey also checks out the back patio but discovers nothing of interest.

Back at the Fremont, Kinsey sees some of the same gamblers who were in the same seats more than ten hours before. Sharon is a tall, beautiful woman who exudes sex appeal without effort. Kinsey watches Sharon until she goes on break and then approaches her. Sharon is surprised to hear that Nikki is out of jail, but asks if Nikki has money. She tells Kinsey that she hated Laurence Fife, hated working for him, and hated secretarial work. She indicates that she would like to see Kinsey that evening after work at 7 pm, but after spotting someone over Kinsey's shoulder, changes the time to 7:45. Kinsey gives Sharon her information on a piece of paper and then leaves the casino afraid that she really is ill. She returns to the Bagdad to get more sleep.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Kinsey demonstrates just how thorough an investigator she is by going to Sharon's apartment knowing that it will be empty. When talking with Sharon at the Fremont, Sharon's interest is piqued when she hears that Nikki is the one who has reopened the case and that she is out of jail. Wondering if she has money, Sharon tells Kinsey that they need to talk after she gets off work. At first she tells Kinsey to come at seven, but after seeing someone over Kinsey's shoulder, she changes the time. Kinsey wonders if Sharon has just made an appointment for a sexual encounter before they are to meet. Kinsey's thriftiness is also evident, for this is the second motel that she has chosen that is not top of the line. She could legitimately consider every aspect of her trip a business expense and charge Nikki, who does have money, but Kinsey is fair in regard to her client's money.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Kinsey wakes up to a phone call from Sharon Napier asking if Kinsey has forgotten about her. It is 8:30 pm, forty-five minutes after their scheduled appointment. Kinsey is promising that she can be right over when Sharon asks her to wait a moment, that there is someone at her door. A strange sound over the phone gets Kinsey's attention and then a muffled voice over the phone says "hello", chuckles, then hangs up. Adrenaline rushes through Kinsey, making her forget her illness. Kinsey races over to Sharon's apartment, picking up her flashlight and rubber gloves from her briefcase in the back seat. She briefly considers taking her gun, but decides against it. She knocks at the front door, whispering Sharon's name. Kinsey is unsure of what or who she will find and she fears that the intruder might still be in the apartment. The back door is locked as well, and Kinsey searches every hiding place on that patio for a key. Twisting the light bulb into darkness, Kinsey uses Sharon's key and enters the apartment. Methodically, Kinsey turns on lights and searches the apartment for the intruder. All she finds are a mouse on his wheel in the bathroom and Sharon on the floor of the living room with a hole in her throat. The apartment is empty, cheaply furnished, showing only signs of Sharon's sloppy housekeeping habits and a pile of unpaid bills. The bills Kinsey slips into her pocket. A misplaced sense of sorrow prompts her to feed the pet mouse in the bathroom before calling the police, pretending to be a neighbor, to report her concern for Sharon. As she is leaving, Kinsey recalls that her name and number must be here; she had given them to Sharon. A frantic search through the apartment yields nothing, when Kinsey notices the bathrobe Sharon is wearing has pockets. With difficulty, Kinsey searches Sharon's pockets and finds the paper, removes it, and exits the apartment just as the police arrive. She saunters to the car where she sits for a bit, watching a patrolman with a gun move toward the back of Sharon's apartment.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Kinsey is unsure who killed Sharon. She has left a trail of doubt and discontent behind her. Sharon had been turning tricks in Las Vegas, so perhaps her killer is a pimp or a customer. Or, Kinsey has to admit, she has led someone to Sharon and now Sharon is dead. The guilt Kinsey feels is intense, but not enough to stick around to face the Las Vegas Police Department. She hurries to the Bagdad, checks out, and leaves Las Vegas that night, getting as far as Needles before her fatigue overwhelms her.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

The next morning Kinsey feels better, leaves Needles, and heads to Salton Sea to interview Greg Fife. She remarks on the scenery, reflecting on the beauty of the emptiness, keeping her mind off of Sharon Napier. Greg is twenty-five, which made him seventeen when his father was murdered. He looks a lot like his father but claims that their personalities are not at all alike. He is reluctant to talk to Kinsey about his past, but does not actually refuse. Kinsey is frustrated at his reticence, but finally gets him talking after asking a question about whether the Salton Sea water is ocean water. After being able to expound on a subject that gives him pleasure, Greg allows Kinsey three questions. She asks about his memories from the period just before Laurence died, explaining that she is attempting to reconstruct the last six months of his father's life. Greg has no idea about his dad's business dealings, but says he can tell her about family issues. Greg admits to acting out because he knew that whatever he did, it would never please his father, but he now regrets it because he can no longer tell his dad what he really meant to him. He recounts the Labor Day weekend before Laurence died when they were all at Salton Sea except Diane, because she was sick. Kinsey asks how Greg liked Colin and Greg admits that he tolerated Colin, but resented him for his disability.

Kinsey's next stop is Claremont to see Greg's sister, Diane. Just before she leaves Greg, she asks if Laurence took allergy medication that weekend and discovers that no, Laurence did not because the dog was left at home that weekend. In fact, it was actually that weekend that Bruno was hit by a car and killed.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

It is very clear at this point in the story that Kinsey is a master at compartmentalizing her feelings. Sad and upset as she is about Sharon's death, she is still focused on finding Laurence's real killer. With that job to do, she must press on. The reader also learns a little about Kinsey's past when Greg asks Kinsey about her father and her relationship with him. Kinsey tells him that she is an orphan, her parents were killed when the car the three of them were in was struck by a boulder that rolled down the mountainside and crashed through the window. The strongest memory is the sound of the silence in the car after her mother stopped crying.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Kinsey leaves Greg and the Salton Sea and heads to Claremont, arriving around 6 pm. Kinsey reaches Diane's roommate, who tells her that Diane will be home in a couple of hours. In the interim, Kinsey goes to the home of an old school friend, Nell, and spends the night on the couch. She does wonder if family life could be a possibility for her.

Kinsey meets Diane for lunch the next day at a health food restaurant. Diane talks about her mother with great affection, referring to Laurence as an asshole because he had dumped Gwen for Nikki. They then talk about all the therapy Diane has been through, and she expresses true shock at the idea that Kinsey has never been through any kind of therapy. She then speculates that Kinsey must be like her dad, a compulsive type who is unable to make commitments. She further speculates that her father manipulated everyone because his mother manipulated him. Then she shares that she believes that the only person her father ever really loved was Colin.

Kinsey then turns the conversation to the dog, Bruno, asking if Diane knew who had let him out the weekend the whole family was at Salton Sea. Diane distracts Kinsey with a photo album she has made for Colin and asks Kinsey to take it to him. Then Diane becomes flustered, and Kinsey presses her. At that point, Diane confesses that she is the one who let the dog out and that she has held a burden for eight years believing that if she had not let the dog out and then forgotten him because she was so sick that her father would still be alive today. Kinsey points out that as the poison was introduced into her father's medication, it could have happened at any time, and that anyone really determined would not allow a dog to interfere.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The interlude with Kinsey's friend, Nell, demonstrates just how much of a loner Kinsey is, even to the point where Kinsey wonders if she will ever have a family life like her friend. Then when she and Diane are talking, Diane speculates on Kinsey's inability to make a commitment which Kinsey ignores, feeling that Diane is only guessing. Focusing on the fact that Bruno died when the Fife family was gone and asking Diane about it is actually more luck than skill when Diane breaks down and admits that Bruno's death was her fault. Sometimes even investigators get lucky.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Kinsey returns to the Hacienda in Los Angeles and gets her messages from Arlette, with three out of four from Charlie Scorsoni. Arlette says he called once from Denver, then Tucson, then Santa Teresa. Kinsey returns Charlie's calls but has to leave a message with Ruth that she's back in Los Angeles. The other caller is Garry Steinberg, the accountant who is willing to meet Kinsey on Friday. Then Kinsey makes an appointment with Mrs. Glass to see Libby's things.

