

# **The Lady in the Lake Study Guide**

## **The Lady in the Lake by Raymond Chandler**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Lady in the Lake Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters One - Two.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Three - Four.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Five - Eight.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Nine - Eleven.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Twelve - Fourteen.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Seventeen - Nineteen.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Twenty - Twenty-three.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Twenty-four - Twenty-six.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Twenty-seven - Twenty-nine.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Thirty - Thirty-two.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Thirty-three - Thirty-five.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Thirty-seven - Thirty-nine.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Chapters Forty - Forty-one.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>

## Plot Summary

The discovery of the body of a woman in Little Fawn Lake at first seems unrelated to Philip Marlowe's search for the wife of perfume tycoon Derace Kingsley. However, as the plot progresses in the novel *The Lady in the Lake* by Raymond Chandler, this gruesome discovery soon helps Marlowe to solve a chain of seemingly unrelated murders. Not only does Marlowe solve these murders, he also uncovers a dirty police officer and the woman the officer has been trying to protect.

Marlowe begins a seemingly uncomplex case in which he is hired by Kingsley to locate his wife Crystal who has been missing for one month. Kingsley had believed his wife had run away with her boyfriend, Chris Lavery. However, Kingsley had seen the boyfriend the day before. Lavery had seen Crystal in nearly a month as well. Marlowe first speaks to Lavery, then visits Little Fawn Lake, where the Kingsley's own a cabin. It is here that Marlowe and Bill Chess, who lives at the lake, discover the body of a woman who'd drowned in the lake. Chess identifies the dead woman as his wife Muriel. She, like Crystal, has been missing for one month.

Marlowe's investigation leads him back to Lavery, whom he discovers has been murdered, most likely by a woman. All indications point toward Crystal as the murderer. Crystal contacts her husband, needing money to get out of town because she is in trouble. Marlowe meets with Crystal to give her the money but insists that he talk to her first. As they are talking, Marlowe is knocked out. When he regains consciousness, he finds the girl he believes is Crystal Kingsley dead. In his attempt to get away from the scene without begin implicated in the murder, Marlowe is intercepted by police officer Al Degarmo. Marlowe deceives Degarmo into believing that Marlowe thinks Kingsley killed Crystal. The two travel to Kingsley's cabin on Little Fawn Lake, where Marlowe uncovers what he has really determined in his investigation.

Marlowe has determined the woman who drowned in Little Fawn Lake was actually Crystal Kingsley. Mildred Haviland, who had introduced herself to Bill Chess as being named Muriel, killed Crystal in an effort to leave her husband. Mildred was also responsible for the murder of Florence Almore, the wife of a doctor with whom she was having an affair. Officer Degarmo, who was also Mildred's ex-husband, covered up the murder to keep Mildred from going to jail. Mildred was also responsible for murdering Lavery because she was afraid Lavery might mention to Bill Chess that his wife was actually alive. Marlowe determines that Mildred was killed by Degarmo. In the conclusion of the novel, Degarmo is killed when he is shot by a sentry guard and his car crashes in Puma Point canyon.

# Chapters One - Two

## Chapters One - Two Summary

The discovery of the body of a woman in Little Fawn Lake at first seems unrelated to Philip Marlowe's search for the wife of perfume tycoon Derace Kingsley. However, as the plot progresses in the novel *The Lady in the Lake* by Raymond Chandler, this gruesome discovery soon helps Marlowe solve a chain of seemingly unrelated murders. Not only does Marlowe solve these murders, he also uncovers a dirty police officer and the woman the officer has been trying to protect.

In chapter one, Philip Marlowe attempts to meet with Derace Kingsley in his business office. After verbal combat with Adrienne Fromsett, Kingsley's personal secretary, Marlowe is finally allowed to wait to see if Kingsley will meet with him. When Kingsley's meeting is finished, Mrs. Fromsett announces Marlowe's presence, but Kingsley doesn't seem interested. About ten minutes later, Kingsley leaves for a hair cut and notices Marlowe still waiting. Kingsley speaks to Marlowe. Although the two don't like each other in this initial conversation, Kingsley agrees to see Marlowe.

After taking his time lighting a cigar in chapter two, Kingsley asks Marlowe for proof that Marlowe is a detective. Marlowe passes Kingsley his identification. When he is satisfied, Kingsley tells Marlowe that if Marlowe is hired, he is to do what he is told and keep his mouth shut about what he finds out. In his turn, Marlowe tells Kingsley he won't do divorce work, and that he requires people he doesn't know to pay one hundred dollars as a retainer. This remark seems to soften Kingsley. He tells Marlowe he needs the detective's assistance to locate his wife. The lady has been missing one month.

Kingsley tells Marlowe his wife had been staying at their cabin near Puma Point. She was supposed to come to a party June 12th, which she did not attend. Kingsley shows Marlowe a telegraph he received from his wife informing him that she was going to Mexico to divorce Kingsley and marry her lover, Chris Lavery. Two days ago, however, Kingsley met with Lavery, who told Kingsley he hadn't seen Crystal in two months.

In addition to Crystal's disappearance, Kingsley is afraid his wife may have gotten into trouble with the police. He tells Marlowe that she has a habit of shoplifting. Although local events have been handled quietly, Kingsley is afraid trouble in another town could result in a scandal that might cause Kingsley to lose his job. Marlowe relieves Kingsley's worries by telling Kingsley he believes that if Crystal had gotten in trouble with the police, Kingsley would already have been contacted.

Marlowe decides to begin his investigation by talking to Lavery and then visiting Little Fawn Lake. Kingsley writes Marlowe a letter to take to caretaker Bill Chase, giving Marlowe permission to see the cabin. Kingsley tells Marlowe that Miss Fromsett can give him Lavery's address. Miss Fromsett gives Marlowe the address, but Marlowe gets the impression she does not like Lavery.

## Chapters One - Two Analysis

These first two chapters serve as an introduction to the entire novel. It is in these chapters that licensed detective Philip Marlowe is introduced and his personality developed. Marlowe is the narrator for the novel. His language is that of the tough guy detective. He notices things, such as Miss Fromsett's reaction to Lavery's name, that detectives would typically notice. When writing his novel, Chandler takes his time giving out information. Marlowe is in the dark about why he has been called to Kingsley's office and so is the reader. It is important to note that Chandler often gives information in hidden ways. For instance, in the beginning of chapter two, Chandler mentions the July heat. Less astute readers might miss this time reference.

