

Laura Film Summary

Laura by Otto Preminger

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



Contents

Laura Film Summary.....	1
Contents.....	2
Context.....	3
Summary and Analysis.....	4
Characters.....	8
Themes.....	11
Style and Cinematography.....	13
Motifs.....	14
Symbols.....	16
Essay Questions.....	18

Context

Laura tells the story of the alleged murder and subsequent investigation of Laura Hunt. Waldo Lydecker narrates the story and tells us exactly what has happened up to the point Mark McPherson, a detective, shows up in his apartment. Laura was murdered, but no one can seem to figure out why or by whom.

As different people are interrogated we begin to learn that every man falls in love with Laura - her fiancé, Shelby; her friend, Waldo; and finally Mark, the detective. When Laura shows up alive, the mystery thickens. As Mark continues to investigate, he discovers that Waldo is actually obsessed with Laura, and he tried to kill her to keep her from belonging to anyone else.

Otto Preminger was one of the best directors of the 1950's and *Laura* was Preminger's first major film. Preminger started out as an actor and performed in such memorable roles as the commandant in Billy Wilder's *Stalag 17*. He had a very specific style and became one of the most famous directors of the 1950's.

Gene Tierney gives her most magnificent performance as Laura Hunt. Before *Laura* she performed in *Tobacco Road* (1941), *China Girl* (1942), and *Heaven Can Wait* (1943). Tierney is best known for this role in *Laura*, but she also received an Academy Award Nomination for *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945).

Dana Andrews who plays Mark McPherson first played impressive secondary roles in such films as *The Westerner* (1940) and *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943). He also had a starring role in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) as Fred Derry after his successful performance in *Laura*. His later films were scarcely able to hold a candle to his first two leading roles, but he did have parts in films like *State Fair*.

Clifton Webb is well-known for his performances representing snobbish socialites. He is true to this role in his performance as Waldo Lydecker. He gave similar performances in *The Razor's Edge* (1946) and *Sitting Pretty* (1948). However, the majority of his roles were in Broadway plays.

Vincent Price, the actor playing Shelby, made his mark on Hollywood as the King of Horror Films. Before *Laura*, he performed in a variety of films including *The House of Seven Gables* (1940), *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), and *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940), but *Laura* was one of his all-time favorite films as was playing the voice of Professor Ratigan in Disney's *The Great Mouse Detective*.

Laura was nominated for five Academy Awards: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Clifton Webb; Best Art Direction-Interior Decoration, Black-and-White for Lyle R. Wheeler, Leland Fuller, and Thomas Little; Best Director for Otto Preminger; Best Writing, Screenplay for Jay Dratler, Samuel Hoffenstein, and Elizabeth Reinhardt; and the film won the award for Best Cinematography, Black-and-White for Joseph LaShelle.



Summary and Analysis

As the film opens, we see a portrait of a beautiful woman hanging on the wall. A man begins to talk of Laura's death and how he was the only one who really knew her; his name was Waldo Lydecker. He was just beginning to write her story when detectives began to see him. Laura was murdered in her apartment.

Waldo talks to one of the detectives and tells him that he will repeat the statement he made the day before. He had dinner with Laura who was then supposed to be going out of town. He ate alone and then got into the tub to read. Waldo reads this off a page, and the detective asks if he wrote it down so that he wouldn't forget it. Waldo replies that he is the most misquoted man in America. Finally, he discovers that the man's name is Mark McPherson, one of the best detectives in New York City.

McPherson asks about a previous article where Waldo switched from a book review to embellishing a story about the Harrington murder. Waldo asks to come with McPherson as he interrogates the other suspects. Then McPherson asks about Waldo's relationship with Laura and whether they were in love. He simply tells him that she thought he was the most wonderful man in the world, and he says that he tried to become all she believed him to be. As they walk into a building later, McPherson nods to a man loitering outside the building, probably another investigator.