The tough call is to her friend in Las Vegas who had found Sharon Napier for her. He is understandably upset and Kinsey tries to appease him by denying any proof that Sharon was killed because of Kinsey's investigation. He is not appeased. Kinsey is suffused with guilt, but even more, she is upset at the loss of a witness. She knows that Sharon had information that could have helped to complete her investigation, but now she feels that she is back to square one.

The appointment with Garry Steinberg is pleasant, turning quickly to the subject of Libby Glass. They try to see if there is a connection beyond the fact that Libby worked on Fife and Scorsoni's accounts. Garry liked Libby and highly endorses her skills as an accountant, saying that she was very detail oriented. They discuss Libby's relationship with Fife and Scorsoni, and Garry admits to not knowing if she was having an affair with Laurence. Garry does give Kinsey information on Libby's breakup with Lyle, who Garry felt was creepy, belligerent, and a druggie. Garry promises to call when he has any information for Kinsey.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter helps to tie up loose ends. The only revelations are that Kinsey is sure that Sharon had some information for her, but was useless because she has been forever silenced. Her suspicions about Lyle are also confirmed by Garry; however, this is a placement of a red herring, leading the reader to suspect that Lyle is involved in Libby's death, which he is but only incidentally. This chapter also demonstrates Kinsey's tenacity and willingness to do her work even when it involves making unpleasant phone calls such as the one discussing Sharon Napier's death with the friend who found her for Kinsey.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Returning to look at Elizabeth's belongings, Kinsey is relieved that only Mrs. Glass is present. They go together to the basement. As they descend the stairs there is a sudden blast and the light bulb on the landing is shattered, plunging them both into darkness. Kinsey throws Grace out of the way and runs to try to intercept the intruder, but is too late. When Kinsey returns to Grace, she immediately blames Lyle for the incident, something that Mrs. Glass is unwilling to accept. Kinsey is positive that intruder is Lyle—after all, he knew when Kinsey was coming and likely did not really care if he gets caught. Irritated, Kinsey still takes the boxes back to her motel room for a more thorough inspection.

Kinsey obtains two cups of black coffee, indicating her intention of staying up as long as it takes to go through the materials that are all that remain of Libby's life. By four in the morning, Kinsey has found nothing and is frustrated. She berates herself for arriving too late. Taking one last look, Kinsey goes through a pile of books, and out of *Pride and Prejudice* falls a letter addressed to Darling Elizabeth. The letter clearly indicates that an affair was going on between Elizabeth and Laurence. Not sure what to think about this piece of evidence, Kinsey rehashes clues in her head. She places the letter in a large envelope to protect any fingerprints, planning to have it tested by Con Dolan. Kinsey feels her first hint of danger. Then she wonders if Nikki might be behind everything.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The tone in this chapter is one of anger and frustration. Kinsey does not like to be wrong, to be shot at, or made a fool of. She has left a body in Las Vegas and just now she has been almost shot at while trying to see Libby Glass's possessions. She is afraid that there is something that she needs to see that has been taken and is angry that for the second time she is too late to get the information that she needs. One she goes through the boxes very carefully, she does find a letter addressed to Elizabeth from Laurence Fife that seems to settle it, that they were having an affair; however, this does not make sense to Kinsey. She wonders if she simply wishes to have a different answer, rather than finding out the truth. The one clue in this chapter is that only Libby's family called her Elizabeth.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

After less than two hours of sleep, Kinsey packs everything into her car, checks out of the Hacienda, and stops by the Glass residence to return Libby's boxes. Grace is almost guilty in her relief when Kinsey tells her that she found nothing, keeping news of the letter to Elizabeth to herself. Kinsey feels a little irritated and yet somehow guilty about Mrs. Glass, who really has been as helpful as she could. Kinsey takes a moment to reexamine the basement and surrounding area for clues of the previous night's intruder, but finds nothing. She returns to Santa Teresa by ten in the morning and sleeps on her couch for most of the day.

At four in the afternoon, Kinsey drives out to Nikki's beach house, mainly to see if her suspicions about Nikki might possibly be true. The beach house is whimsical and very appealing, very unlike the house in Montebello. Kinsey sees a definite difference in Nikki, as if she is more energetic and alive. Kinsey gives her the photo album from Diane to Colin. He is in the kitchen making bread dough, kneading it on the counter. Kinsey marvels at how much mother and son look like faeries. Nikki shares with Kinsey that she feels so good to be back with her son, explaining her new animation. She signs while talking so that Colin can keep up with the conversation. Kinsey fills Nikki in on the events of Sharon's death, her talks with Gwen's children, and the letter in Libby's effects. Asking if it might be Laurence's handwriting, Kinsey shows the letter to Nikki, who cautiously confirms that it could be Laurence's writing. Colin points to a picture of Gwen in his new album and asks who Gwen is, calling her Daddy's mother. Nikki tries to explain ex-wife to him but finally gives up.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Kinsey suspects Nikki for a very short time of having hired her to flush out Sharon Napier so that she could kill her, but after meeting with Nikki again, she can see that Nikki's new animation and intense delight at being back together with her son after a theft of eight years of his childhood is really all that Nikki cares about. Kinsey instinctively trusts Nikki and tells her everything that has happened since she last saw her. The fact that the letter is in Laurence's handwriting still really bothers Kinsey, somehow she just does not feel that he was having an affair with Libby Glass. The album that Diane had made for Colin was opened immediately and the only thing that bothers Kinsey is Colin's confusion over who Gwen is. Nikki tries to explain ex-wife, but Colin insists on calling her Daddy's mother, or grandmother. This is a very curious event as the last time Colin was to have seen Gwen was when he was fourteen months old, far too young to actually remember her.





# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Kinsey finds Charlie Scorsoni sitting on her doorstep when she returns home and she is irritated because meeting Charlie like this did not match her fantasy. She takes her irritation out on him by being grumpy and unfriendly. He talks her into getting dressed up so he can take her out to dinner. At the Ranch House in Ojai, Kinsey is actually relieved to have Charlie order for her, which is very much out of character for independent Kinsey. Her attraction to him has only increased, but when he opens the conversation by asking how the investigation is going, Kinsey rebuffs him, but relents and states that it is not going well. Charlie continues to woo her over dinner, lowering her defenses against him. They talk a little about his past, how he chose to go to law school, about his abusive father and dysfunctional family dynamics. His hatred for his father is still evident and his disappointment that his mother needed the abuse to live is alive as well.

They drive back to Kinsey's apartment, and on the way Charlie takes her hand and holds it, rubbing her fingers in a way that could only be described as sexual. Then he asks Kinsey if she knows what they are going to do and then places her hand in his crotch. He makes love to Kinsey several times during the remainder of the night and Kinsey, rather than feeling trapped, is strangely comforted by his presence in her bed. He kisses her forehead early the next morning and leaves.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Kinsey allows herself to be seduced by Charlie, first during dinner with a very sensual meal, knowing all the while that she really should not allow what was happening to continue. Then Charlie takes her home and continues the seduction by making love to her over and over again during the night. The reader really has to wonder what it is about Kinsey that he finds so appealing and lovable. She has done her best to rebuff him and he keeps coming around, more and more insistent each time, finally becoming her lover despite the ongoing investigation.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

On Sunday Kinsey takes care of personal business and on Monday she goes to see Con Dolan at Homicide. He is skeptical about the letter Kinsey brings for fingerprinting, and very aggressive regarding the death of Sharon Napier in Las Vegas and Kinsey's possible role in it. Kinsey lies to his face, telling him that she never got to Las Vegas, but instead went to Salton Sea to interview Greg Fife and to Claremont to interview Diane Fife. She tells him to either read her her rights or to back off. She says that Sharon could have been killed for reasons other than the Fife case, after all, eight years have passed. Personally, Kinsey believes she caused Sharon's death, but was never going to admit it to Con Dolan. Con reluctantly agrees to test the letter for prints, but only because it would support his theory that Nikki is still his pick as murderer.