Derace Kingsley is another character who is introduced in these first two chapters. He is worried about his wife's disappearance even though the two are obviously no longer close to one another. Kingsley begins his relationship with Marlowe pretending to be a tough guy also. He keeps up this tough façade until Marlowe first threatens to charge him an extra one hundred dollars as a retainer then suggests that some of his customers have not come away from his services alive because of the way they treated him. It is these two threats that break Kingsley's icy façade and show that Marlowe has gained the man's respect.

One very important thing to note in this section is the impression Marlowe receives of Crystal from her husband. In fact, Marlowe asks if this impression is correct and Kingsley agrees. Marlowe sees Crystal as a pretty woman, but impetuous and wild with a tendency to get herself into trouble.

# Chapters Three - Four

## Chapters Three - Four Summary

In the beginning of chapter three, Marlowe locates Lavery's house in Bay City. Although Marlowe knocks and rings the bell, no one answers. After some time, Marlowe finally manages to get Lavery to the door. Lavery does not agree to let Marlowe in until Marlowe shows him the telegram Kingsley received from Crystal. Marlowe begins the conversation in a straightforward manner by asking Lavery where Crystal is. Lavery tells Marlowe he has not seen Crystal in some time. The last time he saw her was before the date on the telegram. He claims there were never any plans for the two of them to get married. Lavery tells Marlowe he visited Crystal at Little Fawn Lake the third week in May, and that was the last time he saw her.

Marlowe continues to probe Lavery. Lavery finally admits he stood Crystal up. He was supposed to go see her one weekend and didn't. Lavery thinks the telegram may be Crystal's way of getting back at Lavery. When Marlowe asks Lavery what line of business he is in, Lavery becomes irritated and insists Marlowe leave and not come back. As he is finishing his conversation and preparing to leave, Marlowe notices that Lavery spits on the floor in front of him. Marlowe finds the act disconcerting.

In chapter four, Marlowe's interest is directed at the house across the street from Lavery's home. A tablet on the front of the house tells Marlowe this is the home of a doctor named Albert S. Almore. As Marlowe gazes at the house, he sees a black Cadillac turn into this same house's garage. A thin man gets out of the car and goes into the house, but appears to be keeping his eye on Marlowe the entire time. As Marlowe tries to decide if he wants to hire someone to follow Lavery, he notices the doctor is watching him from a window. Marlowe begins to realize that Almore is bothered by Marlowe's presence. As Marlowe watches, the doctor makes some phone calls and jots some notes in a book. After about five minutes a car drives up to Almore's house. The driver of the car goes inside and talks to Almore, then approaches Marlowe's car.

The man asks Marlowe if he is waiting for someone. Marlowe suspects he is a cop and asks for identification. The man demands Marlowe's identification first. After checking Marlowe's credentials, the man introduces himself as detective-lieutenant Degarmo. He asks Marlowe if her parents hired him and reminds him that the last one ended up in jail. Marlowe lets Degarmo know that he has no interest in Almore and has no idea to what Degarmo is referring. Degarmo says out loud to himself that Almore is crazy and lets Marlowe go.

Marlowe drives back to his office in Los Angeles and calls Kingsley. He tells Kingsley that Lavery doesn't appear to have anything to do with Crystal's disappearance. Marlowe doesn't believe Lavery even knows where Crystal is. He also mentions the actions at the Almore house. Kingsley tells Marlowe that Almore had been Crystal's

doctor for a time and that his wife had committed suicide. Their conversation concludes with Marlowe telling Kingsley he plans to head for Little Fawn Lake next.

## **Chapters Three - Four Analysis**

Marlowe begins his investigation in this section. His first stop is Lavery's house. Although Lavery at first won't let Marlowe into his house, then acts uncomfortable around the detective, Marlowe doesn't feel Lavery is involved in Crystal's disappearance or knows where she is. In fact, Marlowe is more intrigued by the actions of the doctor that lives across the street from Lavery than he is in Lavery himself.

Marlowe notices the doctor acting in a suspicious and unusual manner from the time he arrives at Lavery's home. As Marlowe sits in his car in front of Lavery's house, which is across the street from the Almore house, he notices the doctor is watching him. After the doctor makes some phone calls, a police officer in an unmarked car comes and questions Marlowe. Although he is not interested in the doctor, the man's unusual actions begin to raise a spark of curiosity in Marlowe. This curiosity is deepened when Kingsley tells Marlowe that Almore was Crystal's doctor. Kingsley also tells Marlowe that Almore's wife committed suicide several years prior.

# Chapters Five - Eight

## Chapters Five - Eight Summary

In chapter five, Marlowe drives to Little Fawn Lake and introduces himself to Bill Chess. Kingsley has written Chess a note telling him Marlowe is there to look at Kingsley's cabin. Chess, however, recognizes that Marlowe is a private detective and thinks Kingsley has hired Marlowe to find out if Chess has been sleeping with Crystal. Chess almost comes to the point of hitting Marlowe, but Marlowe calms him down. Chess apologizes and tells Marlowe how his wife left him about a month ago. He adds that he did have a fling with Crystal. Muriel found out about it and left him that night. Chess shows Marlowe a note Muriel left him on the dresser. Chess tells Marlowe Crystal went down the mountain the same night. Chess hasn't heard from or seen either woman since.

In chapter six, Chess takes Marlowe to see Kingsley's cabin. Chess becomes angry again as Marlowe looks through Crystal's clothes. Chess realizes Marlowe is indeed a private detective. Marlowe brushes off Chess' anger and asks him if he thinks the two women might have gone away together. Chess says this action would have been unlike Muriel. Besides, Muriel had her own car that she drove. As Chess and Marlowe walk back around the lake together, Chess notices something that looks like a human arm waving out from under an old boat landing in the lake. Chess throws a boulder onto the landing and the body is freed. As the body rises to the top of the water, Chess cries out that it is Muriel.

In chapter seven, Marlowe reports his and Chess's gruesome discovery to Sheriff Jim Patton, the local constable and deputy sheriff. Marlowe stuns the man by telling him there is a body in Little Fawn Lake. Patton goes for the doctor and instructs Marlowe to follow him back to the lake.

In chapter eight, Patton picks up a man named Andy and the group heads to the lake. When they arrive, Chess has used a rope to drag the body out of the lake. Although Chess and Marlowe believe Muriel's death was a suicide, Patton talks about murder. Chess shows Patton the note Muriel left. The men notice the note is not dated and that it looks older than one month old. Bill insists he was not involved in Muriel's death and even hits himself in the face as a way of punishing himself. Patton tries to reassure Chess they aren't blaming anything on him, but they will have to question him.