The two men go to visit Laura's friend, Mrs. Ann Treadwell, who was present when the maid found her body. She says that the maid was loyal. When McPherson asks about her feelings concerning Laura's upcoming marriage to Mr. Carpenter; she says she had no reason to disapprove. Then he asks about her relationship to Mr. Carpenter and whether she's in love with him since he visits often. Also, he inquires about several check and cash exchanges between her self and Mr. Carpenter. She says that she simply lent some money to Mr. Carpenter. Suddenly, Shelby Carpenter walks in and begins talking to the men. He was just lying down because he has not been able to sleep for weeks since it happened. Shelby says that he had no reason to kill Laura and that they were to be married the coming weekend. Waldo interjects and said that before her death she told him she wasn't sure she would marry Shelby and that she was going away to the country to think it over. Shelby joins the other two men, but he quietly puts his arm around Ann before leaving.

The men go to Laura's to look for a key to her house in the country. We see the same portrait from the beginning of the film hanging above Laura's mantle. McPherson tells Shelby that he actually put the key in the drawer when McPherson tells him that the key wasn't on the police inventory. Shelby says that he wanted to give him the key away from Waldo. Shelby and Waldo almost get into a fight, and McPherson continues to play with his puzzle.

At dinner, Waldo tells McPherson how he met Laura. They were both dining separately at the Algonquin Hotel, and Laura walked up and introduced herself. She tries to convince him to endorse a pen that her company sells. She tells him that it was her idea



to see him and try to convince him to do the ad. She is shocked that he is so self-absorbed and focused on money. He was annoyed by what happened; however, there was something about Laura that made him want to see her again. He goes to her work, but she attempts to blow him off. He then tells her that he would like to endorse the pen. He asks her on a date, and she agrees; the two begin a close companionship until Laura begins to spend time with other men.

Eventually Shelby is introduced to Laura, and he begins to try to win her heart. Waldo is obviously jealous and insulted by Shelby's comments about his age. At the end of the evening they met, Laura and Shelby made a date for the next date; Waldo is insanely jealous as Shelby falls hard for Laura. The next time Laura visits Waldo, he tells her that he investigated Shelby. She doesn't want to believe that Shelby could have done any of the horrible things he's accused of, and she says she's only concerned about the present; she also tells Waldo that she and Shelby were getting married. Waldo tells her that Shelby is now running around with a girl from Laura's office who even pawned a former gift from Laura that Shelby had given to her. Waldo tells Laura that even as they speak Shelby is out dining at Ann Treadway's home. Laura and Waldo go to see if Shelby is at Mrs. Treadway's home, but the maid says that Ann is not in at the moment. The two walk in to find Shelby and Ann dining together.

During that time, Waldo was not sure whether Laura and Shelby saw one another. Laura was supposed to have lunch with Diane Redfern on Friday, and he hoped to hear about the meal that night. However, Laura called to cancel their plans so that she could go away to the country for a few days so she could think things through. Waldo takes responsibility for Laura becoming involved with Shelby.

McPherson calls to ask a grocer whether Laura ever bought a brand of Scotch called Black Pony. Then Laura's housekeeper, Bessie Clary, comes to visit with McPherson. Bessie tells McPherson that Laura was a very sweet woman, and she would never have hurt her. Bessie tells McPherson that she put the Scotch in Laura's cabinet. She said she didn't want them to think that Laura drank like that, and she also cleaned up the glasses.

Shelby, Ann, and Waldo show up at Laura's apartment. After Bessie brings in the drinks, McPherson tells her to leave. Ann says that they should dispose of Laura's things, and Waldo demands that he receive back the things that he gave to Laura. However, Shelby tries to argue. McPherson finally tells them all to leave. That night McPherson returns and begins searching Laura's home again for more clues. Waldo shows up and objects to McPherson poring over Laura's letters, especially those from Waldo.

Waldo tells McPherson that he has heard that he put in a bid on the apartment. Waldo also accuses him of being in love with Laura. He also reminds him that he wants his things back in the same way McPherson wants the apartment. Late that night as McPherson sleeps in the chair; Laura walks in, turns on the lights, and asks why he is there. She tells him that she will call the police if he doesn't leave, and he explains that he is the police. McPherson shows her a newspaper as she explains that she has been in the country.