Returning to Marcia Threadgill's apartment, Kinsey decides to set her up in order to prove to California Fidelity that Marcia's injury is fabricated. Kinsey buys Marcia a big heavy plant, scrawls illegibly on the gift card, and delivers it to Marcia's apartment herself, taking pictures at the front of Marcia picking the heavy plant from the floor, and then running back to her car so that she could get shots of Marcia lifting the plant from shoulder height up to the plant hook above her head. Kinsey drops the film off to be developed. Perhaps this will be what it takes for the insurance company to realize that they were being defrauded. Unfortunately, they believe that settling out of court is their best option.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Kinsey's unique honor system is in full sail in this chapter. She takes the Elizabeth letter to Con Dolan because she really wants to know if it is a legitimate letter, but while she is there, Con challenges her about her role in Sharon Napier's death and Kinsey tells a bold-faced lie to him that she never even got to Las Vegas. If the reader recalls, however, Kinsey actually signed a credit card slip at the Bagdad motel. If Con were as good an investigator as Kinsey, he could possibly find that out. Kinsey also has no qualms about tricking Marcia Threadgill into revealing that her injury is fabricated by buying her a big heavy plant just so that Kinsey can get photos of Marcia picking it up, proving her injury to be false. The sense of injustice in this case really infuriates Kinsey, showing an interesting view into her sense of justice.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

The pace of the investigation picks up. Garry Steinberg has information on Lyle Abernathy, which is that he once had a job as an apprentice to a locksmith but was released because cash had gone missing from his job sites. This could easily put Lyle in a position to have gotten into the Fife's house after Bruno had been killed.

Next, Gwen calls to see if they can have lunch together. She wants to come clean about her affair, but then Kinsey realizes that it is only because her former lover is dead that she is willing to share this information. Kinsey suspects that something else is going on, so she is very evasive when Gwen asks how the investigation is going, and expresses her doubt that anything new could possibly turn up after eight years. Kinsey, acting on her hunch, double checks with Gwen about the last time she saw Colin. Gwen seems perplexed, but says that she thinks it was at her daughter, Diane's graduation, when Colin was fourteen months old.

Kinsey then goes to Charlie's office to see if he is free for dinner. They make a date and she drives out to Nikki's house.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

The pace of the investigation is moving more and more quickly, as is the narrative. The chapters read more quickly now, giving the reader a sense of urgency. The information on Lyle Abernathy can help Kinsey pin Laurence's murder on him, he has means and motive now, all she is missing is opportunity. The lunch with Gwen is perplexing to Kinsey, leading her to think that Gwen is definitely not telling her everything. The information about her former lover could have been given over the phone. Kinsey really thinks that Gwen is concealing something. Kinsey makes her first overture toward Charlie by inviting him to dinner.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Kinsey is really troubled by Colin's referral to Gwen as Daddy's mother. Kinsey's trip out to the beach house is to try to get to the bottom of the confusion, but communicating with a deaf boy is difficult. Kinsey insists that a fourteen-month-old could not possibly remember seeing someone. She thinks that Colin has seen Gwen more recently than that and she is determined to figure out why. Nikki is upset at the connotation behind Kinsey's questions, but Kinsey insists that perhaps Laurence introduced Gwen to Colin that way if Colin had somehow seen them embracing. She further insists that Gwen must have been out at the beach house at some time when Nikki was not there. Nikki does not like feeling like she's been cheated on by her wife again, and Kinsey reminds her of the five thousand she paid for the truth and that Charlotte Mercer had put the idea into her head with the comment about how Laurence was always sniffing around the same porch.

Dinner with Charlie is postponed in order to go to Charlie's partner's home to feed and walk the dogs. John Power's home is on the beach not too far from Nikki's home. Kinsey's lack of affection for dogs is very apparent even during their romp on the beach. Kinsey asks Charlie if he knew of Laurence's affair with Sharon Napier's mother. Charlie denies it heatedly, saying that he had never heard the name and that he knew Laurence for years. Kinsey reminds Charlie that he said the same thing about Libby Glass. Then Charlie verbally attacks Kinsey, demanding to know if she is there to work, to simply pump him for information, because he does not like that. The old Kinsey comes back, she becomes angry at his behavior and leaves, glad that she had taken her own car to the beach house.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

Kinsey feels that she is getting closer and closer to the truth. She is discovering that some of her witnesses are not always telling the entire truth and when they do, she becomes suspicious of their motives. Nikki is upset at the idea that perhaps Laurence was having an affair with his ex-wife while he was married to her, and Kinsey offers to refund her money. Nikki refuses, still wanting to know the truth about the murder of her husband, but not liking the idea of Gwen being intimate with Laurence, despite the eight years since his death. Charlie is happy that Kinsey has made a move by inviting him to dinner, but when they start talking after taking the dogs for a walk, Kinsey asks him if he knew about Laurence's affair with Sharon Napier's mother, and Charlie gets angry, especially when he denies it and Kinsey reminds him that he said the same thing about Libby Glass. The reader has to wonder at the source of this anger. Is it from his dysfunctional upbringing or is it something more sinister?



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Kinsey admits she has never been good at taking that kind of guff from men. Rather than stew about it, she gets out her index cards and brings them up to date. Then she begins to speculate on how the murder could have been committed. She makes lists of everyone involved in the case, including Charlotte Mercer. Kinsey then realizes that she is not able to eliminate Charlie Scorsoni from her list and this makes her uneasy.

Just after midnight, Charlie shows up at Kinsey's apartment, claiming to have come to apologize. Kinsey is reserved, partly because of how he treated her, partly because of her new awareness of his possible involvement. They talk about the fight for a bit, both admitting some fault. Charlie accuses Kinsey of not wanting anyone in her life, but even as he tells her these hard truths, he begins the seduction process again and they end up making love on the floor. He is gone just over an hour later. Kinsey evaluates her behavior and decides that it is unprofessional and dangerous.

Kinsey returns a call from Con Dolan, who verifies that there are not prints on the Elizabeth letter, but that the handwriting seems like a match. Kinsey is still not convinced, there is still something not right about that letter. She returns to the Marcia Threadgill case, not expecting anything, resigned to the fact that Ms. Threadgill will likely win this time, as cheaters often do.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Kinsey's sense of self does not allow her to be mistreated by a man, and she is understandably irritated by their fight earlier that evening. To take her mind off of it, she works on her index cards, thinking about the case, considering all possible angles, making lists of all suspects and others involved in the case just to see if anything new comes to light. One fact that troubles her is that Charlie is still on her list as a suspect, he has not been eliminated. When Charlie comes around after midnight to apologize, the reader has to wonder if he has come for more information, and also wonder if Kinsey locked up her lists and cards from his very interested eyes. After all, he does manage to get her guard down again and make love to her, even though she knows that it is a bad idea. The news from Con Dolan that the letter seems genuine does not sit well with Kinsey, as she still thinks that there is something wrong there.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Acting on a hunch, Kinsey calls Charlotte Mercer at home, greatly irritating the woman. She asks what Sharon Napier's mother's name was and discovers that it is Elizabeth. Kinsey's hunch is verified, so she gets her lists out again and is able to eliminate Grace and Raymond Glass, but is unable to make sense of anything else. When Charlie's name comes up again, her uneasiness increases. Kinsey finally admits she has been taking too much for granted. She must verify his whereabouts the night Sharon Napier was killed. In considering him even more deeply, Kinsey's feelings of uneasiness are so intense that she forces herself to call Charlie to cool their relationship until the case is closed. He is angry and blames it on Kinsey. If he were legitimate this might be understandable. She reflects more on her emotional involvement and how her work keeps that to a minimum.