## Chapters Five - Eight Analysis

Much happens in these four chapters. In the course of investigating the disappearance of Kingsley's wife, Marlowe stumbles onto the death of another woman. In Marlowe's opinion, Muriel's death is the result of suicide, but the authorities have not ruled out murder. Bill Chess identifies the dead woman as his wife, Muriel. He believes she has



been in the lake since she left him one month ago. On that day Bill had given into temptation, allowed Crystal to get him drunk and then slept with her.

During Chess and Marlowe's conversation before they discover the body in the lake, Marlowe learns some interesting similarities between Muriel and Crystal. First, Chess describes Muriel and Crystal as being the same type of woman. He says they are similar in height, weight, and hair color. Chess even says the two women's eye color is almost identical. He does say, however, that their personalities are completely different. Chess also tells Marlowe that it was on Friday the 12th of June that Muriel left him. Ironically, this was the same day Crystal was supposed to have attended the party at which she never arrived.

In this section, Chandler adds to his cast of characters Jim Patton, the constable and sheriff deputy of the area where Little Fawn Lake is located. Unlike the hardened and skeptical Degarmo, Patton seems to be more open and honest with others. He is the typical country sheriff who is responsible for everything in his district from putting out fires to keeping the law. It also appears that nothing really bad, besides the murder of Dad Meacham, a gold prospector who had lived in the area, had ever really happened in the small vacation area.

# Chapters Nine - Eleven

## Chapters Nine - Eleven Summary

In chapter nine, Marlowe stops at a hotel in Puma Point for dinner. When he returns to his car, he finds it is occupied by a girl. The girl introduces herself as Birdie Keppel, and says she is a beautician by day and a newspaper journalist at night. She instructs him to drive her to a quieter place where they can talk. In response to her questions, Marlowe tells Birdie he does not believe Chess was responsible for his wife's death. Although she already knows what he does for a living, she asks anyway and suggests Marlowe might have had some interest in Muriel Chess. She mentions that a Los Angeles cop who had called himself De Soto had been looking for a woman named Mildred Haviland. Although the woman in the picture he had looked like Muriel, no one had liked De Soto because of his bad manners; therefore, no one had given him any information. Birdie admits she told Muriel the man was looking for her but Muriel didn't say anything about it, but just laughed and walked away.

In chapter ten, Marlowe goes to Puma Point's telephone office and calls Kingsley. He fills Kingsley in on the information he got from Chess about Crystal, and then tells Kingsley about Muriel's apparent suicide. Because the death is suspicious, Kingsley will probably have to testify. This affects Kingsley because Marlowe will have to tell exactly why he was at Little Fawn Lake that day. Marlowe tells Kingsley he plans to see what he can find out about Crystal at the Prescott Hotel. At the conclusion of their conversation, Marlowe asks Kingsley if he knew Muriel well and if he ever knew a Mildred Haviland. Kingsley answers in the negative to both these questions and they end their conversation. Marlowe waits for darkness to fall, and then heads back to Little Fawn Lake.

In chapter eleven, Marlowe drives back to the road to Chess's cabin. He walks the rest of the way from the gate to the cabin. Marlowe looks for a way to get into Chess's cabin. When he doesn't find one, he uses a rock to pull the lock out of a window frame. After Marlowe climbs through the window, he is met by the beam of a flashlight in his face. Jim Patton, who has been sitting in the cabin, turns on a lamp. Patton asks Marlowe what he is doing. Patton adds that he realizes that Marlowe is a private detective. Marlowe tells Patton he was hired by Kingsley to find Kingsley's wife. He was at Little Fawn Lake because that was one of the last places she was seen. Marlowe admits to Patton he wanted to search Chess's cabin because he wanted find whether or not Chess was involved in Muriel's death.

Patton shows interest in learning what Marlowe might have hoped to have found in the cabin. Marlowe says he is looking for personal articles the Muriel should have taken with her if she had been planning on leaving. In the case that Chess murdered her, Chess would have had to get rid of her things somewhere. Her car should also be somewhere. Marlowe suspects that if Chess was involved he would have hidden the car, with Muriel's things inside, somewhere in the nearby woods.

Marlowe changes the subject and asks Patton about Mildred Haviland. Patton admits he did wrong when he did not tell De Soto about Muriel's resemblance to Mildred, but that he just didn't like the man's manners. Patton then tells Marlowe that he located Muriel's car in the woods near Coon Lake, with all of her things inside. Patton then shows Marlowe the cut bracelet he found in a box of confectioner's sugar. After a brief discussion of why Chess did not run away after the murder, the two close up the cabin and separate. Marlowe looks for a place to hide himself and his car until Patton leaves.

## **Chapters Nine - Eleven Analysis**

The mysteries surrounding Muriel deepen in this section of chapters. Marlowe learns from a newspaper reporter that a cop named De Soto had been looking for a girl named Mildred Haviland. Although the picture he showed looked like Muriel, no one, including Patton had liked De Soto, so they didn't mention Muriel. Apparently, the tough cop attitude that De Soto used irritated the people so much that he did not win any friends during his stay in Puma Point.

Although Patton appears to be a small city deputy, he has a great deal of people sense that he uses in solving his area's crimes. For instance, he, like Marlowe, had already thought about Muriel's car and had already located it. Patton had also had a feeling that Marlowe would return to Chess's cabin to poke around. While the two are together in Chess's cabin, they take the time to discuss the details of the case. Although Patton believes Chess killed his wife, Marlowe isn't convinced.

Notice throughout the book the unusual descriptions that Chandler uses when describing the places, people and things in his novel. For instance, Chandler uses similes often in his writing. One example of this use of simile occurs in chapter nine where Chandler describes a radio in the room as being a "radio that was as full of static as the mashed potatoes were full of water." Chandler also often uses over exaggeration to make points about his subject matter. For instance, in chapter eleven, he writes that Patton was wearing, "a leather jerkin which must have been new once, say about the time of Grover Cleveland's first term."

# Chapters Twelve - Fourteen

## Chapters Twelve - Fourteen Summary

In chapter twelve, Marlowe parks his car in the woods and waits for Patton to leave before walking back to Chess's cabin. He pokes through the bathroom and bedroom before returning to the baking items in the kitchen. Marlowe looks through the other boxes, thinking there might be something Patton missed. Inside the box of sugar, he finds another twist of tissue paper. Inside this paper is a gold heart engraved with the words "Al to Mildred. June 28th 1938. With all my love." Marlowe takes this heart back to Patton's office. When he shows it to Patton, Patton also believes this indicates that Muriel was indeed Mildred. Patton also now believes that Chess did not murder Muriel, but that someone from her past did.