Laura finds Diane Redfern's dress in her closet, but she can't figure out why it is there. Laura tells McPherson that no one saw her while she was at her country home, and she wasn't in the house Saturday because she took a long walk in the woods. McPherson asks why she left right before her wedding, and he also accuses her of knowing that Shelby had a key to her apartment. Laura admits to knowing that Diane was in love with Shelby, but she says that Shelby meant nothing to her. He responds that Diane was found in Laura's dressing gown and slippers. McPherson prepares to leave, and he asks her not to make any calls. Before he leaves, he asks whether she decided to marry Shelby or not. She replies that she decided not to marry him. When McPherson gets downstairs, the other investigator tells McPherson that the body actually belonged to Diane Redfern. Then they hear Laura on the phone with Shelby. They arrange to meet outside her building, and McPherson follows them.

At Laura's home in the country, Shelby takes down the gun above the fireplace. McPherson notices that the gun was fired recently and asks whether he or Laura knew how to fire it. Shelby finally admits that he took the key from Laura's desk so that he and Diane could talk since she thought that she was in love with him. The doorbell rang twice, Diane answered the door, and then Shelby heard a shot. He didn't see who killed Diane. Shelby apologizes for all the trouble, and before they leave McPherson is disappointed to find that the record player works.

McPherson brings breakfast for Laura the next morning. McPherson finds Bessie in the closet, and she bursts out screaming. Laura explains that she found Diane's body. McPherson tells her that Waldo is coming to the house in a few moments. Shelby arrives at the apartment with flowers for Laura. Apparently, the engagement is back on. Shelby also lets McPherson know that anything said last night would be considered under duress. Waldo collapses when he sees Laura. While he rests, the other three get into an argument. Waldo lets Laura know that he has called everyone to let them know Laura is alive, and McPherson says that he already called everyone.

At the party, Ann tries to convince Shelby to marry her, but he says that Laura needs him. Laura asks Shelby why he went to the cottage the previous night. He tells her that he wasn't sure she would think to hide the shotgun, and he encourages her by telling her that he will stand by her. Ann and Laura talk about Shelby, and Ann tells her that she knows Shelby is capable of murder because he is like her. However, she tells Laura that neither of them killed Diane. Bessie answers a call for McPherson, and he lets the caller know that he was planning to bring in the killer that day. He replies that he was just about to make the arrest.

McPherson walks over to Laura, but Bessie runs in screaming, "No." Laura thanks her but asks her to get her things. Waldo reassures her that they will protect her in court. Shelby walks up and says he warned Shelby to stay away from McPherson. Before he leaves, McPherson punches Shelby, and Ann embraces him, telling him that everything will be okay. In the interrogation room, McPherson questions Laura. She tells him that she asked a local handyman to fix the radio at the cottage before she left. He also asks her why she told him she wasn't going to marry Shelby and why that suddenly changed.



Laura admits that Shelby convinced her to pretend to be back together so that they would both be protected from further suspicion. Laura admits that she doesn't know how she could ever have loved Shelby. McPherson tells her that she is free to go home; he just wanted her and a few others to think she was guilty. McPherson then goes to Lydecker's apartment, but he receives no answer when he rings the doorbell; finally, he lets himself in as the grandfather clock begins to chime. He discovers that the bottom part of the clock is hollow, and he breaks it open. McPherson looks worried and hurries out.

Waldo and Laura visit, and Waldo tries to convince Laura that McPherson is not good enough for her. Waldo tells Laura that she has one weakness, thinking the measure of a man is in his looks. She says she'll never let anyone hurt her again, not even him. He says that he could never hurt her, because she is everything he wants. Waldo wants their relationship to go back to what it was before Shelby. Suddenly, however, McPherson bursts in and tells Laura that her shotgun wasn't the one that killed Diane.