Kinsey then calls Gwen and asks to meet her in person at Rosie's Bar. Kinsey starts to play her cards and tells Gwen that Colin recognized her. She gets Gwen to admit to having had a full-blown affair with her ex-husband. Then Kinsey goes in for the kill by accusing Gwen of killing Laurence. Her reaction is all that Kinsey needs. Gwen admits to hating him for what he had done to her, with him taking her kids as being the worst. She wishes she could kill him all over again. Kinsey accuses Gwen of doctoring more than one capsule but Gwen's reaction seems genuine, she really does not know what happened to Sharon Napier and Libby Glass.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

Kinsey is in her element. She has made a bit of a leap of faith by telling Gwen that Colin recognized her in a photo, but it is all the truth she needs to get Gwen to confess to killing her husband. Her venom over how Laurence treated her is obvious and disturbing. Kinsey then pushes harder, accusing Gwen of doctoring more than one capsule and killing Libby Glass and even Sharon Napier. This is where Gwen's reaction is genuinely innocent. There is a lot of introspection in this chapter; Kinsey has a lot to think about, with her relationship with Charlie Scorsoni being a possible problem with handling the case. She does not like to think that she is simply pushing him away because she does not want to get close, but that she is doing the right thing with regard to the investigation. The reader really is not any more certain than Kinsey is about why she really pushes Charlie away.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Kinsey is upset; the case should be coming together, and yet despite the fact that she has Gwen's confession, the questions about the deaths of Libby and Sharon are unanswered. Gwen's motivation for killing Laurence is evident, but she has no motive for killing Libby or for killing Sharon. Everything is missing: means, motive, opportunity. Suddenly, Kinsey realizes that there must be a second murderer. The first two who come to mind are Lyle Abernathy and Charlie Scorsoni. She wants it to be Lyle. She has to make sure. On the spur of the moment, she heads down to Los Angeles, and as she is driving she berates herself for making the mistake a novice would make, though to her credit, the police had assumed the same thing—same MO, same murderer. The notion of justice that Kinsey determines is all about settling up. She can actually understand the bigger sins, such as hatred or revenge. Marcia Threadgill's fraud case still bugs her, because there is no concept of settling up, it is simply fraud. Once she reaches Los Angeles, she checks into the Hacienda for the night.

The next morning before she leaves, Arlette flags her down. Nikki is on the phone and gives her the information that Gwen has just been killed by a hit and run driver. The news propels her to Lyle's interview with deadly purpose, and when she gets there she is in no mood for games. With a gun pulled on Lyle, she forces him to confess that he was the one who gave Libby the tranquilizer that caused her death but he had no idea that it had poison in it. He went over to see her because she had heard about Laurence's death and was very upset. Lyle tried to calm her, giving her the tranquilizer. He left, and when he returned, realized that she was dead. He wiped the whole place for fingerprints, took the bottle of tranquilizers, fearing that he would be the one they targeted for the murder of his girlfriend. He has kept quiet all these years. Lyle has a complete breakdown in front of Kinsey. There is no doubting his integrity now. This leaves only one suspect.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Once Kinsey realizes that all the pieces of the puzzle are not falling into place as they should, she intensifies her speculation and thought processes. There is even more introspection in this chapter as she goes through all the possible scenarios that would make any sense. The fact that two people had been killed using the same method had led everyone to believe that it was only one murderer. No one had ever given any sort of thought to the fact that a copycat murderer could still be at large. Once Kinsey forces the truth from Lyle at gunpoint about Libby's death, she realizes that there is only one suspect left, and that is her lover, Charlie Scorsoni.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

Kinsey then heads to the accounting office of Haycraft and McNiece to see Garry Steinberg to ask him about embezzlement. She tells Garry that she believes that Charlie Scorsoni has been embezzling from his clients after all they were all dead, and that Libby could have discovered his activities. Once she discovered the discrepancies, she would have asked Charlie for records and documentation to validate the transactions. Kinsey believes that Charlie engineered an affair with Libby Glass in an attempt to keep her quiet, perhaps offering her a cut of the proceeds. Kinsey knows that she must have proof of the embezzlement and asks about the files, which Garry actually has in his office. He promises to look at them and get back to Kinsey that afternoon.

On the way back to Santa Teresa, Kinsey finally goes over the actual course of events, realizing that Charlie Scorsoni had played her like a professional and that she had given him every bit of information that he needed, down to locating Sharon Napier for him so that he could silence her before she could tell Kinsey that Laurence was not having an affair with Libby Glass but that Charlie was. She reflects that Charlie would have been smarter to have just not done anything, but he had panicked when Kinsey had agreed to work on reopening the case.

Kinsey finds the bills she had taken from Sharon Napier's apartment and locates the phone bill that had three calls in the month of March with the area code that included Santa Teresa. She'd called Charlie Scorsoni's office twice and John Power's home once. Kinsey calls Charlie's secretary to verify that Sharon had actually called Charlie Scorsoni, and then to try to determine if he had actually been in Tucson the night of Sharon's murder. Ruth is suspicious at this point and is only willing to give Kinsey his number at the motel in Santa Maria where Charlie is.

A call to Nikki gives her the information that Gwen had been run down by a black car, a black Lincoln. Kinsey is surprised because she knows that Charlie drives a blue Mercedes. She then asks about the Elizabeth letter and Nikki remembers the huge scandal with Laurence all those years ago and tells Kinsey that it was Charlie who stole the letter out of the files in order to protect him. Kinsey consigns everything to a typewritten report for her protection: "I typed on, feeling exhausted but determined to get it all down. In the back of my mind, I kept thinking of it as a safeguard, an insurance policy, but I wasn't sure what kind of coverage I needed. Maybe none. Maybe I didn't need protection, I thought. As it turned out, I was wrong."

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Everything has finally fallen into place for Kinsey and she is excited, angry, and frustrated at having been unable to put the picture together sooner. She still executes





her excellent investigative skills by tying up all the loose ends, calling everyone to get the information that she needs to solidly verify that Charlie Scorsoni is the murderer of Libby Glass and of Sharon Napier. Gwen had killed Laurence Fife, but Charlie took that opportunity to take care of his problem by creating a copycat murder and hoping that the same person who was charged with Laurence's murder would also be charged with Libby's murder. He very nearly got away with it.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

Being exactly who she is, Kinsey is not about to shirk from what she now considers to be her duty. She first goes to Charlie's house and is intrigued that it is the sort of house that would show up in the beginning shot for a family show in television, nothing out of the ordinary, wholesome. There is no car in the driveway and so Kinsey looks in the garage, but does not find a black car. She is unsure, perhaps she is wrong after all. She has been wrong at so many junctures in this case, perhaps this is a continuation, but she is sure that she is right this time. Not sure what to do, Kinsey heads toward Nikki's house, intending to debrief her on the latest events of the case, but she then passes John Powers's house and a thrill of excitement courses through her. She just knows that she is right this time. Taking her gun and flashlight, she moves toward the carport where she sees John Powers's car, and it is black. Using her flashlight, she sees that the right fender is crumpled with a broken headlight. She knows that this is the murder weapon for Gwen's murder.