In chapter thirteen, Marlowe finally checks into the Prescott Hotel. The staff is rude and disinterested. He offers the bellhop money and a drink in return for information about Crystal. The bellhop sends up Les, a man who the bellhop claims to be the one who checked Crystal out of the hotel. Les, the bell captain, doesn't tell Marlowe anything except to inform him that they don't like private detectives at that hotel. The first bellhop comes back and tells him Crystal never checked in at that hotel. However, Crystal did pay to have her car parked there. Marlowe shows the bellhop Crystal's picture and asks him to identify her. The bellhop is more interested in Lavery, whom he says had dinner with Crystal the night she left and even went to the train station with her. After he finishes his conversation with the bellhop, Marlowe decides to check out of the hotel and go home.

In chapter fourteen, Marlowe dreams about the corpse in the lake. When he finally wakes, a member of the Central Detective Bureau interrupts his breakfast by knocking on the door. The man asks Marlowe if he had been at Puma Lake investigating the drowned girl. Marlowe replies that he had no interest in Muriel's death. The man continues to push for any information Marlowe might be able to give him about the death. After the man leaves, Marlowe gets on the phone in an attempt to talk to De Soto. He learns that there is no officer by that name. Marlowe next calls Kingsley and updates him on his latest findings. His next step, he tell Kingsley, will be to go back to Lavery.

## Chapters Twelve - Fourteen Analysis

Two major discoveries are made in this section of three chapters. First, when Marlowe searches Chess's cabin after Patton, he finds the remainder of Muriel's bracelet. There is a pendant engraved with an inscription that indicates that Muriel actually was Mildred Haviland. With this new information, the two decide Muriel was not killed by her husband but instead by someone from her past. Also, when interviewing the bellhop at the Prescott Hotel, the bellhop remembers seeing Lavery with Crystal the night she left

her car at the hotel. It is from this discovery that Marlowe decides to go back to question Lavery again.

# Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen

## Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen Summary

Marlowe drives the Lavery's house and sits in his car trying to decide how to handle Lavery. He finally walks to the house and rings the bell. There is no answer, but Marlowe notices the front door is not latched and pushes it open. Marlowe stands in the front room and listens for sounds to indicate someone else is there. As he watches and listens, a woman comes up from the downstairs bedroom. She is holding a gun, which she points at Marlowe. The woman approaches Marlowe with the gun, telling him she had only come to see about Lavery's past due rent money. She claims to be Mrs. Fallbrook, the owner of Lavery's home. Marlowe tells Mrs. Fallbrook that he has come because Lavery is behind in his car payments. As Marlowe tries to make a move for the gun, Mrs. Fallbrook tells him she found the weapon on the stairs. She gives him the gun willingly.

As Mrs. Fallbrook rambles on, Marlowe examines the gun. He notes that it has been shot and emptied recently. As he examines the gun, Mrs. Fallbrook asks Marlowe if it has been shot. He gives a vague answer then asks Mrs. Fallbrook if she saw Lavery in the house. She says Lavery is not in the house. Marlowe then straight forwardly asks Mrs. Fallbrook if she shot Lavery because he did not pay her the rent money. Mrs. Fallbrook is appalled at this idea. At one point in the conversation, Mrs. Fallbrook tries to get tough with Marlowe and order him out of her house. Marlowe responds by getting tough with Mrs. Fallbrook, who leaves rapidly.

After she is gone, in chapter sixteen, Marlowe uses the opportunity to search Lavery's house. In the bedroom, it appears as if a woman has stayed the night with Lavery. Marlowe also finds the outfit the bellhop described to Marlowe as the one Crystal was wearing the night she left her car at the Prescott Hotel. The bathroom door is locked, but Marlowe uses a nail file to break in. Once inside he discovers three spent gun shells and the body of Lavery. The body is already cold and stiff. Marlowe leaves the bathroom and goes back to the bedroom where he pulls a handkerchief out from under one of the pillows and notices there are the initials A.F. embroidered in red. The first name that comes to mind is Adrienne Fromsett. Marlowe pokes around a bit more then leaves the house. He does, however, fix the lock so that he can get back inside.

## Chapters Fifteen - Sixteen Analysis

In this section Marlowe finds Lavery, whom a bellhop has told Marlowe was with Crystal the night she left her car at the Prescott Hotel and was shot to death in his bathroom. Marlowe also finds the outfit the bellhop described to him as the one that Crystal was wearing the night at the Prescott hanging in Lavery's closet. There is, however, a handkerchief with Adrienne Fromsett's initials on it under the pillow and evidence that a woman spent the night with Lavery recently.

This entire gruesome and muddled discovery takes place after Marlowe has his conversation with the high-strung Mrs. Fallbrook, who claims to be Lavery's landlady. She says she has only come for past due rent, but when Marlowe first sees her, she is carrying an empty, but recently shot handgun. Notice that Mrs. Fallbrook allows herself to be caught in a lie as Marlowe asks her twice when she called Lavery about the rent money. Once she doesn't correct him when he suggests it was this morning she called, while the next time she responds that it was the night before.

With Lavery dead, Marlowe's trail on Crystal has now gone cold. His investigation, however, has turned from a missing person investigation to one where he is perhaps looking for a murder. There is evidence Crystal may have been with Lavery and may have been the one to shoot him. However, there is also evidence the quirky Mrs. Fallbrook may have shot Lavery. Marlowe doesn't seem to know quite what to think as he leaves Lavery's house and takes the gun with him.

# Chapters Seventeen - Nineteen

## Chapters Seventeen - Nineteen Summary

At the Athletic Club, Marlowe is escorted to the library where some members are taking a nap. He meets with Kingsley in a corner. Kingsley is upset about the last minute meeting. Marlowe tells Kingsley he believes Crystal shot Lavery. After Marlowe gives Kingsley the necessary information about Lavery's death, he asks Kingsley if Crystal owned a gun. Kingsley replies that she did, she had a small handgun. Marlowe pulls out the gun, lays it on Kingsley's lap, and asks him if he recognizes it. Kingsley is not sure if the gun is Crystal's or not but believes Lavery must have dumped her, resulting in Crystal murdering him. Although Kingsley offers Marlowe five hundred dollars to keep the gun and try to cover up the murder, Marlowe convinces Kingsley that even without the gun the police will eventually connect Crystal with Lavery. Marlowe says he has to go back to Lavery's house, replace the gun and call the cops. He hopes the police will find Crystal and free Marlowe up to spend his time proving that Crystal didn't kill Lavery. Kingsley tells Marlowe he will get the five hundred dollar bonus if he is able to prove Crystal didn't murder Lavery.