Waldo is angry at McPherson, and he tells Laura that she is always following the same pattern. She retorts that he is the one who always follows the same pattern by hating all the men she loves. Laura tells Waldo that they should no longer see each other, and he tells them to listen to his broadcast in fifteen minutes. Laura tells McPherson that it was the most difficult thing she's ever done, and McPherson tells her that they just have to find the gun. He opens up a clock just like Waldo's and asks for the combination, but she doesn't know it. He finally gets the compartment open and finds the gun. Since Waldo gave her the clock, McPherson realizes that he knew about the compartment. Waldo placed the gun in the clock after Shelby ran out.

Laura says she knew that Waldo was the killer, but she didn't want to believe it. Then, she tells him that it's her fault Diane died. Laura says that she owed Waldo too much, so she couldn't stop anything. McPherson is not impressed by Laura's penchant for surrounding herself with stupid men. Laura and McPherson kiss as he leaves to arrest Waldo. He tells her not to open the door for anyone. After Laura turns out the lights, we see a door beside the clock open and Waldo enters. He retrieves the gun, and Laura hears a sound. She turns on the radio, and Waldo says, "Love is eternal. It has been the strongest motivation for human actions throughout history. Love is stronger than life. It reaches beyond the dark shadow of death." He closes the broadcast with those words.

McPherson discovers downstairs that Waldo went out a different way. Waldo walks into the room and surprises Waldo. He tells her that she is the best part of him self, and he will not allow McPherson to have her. At the door, McPherson tries to get in, and Laura knocks the gun toward the ceiling as Waldo shoots. McPherson shoots Waldo who says, "Goodbye, Laura. Goodbye, my love." After focusing on the broken glass of the clock, the film ends.



Characters

Laura Hunt, played by Gene Tierney

Description

Laura Hunt is a beautiful woman with whom every man seems to fall in love. She is working in advertising when she meets Waldo Lydecker and the two become good friends. She eventually meets Shelby Forrester and becomes engaged to him. The two are to be married a week after her alleged death.

The night of her death Laura is planning to go to her cabin in the country to think about whether she should marry Shelby. Although everyone believes her to be dead, she returns a few days before she was to be married. McPherson has fallen in love with her while she has been gone, but he also suspects that she killed Diane Redfern, the woman who was really murdered in Laura's apartment.

Analysis

Laura seems like an innocent young woman, but she is also willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done as shown by her move in approaching Waldo while at dinner. Laura has trouble making up her mind as to whether Shelby is the right man for her or not, but she chooses to go away so that she will have time to think about it rather than make a fickle decision.

When Laura returns and discovers Diane's death, she begins to try to lie to protect Shelby. Because of his history, she believes that he must be the perpetrator of the crime. Laura cares for him, but because of the way he treats her, she realizes that he is not for her. Eventually, she falls in love with Mark for his good heart.

Det. Lt. Mark McPherson, played by Dana Andrews

Description

Detective Mark McPherson is put on the case of Laura's death. The more he learns about Laura and the more he gazes at her portrait, the more Mark seems to fall in love with her. Before Laura ever returns, Waldo accuses Mark of having fallen in love with a dead woman.

Mark uses all his detective skills to discover Laura's true murder who turns out to be one of her best friends, Waldo Lydecker. Mark realizes that Waldo's care is an obsessive love that makes him not want to share her with anyone else. At the end of the film, Mark saves Laura's life and the two fall in love.



Analysis

Mark may fall in love with a dead woman, but he is no fool. He quickly realizes the shortcomings of Shelby, and eventually he comes to recognize Waldo's obsession with Laura. Although Mark does not know Laura is alive until she returns, he quickly realizes the identity of the murderer.

As Mark continues to try to help and protect Laura, she begins to fall in love with him. After he saves her life, he is able to win her heart with his goodness and kindness.

Waldo Lydecker, played by Clifton Webb

Description

Waldo Lydecker is a famous author who meets Laura when she tries to get him to endorse her company's pen. He agrees, but only so that he can get to know her better. Waldo becomes enchanted with Laura, and he begins to fall in love with her.