At that moment Kinsey hears the squeal of tires on the road above and she is afraid it might be Charlie. If he called Ruth he would know that Kinsey is aware of everything and that he must silence her as permanently as he silenced Libby and Sharon. Kinsey knows that she is now in for the fight of her life. She runs down to the beach, knocking a dog back that Charlie had let loose on her. Her only choice is the beach and the ocean, and in the total darkness Kinsey stumbles, falls, loses her gun once, but does not think that it got wet. She parallels the shoreline, heading for the park. From time to time she can see Charlie's silhouette at the top of the cliff and knows that he is after her. Once she reaches the beach she knows that she cannot run for help because Charlie is there with his car lights illuminating the portion of the seashore that she would have to use. Kinsey climbs into a trash bin, hoping that he will not think to look for her there. However, when the lid does open, and the flash of a knife is the first thing Kinsey sees, she uses her gun to kill the man who had been her lover and her nemesis.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Chapter twenty-seven is all exposition with the exception of two lines of dialogue from Charlie trying to coax Kinsey out and give him a chance to kill her. His voice is soft and coaxing, as he is able to turn his sex appeal on and off at will. The remainder of the entire chapter is one of heartrending terror, fear, excitement, and finally satisfaction that the bad guy is taken care of in the end. Rather than waiting for a long and drawn out trial, Charlie Scorsoni is killed by Kinsey, his former lover, by her gun, as she sits crouched at the bottom of a trash bin in the park on the beach. None of Kinsey's fantasies about Charlie quite worked out. This one is even less satisfying. Kinsey considers taking a life as putting her in the same category as soldiers and maniacs. She

never started the case intending to kill anyone. She admits that she will never be the same again.



# Characters

## Kinsey Millhone

Kinsey Millhone is the main character, or protagonist of the novel, *A is for Alibi*. She is a private investigator working independently in Santa Teresa, California, using two rooms in California Fidelity Insurance's building rent free in return for working pro-bono on some of their cases. She has been married twice, divorced twice, has no children, no pets, and no plants. Kinsey lives a very independent life. Though she has a lot of friends, she has some issues with developing close relationships with people, especially men. Her work, in many ways, is her life. Through her work, she becomes involved in the very intimate details of the lives of other people without having to invest emotionally in the relationships. It is almost as if Kinsey needs to see if something is going to work before she takes the step and tries it herself. Kinsey is dedicated to her work; in fact, life totally revolves around her work. She wakes up thinking about it and goes to sleep thinking about it. It is what she lives for.

## Nikki Fife

Nikki Fife is a lovely young woman in her mid-30s who has just been released from prison having served eight years on a homicide conviction, and is currently on parole for the murder of her husband. The jury believed the DA's story that she replaced the prescription antihistamine powder with pulverized oleander powder because she was angry that he was being unfaithful to her. At the time of her trial, Nikki was young, blonde, beautiful, and rich. Eight years later, when she hires Kinsey, she is still very young-looking, with pale brown hair (almost colorless), and is still beautiful and rich. Nikki claims to be innocent of the crime and hires Kinsey Millhone, private investigator, to prove that someone else killed her husband. When the reader first meets Nikki, she seems to be without hope, without any real reason to go on. She was married to Laurence for four years; three and a half were spent with the knowledge that he was cheating on her. She was surprised, even though she had been Laurence's mistress when he was still married to his first wife, Gwen. Nikki learned in prison that people kill for a lot of reasons, including hatred, anger, and getting even, but no one ever kills due to indifference. At first she had kept a diary of his infidelities, but later on she got so that she simply did not care about his affairs. She hires Kinsey because she thought there was a certain irony in hiring someone who had done work for her husband. She did determine at their first meeting that Kinsey and Laurence had never been romantically involved.

Nikki is also a mother. Her son, Colin Fife, was born deaf and was only three when his father died and his mother went to prison. Nikki might not have cared anything for Laurence, but she absolutely lived for her son, whom she loves with all her heart. Throughout the story, in each scene where Nikki is seen with her son there is no doubt that if it were not for Colin, Nikki would have very little to live for. He is her life.



## Laurence Fife

Laurence Fife is a very interesting character in the story because he is dead throughout the entire story, and yet the reader is well acquainted with his very strong personality throughout the entire book. Laurence Fife was a divorce attorney and a philanderer, who died at the hand of a poisoner. He had a reputation as a killer in the courtroom, a cold, methodical, man who took every advantage of the legal system to get his clients whatever he wanted them to have. Even clients who deserved a fifty-fifty split ended up with the biggest share of the joint property. He was talked about all the time, with rumors flying that he took very good care of his female clients both inside and outside of the courtroom. He was smart, but had no sense of humor. He was exact, and Kinsey found him easy to work for because he gave exact instructions for the jobs he wanted done.

Laurence Fife was also a man who was hated by many. He was hated by the men who lost in court to him. He was also hated by the women he had loved and then left behind, betraying their trust. He also was capable of great love, as evidenced by the letter that Kinsey finds in the belongings of Libby Glass addressed to Elizabeth. In addition to being capable of the love of a woman, he demonstrated the great love of a father. His son, Colin, who was deaf, needed an assistance dog, and while Laurence was allergic to dogs, he attained a prescription antihistamine that would allow him to live in the house with his son's dog. That love is what ultimately killed him because he died from an oleander laced capsule that had been placed in his antihistamine vial.

## Gwen Fife

The first wife of Laurence Fife, mother of two children, Gregory and Diane, who are grown at the time of the story. She is the murderer of her ex-husband, Laurence Fife.

## Charlie Scorsoni

Charlie Scorsoni was Laurence Fife's law partner before Laurence was killed. He is questioned by Kinsey early on in the case because of his relationship with Laurence and the fact that because of their work Charlie might know if someone had a motive to kill his partner. Charlie is an embezzler, having embezzled for years. He killed Libby Glass because he wanted to quiete her because becoming sexually involved with him was not enough to keep her quiet. He then kills Sharon Napier in Las Vegas after Kinsey finds her to keep her quiet about the fact that it was Charlie who was having the affair with Libby Glass and not Laurence Fife.

## Con Dolan

The rough and gruff homicide detective in his 50s who handled the Fife murder case eight years before, and who gives Kinsey a little bit of help with information on the case, but still believes that Nikki Fife is the guilty party and thinks that Kinsey is wasting her



time. Con is not much to look at, would never get a cover shot on GQ, but he is much smarter than the average thief. His mind works fast, his concentration is intense, and his memory is not shrouded by emotion or compassion.

## Libby Glass

Libby Glass is another dead character, having died only four days after Laurence Fife, in exactly the same manner. This murder never made it into the original murder trial despite the similarity in the method of death. Libby was an accountant, a pretty young girl who was dedicated to her job and her family. There does not seem to be any reason that she should have been killed.

## Henry Pltts

Henry Pitts is an eighty-one-year-old man who is Kinsey Millhone's landlord. Henry used to be a professional baker but now is retired, baking for a local restaurant and bar in return for a few meals there. He is also the writer of crossword puzzles.

## Rosie

Rosie is the owner of the Hungarian diner, named, surprisingly enough, Rosie's. She buys Henry's bread, giving him free meals from time to time. She is sixty-ish, has dyed red hair the color of cheap redwood patio furniture, and draws on her eyebrows with brown eyeliner. Her heritage gives her a very long nose as it nearly reaches her upper lip. Rosie is nosy, bossy, and safe.

## Sharon Napier

Sharon Napier was Laurence Fife's secretary, but for all he paid her, no one ever remembers that she ever did any work. She was blackmailing him because of the information she had about his affair with her mother.

## Lyle Abernathy

Lyle Abernathy is still hanging around Libby's family even though Libby died eight years ago. They had been high school sweethearts, but after Libby started working as an accountant, she no longer wanted to see Lyle. Lyle is a drifter, never having gone to college, having numerous jobs including working at the Wonder Bread Factory and a stint with a locksmith, but was fired because there were small thefts at the places where he worked. Lyle now works as a brick layer, going to the Glass household every day for lunch to help Libby's aging parents. He seems nice enough, but there is something fishy about him at the same time.



## **John Powers**

The reader never actually meets John Powers, but he figures prominently in the story as Charlie Scorsoni's law partner, the owner of a beach house, two uncontrolled dogs, and of a Black Lincoln that has a large area of damage at the end of the story.