At this point Marlowe changes the subject and asks Kingsley how well Adrienne Fromsett knew Lavery. Kingsley remarks that she knew him well at one time but their relationship had turned sour. Marlowe states he will have to talk to her. Kingsley mentions that Adrienne knew the Almores and wonders if there is any connection. Before he leaves to go back to Lavery's house, Marlowe warns Kingsley not to fall into any traps when the police talk to him. If he does, Marlowe warns that it may endanger his investigation.

In chapter eighteen, Marlowe crosses the street and walks to the Gillerlain Company's office. Here he speaks with Adrienne. He mentions first that Kingsley told him that she knew Mrs. Almore. Marlowe asks if Adrienne met Mrs. Almore at Lavery's house. Adrienne mentions that Mrs. Almore committed suicide. Marlowe asks her if there is any question in her mind about that fact. Adrienne wants to know why he is asking and Marlowe suggests the Almore incident may in some way be connected with what is going on with Crystal and Lavery.

Adrienne tells Marlowe that Mrs. Almore died just a few weeks after having a run-in at a party with Mr. Brownwell, a man who was questioning her about her husband's drug business. Lavery was the one who found the woman dead in the garage with the door shut and the car running. Adrienne says she later heard the real story about the death from Brownwell. Mrs. Almore had been at a party the night of her death and had gotten out of hand. Her husband, the doctor, had been called and had given her a shot, then left her for a nurse and another man to take home. Although she had to be put to bed, it was said Mrs. Almore later got up and walked to the garage where she killed herself. Adrienne goes on to say that Mrs. Almore's parents hired a private detective who apparently found something at the scene to indicate murder but was arrested for drunk



driving in an attempt to shut him up. According to Adrienne, Brownwell believes all this gives Lavery a reason to blackmail the doctor.

In chapter nineteen, Marlowe shows Adrienne the handkerchief he found in Lavery's bedroom. Adrienne admits the handkerchief is hers but says she must have dropped it at Lavery's a long time ago. Marlowe then surprises Adrienne with the information that Lavery has been murdered. Although Adrienne admits she didn't like Lavery, she tells Marlowe she didn't shoot him. Marlowe also tells Adrienne that he didn't tell Kingsley about finding her handkerchief in Lavery's bedroom.

## **Chapters Seventeen - Nineteen Analysis**

Chapters seventeen, eighteen and nineteen all deal with the reactions of Kingsley and Adrienne to the news that Lavery has been killed. Kingsley is shocked, and though he believes Crystal may be responsible for the death, he offers Marlowe a bonus to prove that she isn't. Notice that this particular encounter with Kingsley shows that although Marlowe is a detective, he still has a reasonable amount of moral integrity about him. He realizes there is no way for him to cover up the crime, even if Crystal were responsible. Even though Kingsley offers Marlowe a hefty bonus, he refuses to unlawfully hide the gun, but instead insists that it be taken back to the murder scene and the police notified.

In chapter eighteen, Adrienne gives Marlowe some background into the mystery behind the death of Mrs. Almore. Although Marlowe does not believe there is any connection between the doctor and Lavery's death, Adrienne suggests that Lavery might have been blackmailing the doctor. Apparently there was some reasonable question of Mrs. Almore's death being a murder that was covered up and made to look like a suicide. Lavery happened to be the person who found Mrs. Almore dead in her garage.

Finally, Marlowe seems to have gained a certain amount of respect for Adrienne after speaking with her about Lavery's murder. Adrienne admits that though she and Lavery were close for a time, she now despises him. She also admits the handkerchief is hers and that she probably dropped it while at Lavery's house. However, she provides Marlowe with an alibi, saying she was at work at 8:30 am, which she says is probably before Lavery had even gotten up that morning.

# Chapters Twenty - Twenty-three

## Chapters Twenty - Twenty-three Summary

In chapter twenty, Marlowe returns to Lavery's house and reports Lavery's murder. Two Bay City police officers arrive to investigate the murder. Upon viewing the scene, they decide to wait for homicide to arrive. In chapter twenty-one, the two detectives arrive at the house. One of them is Degarmo. Webber looks over the scene and is unhappy that Marlowe has handled the gun. Webber tries to scare Marlowe into not making trouble over the murder, but Degarmo tries to convince Webber to let Marlowe help them. Marlowe tells the events of the day before and that morning. Webber then asks Marlowe if he believes that Crystal has been in Lavery's house. Marlowe answers yes to this question.

Three more men arrive to dust for fingerprints and inspect the body. While Webber goes with them downstairs, Marlowe takes the opportunity to talk to Degarmo. Marlowe asks for more information about the death of Mrs. Almore. He is particularly interested since one of the officers that was at Lavery's house earlier mentioned the death and how pretty it was. When Marlowe asks if there is anything to the rumor that Almore killed his wife, then paid to have it covered up, Degarmo asks Marlowe to repeat himself. When he does so, Degarmo hits Marlowe. This happens twice. This time, Degarmo threatens Marlowe that if he says anything like that again he will wind up in an alley somewhere.

In chapter twenty-two, Marlowe returns to his own office. He has received a letter from Adrienne informing him of the names of Mrs. Almore's parents and their address. As Marlowe sits in his office and drinks, he slowly becomes more calm and quiet. In chapter twenty-three, Marlowe goes to visit Mrs. Almore's parents. At first they don't want to talk to Marlowe. After he tells them about his experiences with Almore and Degarmo, however, they open up a little. They tell Marlowe there was evidence that their daughter was murdered but that they never knew what it was, that the police had taken care of this evidence. They also believe Talley, the detective they had hired, had been framed from drunk driving.

As they talk more, Grayson tells Marlowe that they believed Almore was having an affair with his office nurse. When their daughter, Mrs. Almore, found out about the affair and threatened to make it public, she was conveniently found dead. They believe Almore killed her with an overdose of drugs, and then staged her in the garage to make her death look like a suicide. The couple does finally remember that the name of the office nurse that Almore was fooling around with was the same one that put Mrs. Almore to bed the night she died. This nurse's name was Mildred Haviland.