Waldo tells much of the story when he begins by describing his experience with Mark McPherson at the beginning of the investigation. Although Waldo obviously loved Laura, he seems not as upset as he should. Waldo quickly points the blame toward Shelby, and at the end of the film, we finally realize that Waldo is the murderer.

Analysis

Waldo has an obsessive love for Laura. He fell for her the first time he met her because of her looks, charm, and self-sufficiency. However, Waldo also realizes that Laura sees him as a best friend rather than a lover. Once the handsome Shelby comes in to the picture Waldo realizes that he has absolutely no chance with Laura.

Waldo sends Laura off to her cabin to consider her impending marriage to Shelby, but when he sees two people in her apartment, he becomes insanely jealous. He quickly goes upstairs and murders the woman who comes to the door, Diane. In the end, Waldo's jealousy overtakes him once again, and he tries to kill Laura until Mark first kills him.

Shelby Carpenter, played by Vincent Price

Description

Shelby Carpenter is Laura's fiancé and a playboy in the city. Although he is supposedly committed to Laura, Shelby is cheating on her with several different women. After Laura goes to the cabin for a few days, Shelby even meets Diane Redfern in Laura's apartment.



After Diane is murdered, Shelby believes that Laura killed her because she found them together. Thus, he begins to lie about the real circumstances in order to protect Laura, and his own reputation.

Analysis

Shelby is a selfish man. He cares about Laura for the sake of his own reputation, but he has affairs with many other women in town. He even meets Diane Redfern in Laura's apartment while she is out of town.

Shelby tries to protect Laura when he thinks that she was the murderer, but once again he does it to keep his own reputation spotless. Shelby may be a socialite, but he does act in a classy manner or treats the women in his life the way they should be treated.

Mrs. Ann Treadwell, played by Judith Anderson

Description

Mrs. Ann Treadwell is Shelby's lover. They have a relationship in which she is desperately in love with him, but he is also in love with Laura.

Analysis

Ann tries to steal Shelby from Laura, and the other women he sees, but she is disappointed when he continues to fool around with others. However, at the end of the film she kisses him, and we can see that she is hoping now that Laura is out of the picture, she can finally win his heart.

Bessie Clary, played by Dorothy Adams

Description

Bessie Clary is Laura's faithful maid.

Analysis

Bessie is completely distraught when she finds Laura, actually Diane, dead in the apartment. When Mark tries to interview her, she is completely hysterical.

Themes

Power of Jealousy

Jealousy has an overwhelming negative effect on people. We can see that jealousy destroys many other lives besides the life of the jealous person. Nothing good ever comes out of jealousy, and it only complicates relationships.

Waldo is extremely jealous of Shelby, and tries to guard Laura against Shelby's advances as well as those of every other man. He believes that since he cannot have her that no one else is good enough or deserves to have her either. Waldo's jealousy eventually leads him to murder Diane Redfern when he sees silhouettes through the window and believes that Laura has lied, stayed home, and is with Shelby. Waldo's jealousy destroys everyone's lives including Diane's.

In addition, Waldo hides the truth and even lets Laura be incriminated in Diane's death at one point. Although he tries to stand up for her, he also realizes that he cannot let anyone know about his jealous rage that killed Diane. Waldo's jealousy ruins everyone's lives, and eventually he dies because of the acts he has committed in the name of jealousy and in order to make sure that if he can't have Laura, then no one else can.

Trust

Trust is a major issue in this film. Trust is the basis of all good relationships, and it is obvious that Waldo wants a relationship with Laura but does not feel that he can trust her. Waldo knows that Laura is not attracted to him in that way, so he tries to make sure that she cannot be with anyone else either. We learn that a lack of trust can be deadly as it was for Diane Redfern when Waldo thought she was Laura.

Additionally, Shelby and Laura do not have trust in their relationship. When Laura returns, Shelby is convinced that she must have killed Diane after discovering that Shelby had met her at the apartment. On the other hand, Laura does not trust Shelby because he has been having affairs with other women. Laura even goes away to the mountains so that she can decide whether or not she should marry Shelby after seeing all his lies.