## **Marcia Treadgill**

Marcia Treadgill is Kinsey's other case. She claims to have twisted her leg in a crack in front of a store and is badly injured, seeking damages of \$4,800 from the store. Kinsey's office landlord, Fidelity Mutual, is having Kinsey try to find evidence that Marcia Treadgill is faking her injury. For a while her only crime seems to be one of having horrible taste in decoupage crafts for Christmas presents.

## **Gregory Fife**

Gregory is the son of Laurence and Gwen Fife. He lives a life of leisure from the inheritance he received upon his father's death.

## **Diane Fife**

Diane is the daughter of Laurence and Gwen Fife. She also received one third of her father's inheritance, though she has been living with a secret that she thought had recently been discovered. Because of her, Colin Fife's dog, Hugo, was run over by a car and killed.

## **Colin Fife**

Colin is the son of Laurence and Nikki Fife and was only a year and a half old when Diane graduated from school, and was likely the only time he met his father's first wife. Despite being deaf, Colin is the one who gives Kinsey the clue that she needs to find the real killer.

## **Charlotte Mercer**

Charlotte Mercer is the wife of a fine judge who had an affair with Laurence Fife. She is very bitter still about the way Laurence ended their affair.



## **Elizabeth Napier**

Elizabeth Napier is Sharon Napier's mother with whom Laurence Fife had an affair while still in Denver, Colorado, early in his career. Laurence was likely in love with Elizabeth, according to the letter that was found among the belongings of Libby Glass.

## **Bob Dietz**

A Nevada investigator who Kinsey found through a national directory of private investigators.

## **Grace Glass**

Grace Glass is the mother of Libby Glass. She makes beautiful clothing on her kitchen table for people, so she can take care of her infirm husband. She lives for the noon hour when Lyle comes for lunch and to assist her with her husband's care.

## **Raymond Glass**

Raymond Glass is husband to Grace and father to Libby. He was in an accident three years ago and is in a wheelchair, unable to speak, and eats only baby food.

## **Arlette**

Arlette is the enormous manager and telephone operator of the Hacienda Motor Lodge in Los Angeles.

## **Garry Steinberg**

Garry (with two r's) is an accountant at Haycroft and McNiece where Libby Glass used to work.

## **Ruth**

Ruth is Charlie Scorsoni's secretary.





## Objects/Places

### **Santa Teresa**

Southern California town of eighty thousand where Kinsey Millhone lives and works.

### **California Fidelity Insurance Company**

The company for which Kinsey once worked and still has an office for which she trades her services.

### **Nikki's Diary**

Nikki Fife kept a diary where she wrote about her husband's adulteries, her anger, and her contemplation of divorce. The diary is what helped to convict her of her husband's murder.

### **HistaDril Vial**

The prescription allergy medicine vial that had an oleander powder-filled capsule substituted for an allergy capsule, resulting in Laurence's death.

### **White Wine**

Kinsey's favorite drink. She usually drinks the cheap sour stuff, but enjoys the expensive smooth wines as well.

### **Rosie's Bar**

The neighborhood bar where Kinsey eats on a regular basis and where she likes to meet clients when she needs a "home-turf" advantage.

### **Index Cards**

Kinsey writes down facts from her cases on index cards and uses the shuffling and sorting of them to help her to solve her investigations.



## **VW Bug**

A dented, tan car that Kinsey drives and uses as a traveling office as it is filled with files, law books, a briefcase with a gun in it, cardboard boxes, a packed overnight case, and a case of motor oil.

## **Oleander**

A poisonous tropical shrub that grows up to ten feet tall all around Santa Teresa.

## **Beach**

Where Kinsey likes to run and where she nearly died. Nikki Fife and John Powers have houses on the beach.

## **K-9 Korner**

Where Gwen Fife works grooming dogs. She is the owner. This has been her new career after being divorced from Laurence Fife.

## **Salton Sea**

This is south of Palm Springs, where Gregory Fife lives, usually on a boat, but sometimes in a trailer.

## **Hansel and Gretel**

Two Embden geese that Nikki uses to keep kids off the Montebello property.

## **Los Angeles**

Where Lyle Abernathy, and Grace and Raymond Glass live, and where Haycroft and McNiece have their offices. This is a four hour drive from Santa Teresa.

## **Hacienda Motor Lodge**

A cheap motel where Kinsey has stayed about twenty times prior for \$12.00 a night. It has the amenities of a switchboard operator who sometimes takes and passes on Kinsey's messages and a jelly doughnut continental breakfast.



## **Las Vegas**

Where Sharon Napier ultimately disappeared to when she left Santa Teresa eight years before.

## **The Hidden Letter**

A letter addressed to Elizabeth and found among the belongings of Libby Glass.

## **Ludlow Beach**

Near where Marcia Threadgill lives and where Kinsey kills Charlie.

## **Dogs**

Featured throughout the book, dogs are something that Kinsey does not appreciate.

## **Black Lincoln**

Murder weapon belonging to John Powers, Charlie Scorsoni's partner.

## **Trash Bin**

Where Kinsey hides from Charlie Scorsoni.

# Themes

## Is Justice a Matter of Perspective or Opinion?

Kinsey is in a side branch of the law because of her dedication to the concept of justice. The case of Laurence Fife brings to light a great many questions on the issue of justice and whether or not it has been accomplished. Kinsey's feelings on Marcia Threadgill leave the reader in little doubt that she feels that Marcia is defrauding California Fidelity over her case of stumbling over a crack in the sidewalk and asking for forty-eight hundred dollars recompense. Kinsey makes her feelings very apparent about Marcia by how she talks to her through the binoculars and when she meets with the insurance company representative.

The main story of the book deals with many issues of justice, starting with the issue of whether or not justice was done for Nikki Fife, who has been imprisoned for eight years for a murder she did not commit. Gwen feels that Nikki got a fair trial and got what was coming to her, but the fact remains that even though the legal system found Nikki guilty, they were very wrong. Gwen is Laurence's murderer and has been out free for these eight years. This is another miscarriage of justice on the part of the legal system as they settled for the evidence that convicted Nikki Fife without looking further. Gwen is run down by Charlie Scorsoni, which begs the question of whether or not justice has been carried out with her death at the hands of another murderer.

Charlie Scorsoni, the other murderer, was allowed to live free for eight years after killing Libby Glass to prevent her from exposing him as an embezzler of the clients he represents. He, too, dies as a result of attacking Kinsey, who kills him in self-defense. Justice is a strange concept, first being one thing and then another depending on who is looking at it and what information they may or may not have.

An argument can be made that justice is possibly a matter of perspective or opinion, and depends on whether or not one is discussing the justice of law, justice of situation, or justice of expediency.

## The Benefits of a Good Work Ethic

Kinsey has found good continuing work as a private investigator, a woman in what is typically a man's field, and her success can be attributed to the fact that she has an excellent work ethic. Kinsey demonstrates this trait in the opening scene of the book when Nikki Fife asks for her to look into her case. Kinsey tells Nikki that she will think about it, but is afraid that there is no new evidence and to take such a case would only cheat the client. Once Kinsey finds new information she is able to tell Nikki with a clear conscience that she is able to take the case. Once she is able to state that, Kinsey has no trouble asking for and receiving a five thousand dollar deposit on the case.



With five thousand dollars, it could be easy to pad the expenses of the investigation in order to keep more of the retainer fee. Kinsey, however, is a woman of scruples when it comes to business, and never cheats her client. She stays in very inexpensive motels, the Hacienda in Los Angeles and the Bagdad in Las Vegas are two examples. This is also an ongoing trait for Kinsey as she has stayed at the Hacienda in room two at least twenty times.

Another example of Kinsey's excellent work ethic is that she is self-employed, and even though no one is prodding her to get in to work every day, she is up and at her work with diligence and determination to get somewhere that day. This kind of excellent investigative skills promise Kinsey's success in the field of private investigation. She keeps excellent records by typing them up and locking them in her desk on a regular basis. She does not wait for the end of the case to try to recall all the details of the case.