## Chapters Twenty - Twenty-three Analysis

In chapter twenty, Marlowe reports Lavery's murder to the police. The two police officers who originally come to investigate the death are cocky and arrogant. Notice that they comment on Lavery's house being across the street from Dr. Almore's residence. When Degarmo arrives at the house to assist in the investigation, notice that he becomes angry when Marlowe asks why there is still so much police interest in the Almore suicide case. In fact, Degarmo indicates the men should lose their jobs for even mentioning the case.

In this section Marlowe also attempts to talk to Florence Almore's parents. They suspect Almore was responsible for the death of their daughter and hope that Marlowe can connect Lavery's murder with Almore. Although they really aren't able to give Marlowe any information that he doesn't already know, they do tell him that the office nurse who put Mrs. Almore to bed the night she died was named Mildred Haviland. This is the same person the cop named De Soto was looking for when he visited Puma Point.

# Chapters Twenty-four - Twenty-six

## Chapters Twenty-four - Twenty-six Summary

In chapter twenty-four, Marlowe attempts to speak with Mrs. Talley, the wife of the private detective hired by the Graysons. As he talks to Mrs. Talley through her screen door, he notices a car parked with its parking lights on. Mrs. Talley refuses to talk to him. Marlowe goes back to his car. The car with the parking lights on is still sitting in the street.

In chapter twenty-five, Marlowe notices as he is driving away from Mrs. Talley's house that he is being followed. As they travel further away from inhabited areas the car behind Marlowe sounds a siren, and then flashes a red light. The driver of the police car tries to pull even with Marlowe's car but he slows down and makes a u-turn to head back to a populated area. The police car pulls up beside Marlowe again and the driver threatens to shoot if Marlowe doesn't stop. Marlowe does as directed. The two officers are cocky and treat Marlowe with no respect. They smell his breath for alcohol, then offer him a drink. Marlowe hesitates but the cops insist he drink. As he tips the whiskey bottle back, one of the officers hits him in the stomach, making him spit the whiskey out onto his face and clothes. As the officer tries to knee Marlowe in the face, Marlowe dodges the knee and then hits the officer. The other officer hits Marlowe in the leg with his blackjack. After the tussle, Marlowe is instructed to get into the back of the police car. In chapter twenty-six, Marlowe is released from his jail cell quickly. He is taken to the desk where Degarmo is standing. Degarmo tells Marlowe that Webber wants to talk to him again.

## Chapters Twenty-four - Twenty-six Analysis

Marlowe's attempt to talk to Mrs. Talley gets him into big trouble with the Bay City police. Two officers try to fake a drunk driving arrest on Marlowe as they did years ago on Talley. It seems that by asking too many questions about the death of Almore's wife, Marlowe has scared someone who has quite a bit of pull in the police department. In fact, the entire sub-plot of the death of Almore's wife has almost overtaken Marlowe's original inquest into the location of Crystal Kingsley. However, it seems that the more he searches for Crystal, the more the two cases seem to be intertwined.

Notice that when Marlowe tries to talk to Mrs. Talley, she tells him that men have already been there to talk to her. It is uncertain if she refuses to talk to Marlowe because these men threatened her or because she really doesn't want to talk to him. She also indicates to Marlowe in their conversation that at one time her husband believed he had information about the suicide/murder of Mrs. Almore.

# Chapters Twenty-seven - Twenty-nine

## Chapters Twenty-seven - Twenty-nine Summary

Degarmo and Webber talk to Marlowe in a private office. During the interview, Degarmo admits that he was responsible for having Marlowe followed. After this admission, Webber asks Degarmo to leave so that he and Marlowe can talk in private. Marlowe describes to Webber all of the coincidences he has come across while trying to locate Crystal. At the conclusion of this chapter, Webber invites Marlowe to talk with him openly about the possible connection between Lavery's death and the Almore case.

In chapter twenty-eight, Webber tells Marlowe that the only evidence that Talley had in the Almore case was a slipper belonging to Mrs. Almore. This slipper was custom made, and Mrs. Almore had two matching sets of these slippers. Talley took one of these unworn slippers from Mrs. Almore's body as evidence that she had not walked, but had been carried to the garage. Webber admits the death investigation was superficial, and that it was carried out by Degarmo. Webber next asks Marlowe for his evidence that the woman found in Little Fawn Lake was Mildred Haviland. Marlowe details his evidence and then tells Webber he is trying to find some other suspect for Lavery's death than Crystal. He has been offered a five hundred dollar bonus and would like to see the crime connected to Almore or Mildred Haviland. At this point Webber tells Marlowe that Degarmo was once married to Mildred Haviland. Although Mildred was mean to Degarmo and eventually divorced him, he still cared for her. Marlowe and Webber decide that Degarmo is not aware that his former wife is dead. As Marlowe leaves the office, Webber asks him to keep what they have talked about secret. Marlowe doesn't make any promises. When Marlowe returns home his phone is ringing. Kingsley tells Marlowe he has heard from Crystal and will be right over.

In chapter twenty-nine, both Kingsley and Adrienne arrive at Marlowe's apartment. Kingsley gives Marlowe an envelope containing five hundred dollars and tells Marlowe he has to take this envelope to Crystal. Kingsley indicates that Crystal is in trouble and has to get out of Bay City. Adrienne talked to Crystal when she called and relayed the message to Kingsley. Adrienne said Crystal sounded calm on the phone. They had arranged for Marlowe to meet her and had described him to her. Marlowe is to wear Kingsley's yellow and green scarf. Marlowe is upset that Kingsley believes he would endanger his reputation on Crystal if she has killed Lavery. He tells Kingsley he plans to talk to Crystal first and if he believes she has murdered Lavery, he will turn her into the police.

## Chapters Twenty-seven - Twenty-nine Analysis

As Chandler reaches the conclusion of his novel, the action speeds up as Marlowe's baffling investigation becomes more and more intertwined with the Almore case. In this section, Marlowe learns that Degarmo was married to Mildred Haviland, the same

Mildred Haviland who was Mrs. Almore's nurse the night Mrs. Almore died. Degarmo was also the one to carry out the death investigation. This coincidence makes it more likely that something in the investigation might have been covered up to protect Mildred. In his interview with Degarmo and Webber, Marlowe learns that it was Degarmo who had the two cops staked out at Mrs. Talley's home. Degarmo was responsible for Marlowe's assault and arrest. Since he is trying so hard to interfere with Marlowe's investigation, it makes it appear as if Degarmo is indeed trying to keep some information from being discovered. Note the way that Degarmo has acted about any reference to the Almore's since his appearance in the novel. Any mention of Dr. Almore or the death of Dr. Almore's wife has caused Degarmo to become defensive and threatening. Even if he does not have some connection with the death, Degarmo's guilty actions cause Marlowe to be suspicious.