The only person Laura ends up being able to trust is Mark, a man she just met. We realize that trust is not based on the longevity of a relationship, but sometimes it is simply based on whether someone tells the truth or not. Laura finally has trust in her relationship with Mark, and he protects her when Waldo once again breaks her trust by trying to kill her.

Love

Love is a theme that shows up in almost every film, but here we see many different types of love. We learn in this film that love can mean different things to different people, and they all may believe that their type of love is the truest and the best.

Waldo loves Laura with a possessive love which turns into obsession. He realizes that she will never love him back, so he tries to keep her from all other men, especially Shelby. Waldo lies to Laura and tries to manipulate her. He even decides to kill her when he believes that she stayed home with Shelby instead of going to the mountains.

Shelby also believes that he loves Laura, but he loves her as a possession. Shelby believes that she belongs to him, so he no longer has to win her and can fool around with other women. The only person who loves Laura for herself and is faithful to her is Mark who falls in love with her portrait and stories about her before he ever meets her. Mark shows his love by protecting her from both Waldo's obsession and Shelby's possession.

Style and Cinematography

Laura is a classic movie mystery film in the film noir style. The film is an early example of this technique. The term film noir was not coined by French critics until 1946. The critics had observed an increasingly dark theme pervading American cinema concerning crime and detective films. *Laura* epitomizes these themes as we see Laura being loved and hated by those closest to her.

The film is entirely based on suspense and some moments of surprise. From the first time we hear about Laura's death the automatic question is why she dies and who did it. However, throughout all the investigations, we seem to get no closer to a conclusive answer. Then, to our surprise, Laura almost magically reappears. At first, viewers wonder if she is a dream, but she has truly returned. The next questions are who really died, who did it, and why. Throughout the rest of the film, we see the characters try to discover this answer, and we are shocked by the result.

Laura also relies strongly on symbolism. Laura's portrait is one of the most symbolic and memorable aspects of the film. Throughout all the searching for her body, she hangs there staring down at everyone. The famous song by the same name that was used for the film is also symbolic. The song is haunting and moving, helping to create the atmosphere for the film. Of all the different aspects of the film, the song "Laura's Theme," often simply called "Laura" is by far the most famous. It determines the mood of the film and helps to enhance the mystery and intrigue.

Motifs

Unsolved Murder

An unsolved murder is what gets the entire film moving. When Laura (actually Diane) is murdered, Mark must get involved in the investigation and as he questions Waldo, the whole story begins to unfold. Waldo tells how he met Laura and the circumstances surrounding her life and death.

The unsolved murder also leads them to Shelby who knows that Laura is still alive since he was with Diane but who refuses to say anything since he doesn't want to implicate himself in her murder. As the plot thickens, Laura, who is supposed to be dead, appears in her living room.

From that point on, the murder is solved, and we discover that Waldo is actually the killer. The unsolved murder is the catalyst for the story and helps to reveal the story and the accompanying themes. Many films start the same way since the motif can quickly grasp a viewer's attention.

Use of Suspense

In the standard form typical of the great Alfred Hitchcock, Otto Preminger relies heavily on suspense in *Laura*. Instead of using surprising shocks at the end of the movie, suspense builds slowly from the beginning of the film until its final moments. The move is more subtle than using surprises and creates a richer plot. Our suspense builds with everything we learn about Laura and the more people we meet who were in love with her. We want to know what happens to her, so we become more and more engaged in the plot and the characters.

Preminger does use a few surprises, though. When Laura walks back into her apartment, viewers are shocked to see her arrive. Her reappearance makes all the other characters try to pull their acts together since they have been lying to Mark the entire time. However, once we learn that Laura is not dead, we are mystified as suspense once again gathers around the girl's true identity and true circumstances of her death. The suspense builds until finally we see Waldo walk out with his gun and prepare to kill Laura so that he will never have to share her with anyone else.