Lastly, Kinsey is willing to do what it takes to keep herself employed even when it means doing the same thing day after day, checking, crosschecking, calling, calling back, interviewing reluctant witnesses over and over. She knows that without that tenacity she will not be able to stay in business very long, and Kinsey is a very determined woman, not willing to play second fiddle to anyone.

## **The Difficulty of Living the Life of a Loner**

Kinsey seems to be well established as a loner in her life. She prefers to live in such a manner that she knows who is going to be in her home, and why. She has experienced two failed marriages and has no kids, though at one point in the book she expresses a wish to know if family life might somehow be in her future and wonders what it might be like.

From time to time, living alone can cause problems, with loneliness being the first and most obvious symptom. Kinsey seems to have enough acquaintances; however, there do not seem to be any close friends in her life. She does have her landlord Henry Pitts and the neighborhood bar owner, Rosie. These two people seem to be a source of grounding in her life, Rosie almost like a mother by nagging her about her work, her acquaintances, and informing her rather than asking her what she would like to eat for dinner.

Because of that loneliness, Kinsey finds herself confiding in the wrong person. It turns out that she has confided very specific information to the murderer who is able to kill one more person to try to keep his secret quiet. Kinsey does more than simply confide in Charlie Scorsoni. She has not been with a man in a long time and Charlie's ability to exude sexuality at will takes her by surprise, but at first she does not fight it and ends up as Charlie's lover a couple of times before her sense of right and wrong intervenes and gives her the strength she needs to put Charlie off until the investigation is completed.

Charlie is hardly a stellar example of a well-adjusted loner. His past history with an abusive father who used to beat him and his mother in a drunken rage helped him to



become the success that he is, but his past also gave him permission to murder two women who got in his way.

Kinsey, as a loner, is an interesting, captivating, and independent woman who is very successful in a man's field. Only her inability to get close to people will be her downfall, especially if she makes another mistake like the one she made in this book. Her misplaced trust very nearly got her killed.



# Style

## Point of View

"A" is for Alibi by Susan Grafton is a murder mystery told from the first person point of view. Kinsey Millhone is a private investigator, and as she progresses through her cases she involves the reader directly with all her thoughts, everything she sees, reads, and hears, including all the interviews that she conducts with witnesses. This point of view gives a true sense of immediacy to the reading experience, allowing the reader to feel as though he or she has jumped inside Kinsey's head and is traveling through the experience of the investigation with her.

There is a good balance of dialogue where Kinsey and other characters converse. Then there are long portions of exposition where the reader is allowed into Kinsey's thoughts about the case, what might be bothering her about the case, what might be going right or wrong, and asking questions that the reader will remember her asking later on in the book. This method of writing allows the reader to stay focused on Kinsey, her thoughts, and her behaviors. All other focus on the other characters in the book are as Kinsey allows it.

The pace of the book begins slowly, giving the reader time to get to know the characters, for there are quite a few. Once the reader becomes acquainted with the characters, Kinsey picks up the pace both of the investigation and of how much material she considers. Initially, the expository material is presented slowly, again giving the reader a chance to stay caught up. Once that has been accomplished, Kinsey's thought process speeds up, challenging the reader to stay focused and on track. Kinsey gives the reader all the information as she either receives it or figures it out, that way the reader can reach the conclusions at the same time that Kinsey does. This is considered playing fair with the reader.

## Setting

The setting of "A" is for Alibi is in modern day United States, specifically California and Nevada. The book opens in Santa Theresa, California, which is where the main character, Kinsey Millhone, lives. Santa Theresa sounds like a warm and idyllic town where most people are good and there is no need for law enforcement. Then the reader is introduced to the downtown police station of Santa Theresa and discovers that there is crime and criminals even in the most enchanting of places. Most of the novel is set in Santa Theresa, but when Kinsey needs information from an out-of-town witness she is very willing to travel in her VW Bug to any destination that is reasonable.

Kinsey travels to Los Angeles to discover what she can about Libby Glass's murder, to meet her parents, Grace and Raymond, and Libby's former boyfriend, Lyle Abernathy.



Also in Los Angeles is the accounting firm of Haycraft and McNiece where Libby Glass was working when she was murdered.

Kinsey travels then to Las Vegas, a city she hates, to interview Sharon Napier. She is able to accomplish one short face-to-face interview, but before they are able to meet for the second interview, Sharon is shot to death.

Salton Sea is Kinsey's next stop and is where the murdered man's son, Greg Fife, lives. This setting is remote, isolated, unpopulated, with only a couple of trailers dotting the shoreline. This is where the Fife family spent their last vacation prior to Laurence's death.

Claremont is where Diane Fife lives, Laurence's daughter. Kinsey spends the night here with an old college friend, living with a family for a night and wondering if it could be a possibility in her future.

Kinsey makes a brief foray back in Los Angeles before she returns home to Santa Theresa, the setting for the remainder of the story.

Additional setting information include notations about Kinsey's car and her apartment. Both of them are small, have the basic essentials but no more, speaking more of living expediently rather than luxuriously. These two places give a really good idea of Kinsey's personality, both are of a transient nature, as her apartment is actually a converted garage. Kinsey never gives the reader the impression that she has any sense of permanence in where she lives.

## Language and Meaning

Language is simple and straightforward. There is the use of some slang, some curse words, and a lot of plain speaking on the part of both Kinsey and the people she talks with, all of which help the sense of being present in the room where the action is taking place. Each character has a distinct but subtle style of communicating. Grafton does not use overt dialect style writing for her characters; rather, she confines them to speaking of certain topics in certain ways. For example, a minor character, Charlotte Mercer, is always short, to the point, irritated, and slightly annoyed whenever Kinsey talks to her. This type of identifying trait makes it easy for the reader to follow dialogue that is more lengthy.

There is no real difficulty in identifying important points in the story because the language is so very straightforward. Once in a while, during an introspective passage, Kinsey will mention that something is bothering her but she cannot quite put her finger on it. These few instances are the only times the reader ever feels a little left out or confused by the language of the book. Generally speaking, all information needed to solve the case is presented in logical order and with great clarity.





## Structure

The structure of the novel is simple and straightforward, with twenty-seven chapters of approximately ten pages each. The chapters are not named by anything other than a number. The action continues directly from the end of one chapter to the beginning of the next. There is no flashback activity in this novel, and so the novel progresses chronologically from the beginning of the story to the end. The only variation in this process is the small note at the beginning of the story that shares that Kinsey had killed someone the day before yesterday. This gives a little bit of foreshadowing of what is to come in the novel, but from that point on it is very straightforward.

The story-telling style is to lead the reader through the life of Kinsey Millhone exactly as she lives it. If she is alone and is having introspective thoughts, then the reader is allowed access to those thoughts. When Kinsey is talking with anyone, friends, witnesses, police detectives, the conversation flows naturally with well-constructed dialogue and access into Kinsey's thoughts and opinions that remain unvoiced to the other characters. Sue Grafton does not really use cliffhanger endings at the end of her chapters, but rather completes a section of the investigation and then starts the next chapter at an obvious point of origin.

The initial portion of the story is slow, giving the reader time to get to know the main character, what her job is, what it entails, and then is allowed along for a minute-by-minute ride. Once all the known points of the puzzle are established, the action begins to mount, moving faster and faster as the reader approaches the climax and resolution of the story. The only subplot in this novel is Kinsey's additional case, a fraud investigation for California Fidelity. The purpose of the subplot is to further augment the view of Kinsey's investigative techniques and to more completely understand her sense of right and wrong, her sense of justice, and her dedication to her work.