Also in this section Kingsley tries to get Marlowe to take money to his wife so she can leave town. Although Marlowe agrees to do so, he says that he won't hand over the money until Crystal talks to him. Until he feels she was not involved with the murder of Lavery, he does not feel comfortable giving her any cash. He points out that by giving her money to run away on, this would make him an accessory to the murder. Again, Marlowe has too much morality to knowingly commit a crime. In addition, he knows how badly he would be treated if it were ever discovered he had helped a woman he believed to be a murderer.

# Chapters Thirty - Thirty-two

## Chapters Thirty - Thirty-two Summary

Marlowe arrives at the Peacock Lounge just shortly after 1:15 a.m. As he reads a paper, a girl with brown hair passes him and leaves the bar. A few minutes later a Mexican boy enters the bar and beckons for Marlowe to follow him. The girl is waiting outside the bar. She asks Marlowe to give her the money. Marlowe refuses to do so without talking to the girl first. She insists that Marlowe come to her apartment before she will talk.

In chapter thirty-one, Marlowe arrives at the girl's apartment. Marlowe first tells the girl that her husband gave him a different impression of what she would be like. Marlowe asks her what she has been doing since she parted ways with Lavery. She tells him she has moved around and tried to be quiet and straighten out herself and her life. Marlowe then asks the girl why she left Little Fawn Lake and if it had anything to do with Muriel Chess. When Marlowe tells her what happened to Muriel, the girl tells him that she is not surprised, since the Chesses fought terribly sometimes. As Marlowe tells the girl the story of Mildred Haviland, the girl appears to be puzzled.

After they talk, Marlowe drops in money in the girl's lap. He congratulates her on her act, telling her that she has everyone fooled into believing she is a very different type of person. Marlowe then suggests she was also Mrs. Fallbrook. He then asks her why she went back to the house. She responds by asking if he thinks she killed Lavery. He responds that he knows she did. She tells Marlowe she went back to the house because Lavery had stolen all of her money. The girl then asks Marlowe what he plans to do about the information he now has. He tells her he plans to turn her over to the police.

At the mention of the police, the girl pulls a gun out of her pocket and points it at Marlowe. When Marlowe tells the girl she will probably miss him, she pushes the gun into his chest. She frisks Marlowe, and then asks him to turn around. Marlowe mentions to her the safety catch is still on the gun. This distracts her and Marlowe takes the opportunity to get the gun from her. As they scuffle for the gun Marlowe thinks he hears a curtain ring clink on the rod the covers the opening to the dressing room, but isn't sure. Suddenly there is another man in the room with them. This man knocks Marlowe out.

Marlowe wakes in chapter thirty-two to the smell of gin. He is lying on the floor beside the davenport. His shoes are off. He looks around for the girl and locates her on the bed. She has been strangled to death. Marlowe pulls his coat out of a tangle of clothes on the davenport. He finds the money still there. As he listens, Marlowe hears footsteps in the hallway, then knocking on the door. Marlowe goes into the bathroom and opens the window. He sees that the bathroom window of the next apartment is only about three feet away from him and decides to try to escape by climbing into the next apartment.

## Chapters Thirty - Thirty-two Analysis

It is with the scuffle between Marlow and the girl that the action of the novel comes to a climax. Note that throughout these chapters, Chandler does not refer to the girl as Crystal Kingsley, he only refers to her as the girl. Notice also that when Marlowe asks the girl who she is, she doesn't give her name, only tells him that he knows who she is. Also notice how different this girl is from the person Marlowe had imagined Crystal Kingsley to be. She does not appear to be reckless or immature in the least. She instead appears to be a very calculating, very cold person. Marlowe correctly connects her with the lady he met in Lavery's apartment. He also correctly identifies her as the person who killed Lavery. Although Marlowe knows it was the girl he was with who killed Lavery, he still doesn't know why she killed him. A new mystery is also introduced in these chapters. Marlowe now has to figure out who attacked him and who killed the girl that was with him.



# Chapters Thirty-three - Thirty-five

## Chapters Thirty-three - Thirty-five Summary

Marlowe has entered an apartment that appears to have been closed up for several days. Marlowe takes the opportunity to clean up and change clothes. Marlowe lights a cigarette and leans against the opening of the door leading to the hallway. When he peeps down the hallway, there is a police officer coming toward him. The officer asks if he heard anything. Marlowe talks to him a minute, then the officer calls for his lieutenant. The lieutenant is Degarmo. Degarmo pushes Marlowe into the apartment and calls for the officer to follow them. The officer dumbly goes about the apartment "solving" the crime as Degarmo stares at Marlowe. Although Degarmo is suspended, he tells his partner that he plans to take charge of the case.

In chapter thirty-four, Degarmo and his partner lead Marlowe out of the apartment building. The three drive off in Marlowe's Chrysler just as Webber pulls up in front of the building. After they drive for awhile, Degarmo's partner points out that they aren't going toward the police station. Degarmo pulls the car over and has his partner look at the wound on Marlowe's head. The partner is confused. Degarmo tries to explain to his partner what exactly has happened. The partner begins to understand something strange is going on and decides he wants to walk back to the station. He tells Degarmo that he will report what has happened.

As Degarmo and Marlowe drive on, Marlowe tells Degarmo that evening's events. He shows Degarmo the scarf he believes Kingsley left in the apartment. Marlowe tries to come up with some reason why Kingsley would have killed his wife. Degarmo tells Marlowe that if he solves this murder case, he can get reinstated to his position in the police force with only a reprimand.

In chapter thirty-five, Degarmo and Marlowe go to Kingsley's house to talk to him but he is not at home. The two then go to Adrienne's house. When Marlowe realizes from talking to Adrienne that Kingsley might have gone to Little Fawn Lake, he calls Patton. Marlowe asks Patton to check and see if Kingsley is at his cabin. If so, Marlowe wants Patton to try to keep him there. After a short wait Patton calls Marlowe back and says that Kingsley is at his cabin.