Unrequited Love

Waldo's unhealthy, unrequited love causes the majority of the problems in this film. Waldo is madly in love with Laura, but he seeks to keep her from others and control her. He seeks to show her the problems with Shelby, and although he is correct, he does it for selfish reasons rather than for Laura's own good. When Waldo believes that Laura

has lied to him about going to the mountains, Waldo loses all control and decides to murder her, but he shoots before realizing that he shot the wrong woman.

Waldo's unrequited love leads to pain and death in the film. He realizes that he cannot have Laura, but he becomes obsessed and decides that no one else can have her either. Waldo becomes seduced by the idea of keeping Laura to himself for all time in his memories, and he attempts to make this idea a reality.

All of the themes seem to relate to Waldo's obsessive love that destroys his life and hurts the lives of the other characters. Waldo is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that at least in his mind he can believe that Laura loved him. At least if she's dead, he no longer has to realize the truth that she doesn't love him.



Symbols

Clock

The clocks in both Laura and Waldo's apartments symbolize two different things. The hidden compartment in the clock is symbolic of the hidden places in a man's soul, such as the place where Waldo harbors the desire to kill Laura. The clock face, especially when shown in the last scene, symbolizes Waldo's desire to stop time and keep Laura all to him self forever.

Waldo hides the gun in Laura's apartment in the hidden compartment beneath the clock. After accidentally killing Diane rather than Laura, he knows he must hide the evidence and that is the most convenient place to hide it since no one would ever think to look there. Waldo also has a hidden place in his heart that would allow him to want to kill Laura. He asks as her best friend but hides his true motivations from everyone.

Waldo's true motivation is to keep Laura all to him self. He feels that if he kills her he can stop time forever, as symbolized by the clock face, and he will never have to feel that she rejected him. Waldo is lonely and confused, and eventually time does stop forever for him after Mark kills him. As we see the clock face, Waldo's last words are "Good-bye, Laura. Goodbye, my love."

Gun

Waldo's gun is symbolic of his desire to kill. When we first meet Waldo he seems like a kind man who wouldn't hurt a fly. As Mark questions him, Waldo seems to truly love Laura and value her friendship. However, Mark realizes that Waldo's love may have become a dangerous obsession.

Although Mark picks up on this part of Waldo just in the nick of time, viewers also do not figure out that Waldo is the killer until we see the gun in his hand. The gun symbolizes his desire to make sure that Laura never belongs to anyone else no matter what the costs. Also, the gun symbolizes power in his mind. He is now able to take away life, a fact that makes him have a sense of power that he does not normally have in his life.

Mark gains greater power though with his gun as he shoots and kills Waldo, barely saving Laura's life. Guns are all about power, and Mark and Waldo have a power struggle to the death. Thankfully, Mark wins and Laura is saved.

Laura's Portrait

After Laura dies, many people come in and out of her apartment trying to visit with the detective and figure out what has happened. Laura's portrait hangs above the mantle as

a reminder to viewers who this beautiful woman is and why everyone falls in love with her.

Additionally, we watch as Mark falls in love with Laura via her portrait and the stories he hears. Laura is an attractive woman, and every man she meets falls in love with her, even Mark who only sees her via the portrait. Thus, when Laura walks back in as he stares at her portrait and dreams of her viewers are very surprised.

Laura's portrait allows viewers to get to know her as they watch the film, and they can relate to her power over the men in her life. Once Laura walks back in her portrait becomes secondary, because the real Laura is much more captivating than any portrait.



Essay Questions

Why does Mark visit Waldo?

What is the relationship between Waldo and Laura?

Who does Waldo believe killed Laura?

How did Laura meet Waldo and Shelby, the two men in her life?

Why does Waldo believe that Shelby is not good enough for Laura?

During his time at her apartment, what type of feelings does Mark develop for Laura?

When Laura returns, what do the characters discover really happened?

Why does Shelby try to protect Laura?

Who actually killed Diane and why?

Where was the gun hidden?