The story is about a female private detective in a role reversal of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. Kinsey Millhone has all the characteristics of the hard-boiled male detectives of the earlier genre of the mystery story, only softened a little because she is female and shows a tendency toward having feelings. Tears form when she comforts a mother still grieving even after eight years, and she fills the food bowl of a mouse whose owner has just been shot to death. Her feelings, however, are a little misplaced, as she usually feels more for animals and dead people than she does for people who are still alive and in her life. She lives much like a loner and seems to live vicariously through the lives of her clients and the people she meets throughout the course of the investigation. Hired to find the real killer of a man whose wife has just spent eight years in jail for a murder she did not commit, Kinsey dedicates herself to the case and moves from clue to clue, witness to witness, until she begins to unravel the truth. She becomes involved with a man who at first glance appears to be safe, but later turns out to be the killer. Again, this is a reflection of the Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe style, where the main killer would fall for a femme fatale only to have to shoot her in the end.



## Quotes

"I found him shrewd, nearly humorless, but exact; an easy man to work for because his instructions were clear and he paid in advance. A lot of people apparently hated him: men for the price he extracted, women for the betrayal of their trust." Chap. 1, p. 7

"The room itself is fifteen feet square, outfitted as a living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, closet, and laundry facility. Originally this was Henry's garage and I'm happy to say that it sports no stucco, red Spanish tile, or vines of any kind. It is made of aluminum siding and other wholly artificial products that are weather-resistant and never need paint. The architecture is completely nondescript. It is to this cozy den that I escape most days after work." Chap. 2, p. 18

"I do most of my hanging out in a neighborhood bar called Rosie's. It's the sort of place where you look to see if the chair needs brushing off before you sit down. The plastic seats have little rips in them that leave curls of nylon on the underside of your stockings and the tables have black Formica tops hand-etched with words like hi. To the left above the bar, there's a dusty marlin, and when people get drunk, Rosie lets them shoot rubber-tipped arrows at it with a toy gun, thus averting aggressions that might otherwise erupt into vicious barroom snits." Chap. 3, p. 19

"I sat down at my desk and consigned Charlie Scorsoni to several index cards. It had been an unsettling interview and I had a feeling that I wasn't done with him." Chap. 4, p. 34

"I hopped down off my stool and let myself out. When the door closed, she was already chatting with the dog. I wondered what else she knew and how much of it she was willing to share. I also hoped to hell I could look that good in another ten years." Chap. 5, p. 44

"'I did feel bad about her,' she said. 'By the time they divorced, Laurence really hated her and I tended to fan the flames a bit. He never could take any responsibility for the failure of that marriage and as a result he had to blame her and punish her. I didn't help. At first I really believed what he was saying about her. I mean, I personally thought she seemed like a capable person and I knew Laurence had been very dependent on her but it was safer to wean him away by feeding his bad feelings. You know what I mean? In some ways, his hating her so strongly was no different from his loving her, but it made me feel more secure to widen the breach. I'm ashamed of that now. When I fell out of love with him myself and he began to turn on me, I suddenly recognized the process.'" Chap. 6, 51

"'I don't think he liked women. He was always expecting to be betrayed. Women were the people who did you in. He liked to get there first, or at least that's my guess. I suspect an affair for him was always a power relationship and he was top dog.'" Chap. 8, p. 72



"'I'm sorry. Sometimes I forget. Sometimes I pretend she got sick. The other makes me cringe, that someone might have done that to her, that someone could have hated her that much. The police here don't do anything. It isn't solved but no one cares anymore so I just . . . I simply tell myself that she got sick and was taken. How could someone have done that to her?' Her eyes welled with tears. Her grief rolled across the space between us like a wash of salt water and I could feel tears form in my own eyes in response." Chap. 9, p. 93

"Driving anywhere looks much the same to me. I stare at the concrete roadway. I watch the yellow line. I keep track of large trucks and passenger vehicles with little children asleep in the backseat and I keep my foot pressed flat to the floor until I reach my destination." Chap. 11, p. 112

"Even that far down in oblivion, I felt an awesome dread of what had been set in motion and a pointless aching sense of apology to Sharon Napier for whatever part I'd played in her death." Chap. 13, p. 133

"I got back to my motel room at 3:30. I put a pillow on the plastic chair, set my typewriter up on the wobbly desk and spent an hour and a half typing up my notes. It had been a long time since I sat down to do paperwork, but it had to be caught up. By the time I pecked my through the last paragraph, I had a pain in my lower back and another one right between my shoulder blades." Chap. 16, p. 161

"There were pieces missing yet but they would fall into place and then maybe the whole of it would make sense. Assuming I lived long enough myself to figure it out. . ." Chap. 17, p. 172

"Colin shook his head slightly, suddenly unsure of himself. He watched her for a moment more as though some other explanation might be forthcoming. He took the album and backed away, eyes still fixed on Nikki's face. He signed once more, flushing uncomfortably. Apparently he didn't want to look foolish in front of me." Chap. 18, p. 182

"The meal that followed was one of the most sensual I ever experienced: fresh, tender bread with a crust of flaky layers, spread with a buttery pate, Boston lettuce with a delicate vinaigrette, sand dabs sautéed in butter and served with succulent green grapes. There were fresh raspberries for dessert with a dollop of tart cream, and all the time Charlie's face across the table from me, shadowed by that suggestion of caution, that hint of something stark and fearful held back, pulling me forward even while I felt myself kept in check." Chap. 19, pp. 186-87

"This chick doesn't even have an attorney. We're supposed to get a signed release from the doctor next week. No deal. I don't want to mess this one up. Forty-eight hundred dollars is chicken feed. It's cost us ten grand to go into court. You know that." Chap. 20, p. 200

"The sex was very good and very strong but the fact remained that I was still in the middle of an investigation and he still had not been crossed off my list. I didn't think that our physical relationship had clouded my judgment about him, but how could I tell? I



couldn't really afford to take the chance. Unless, of course, I was just rationalizing my own inclination to hold back. Was I that careful with myself these days? Was I really just sidestepping intimacy? Did I long to relegate him to the role of 'possible suspect' in order to justify my own reluctance to take a risk?" Chap. 23, p. 226

"And maybe he was right in his assumption that I was rejecting him. Maybe I was just being perverse, pushing him away because I needed space between me and the world. The job does provide such a perfect excuse. I meet most people in the course of my work and if I can't get emotionally involved there, then where else can I go? Private investigation is my whole life. It is why I get up in the morning and what puts me to bed at night. Most of the time I'm alone, but why not? I'm not unhappy and I'm not discontent." Chap. 24, p. 233

"He'd played me for a sucker, just as he'd done with Libby Glass, and she, in her innocence, at least had a better excuse for the tumble than I did. It had been too long since I'd cared about anyone, too long since I'd taken that risk and I'd already invested too much. I just had to slam the gate shut emotionally and move on, but it didn't sit well with me." Chap. 26, p. 258



## Topics for Discussion

Regarding the issue of closure and justice, are the murders of Libby Glass and Charlie Scorsoni the same thing? Explain.

Do Kinsey's methods of investigating that break the law—for example, breaking and entering and tampering with evidence—justify the end result?

Did Charlie exact justice when he ran Gwen down? Why?/Why not?

How did Kinsey extract justice in this case?

Describe Marcia Threadgill's case and the issues of right and wrong involved.

Discuss Diane's guilt over Bruno's death. Did her silence make life easier or did it make it worse?

Talk about Kinsey and her apparent inability to forge personal relationships. What reasons can you find in the text to support your answers?

Describe the effect Libby Glass's death had on her parents. On Lyle.

Explain Lyle's motivation for tampering with evidence. If he had not hidden the bottle of tranquilizers would Libby's murder been solved sooner? What effect might that have had on her parents? On the case?

Discuss how Kinsey's case would have been different had she not overslept and missed her appointment with Sharon Napier.

Discuss how Gwen could have gotten away with murder if she had not had the affair with her ex-husband.

Do you feel that the author played fair with you, the reader? Did she give you information as she received it?

Do you feel that Kinsey misses her parents? What evidence do you find in the text to support your position?