In chapter thirty-six, Marlowe drives himself and Degarmo to Little Fawn Lake. Degarmo admits to Marlowe that he knows that it was Mildred Haviland who was drowned in Little Fawn Lake. Degarmo starts to make a threat against Bill Chess, but Marlowe interrupts him by telling him he's already caused enough trouble by letting Mildred get away with killing Mrs. Almore. Marlowe describes to Degarmo exactly the way in which Mrs. Almore was killed and the role that he believes Mildred played in this killing. Marlowe also describes to Degarmo how he believes Degarmo ran Mildred out of town so that she would be safe from the police. A few years later when Mildred was tired of being married to Chess, Marlowe believes she tried to blackmail Almore for money. It was

when Almore talked to Degarmo that Degarmo learned where Mildred was and went looking for her.

## **Chapters Thirty-three - Thirty-five Analysis**

In this section of three chapters, Marlowe meets up with Degarmo again. This time Degarmo plans to use Marlowe to help him get reinstated to his job at the police department. Degarmo believes that if he can solve the murder before any of the other cops, he can get his job back. However, Degarmo is not smart enough to solve the crime by himself and knows he needs Marlowe's help. Marlowe tricks Degarmo by showing him the Kingsley's scarf that Marlowe "found" at the murder scene. This is the same scarf that Kingsley gave Marlowe to wear so that Crystal would recognize him. In this way Marlowe baits a trap for Degarmo to make Degarmo think that Marlowe thinks Kingsley committed the murder.

While talking to Degarmo on the way to Little Fawn Lake, Marlowe lets Degarmo know that he has discovered the truth behind Mrs. Almore's death. Mildred gave Mrs. Almore a lethal dose of morphine on top of what Dr. Almore had already given her. When Dr. Almore learns about this extra dose, he stages the murder to look like a suicide. Note that Degarmo does not disagree with Marlowe's explanation of the murder, only asks him how he has been allowed to live for so long. By solving the mystery behind Mrs. Almore's death, Marlowe realizes that Degarmo falsified information to cover the murder up. Once Mrs. Almore's parents hired a private investigator, Degarmo had to find some way to shut this man up also so the fact that his ex-wife was a murderer would not get out and she would be protected.

It is important to note in this section that although Degarmo is on suspension from the police department, he is one of the first officers to arrive on the scene of the girl's murder. Although he could falsely arrest Marlowe for murder, Degarmo does not make this arrest because he knows Marlowe didn't do it. Instead, Degarmo decides to track down Kingsley in connection with the murder.

# Chapters Thirty-seven - Thirty-nine

## Chapters Thirty-seven - Thirty-nine Summary

In the beginning of chapter thirty-seven, Degarmo tries to get smart with the sentry who guards the dam at Puma Point Lake. In the end, Degarmo decides to cooperate. When they arrive at Little Fawn Lake, Patton, who has been keeping a eye on Kingsley, first apologizes to Degarmo for not working with him when he was in town earlier looking for Mildred. Patton then asks why they are interested in Kingsley. After Marlowe tells their story, the three men enter Kingsley's cabin. Kingsley is asleep in a chair. Patton wakes Kingsley up by telling him they need to talk to him.

In chapter thirty-eight, Degarmo and Marlowe tells Kingsley about what happened to Kingsley's wife the night before. Kingsley listens patiently to Degarmo rave about the murder. He then calmly tells Degarmo he doesn't understand why his scarf is being used as evidence he was there because Marlowe was wearing it at the time. Marlowe explains to Degarmo he didn't tell Degarmo he had been wearing the scarf because Degarmo hadn't asked. Degarmo realizes he's been duped and asks Kingsley how much he's paying Marlowe to cover up murders. The five hundred dollar bonus is mentioned and Degarmo states it is too bad Marlowe can't earn that bonus money. It is at this point that Marlowe states that he already has earned the bonus, and how he has done it. It turns out that Crystal was the girl who had drowned in Little Fawn Lake, not Mildred Haviland. Mildred Haviland had been pretending to be Crystal Kingsley.

In chapter thirty-nine, Marlowe shares with Patton, Kingsley and Degarmo his version of what happened to Crystal Kingsley. Marlowe assumes Mildred killed Crystal with the thought that the body would not be located, and then attempted to assume Crystal's identity. Mildred did this so that she could have access to Crystal's money. The plan was foiled when Mildred met Lavery at the Prescott Hotel. Lavery recognized Mildred as Muriel, who was supposed to be dead. Mildred killed Lavery to keep him from mentioning to Chess, if he happened to see him, that he had seen Muriel alive even after her body was discovered. When Patton asks who killed Mildred, Marlowe suggests that it was Degarmo.

## Chapters Thirty-seven - Thirty-nine Analysis

Notice that the closer Marlowe and Degarmo get to Kingsley, the more strangely Degarmo acts. Once they are inside the cabin with Kingsley, Marlowe discloses the actual events of the murders. Kingsley and Patton are the only ones surprised by Marlowe's disclosures. It appears that Degarmo already knew what Marlowe had discovered.

# Chapters Forty - Forty-one

## Chapters Forty - Forty-one Summary

In chapter forty, Degarmo pulls his gun on Marlowe. Degarmo asks for evidence he was the one who killed Mildred. Marlowe recounts his suspicions. Degarmo tells the others that he has to leave; he doesn't plan for a small town cop to arrest him. Patton tells Degarmo he can't let him just walk out. Degarmo offers Patton a shoot-off and returns his gun to his holster. Patton acts as if he doesn't want to be involved, but when Degarmo pulls his gun to shoot, Patton shoots the gun out of his hand before anyone even knows what has happened. Degarmo leaves the cabin and heads across the dam.

In chapter forty-one, Patton calls to have the highways blocked. Before any action can be taken, Patton and Marlowe are called to the dam. When Degarmo crossed the dam, he didn't stop when ordered to by the sentry. The sentry, who was under orders to shoot if a driver didn't stop their car when ordered, had shot Degarmo. The car Degarmo had taken from Andy, Patton's helper, had crashed at the bottom of a canyon. Degarmo was dead.

## Chapters Forty - Forty-one Analysis

In these two chapters, Marlowe indicates that he had figured out the murders long before he tricked Degarmo into going to Little Fawn Lake. He indicates to Patton that the reason he brought Degarmo to Little Fawn Lake was because he knew Degarmo couldn't find his way out of the woods if he chose to try to escape. This statement indicates Marlowe already knew Degarmo was guilty of killing Mildred before they even left her apartment complex.

Note the stark contrast between Degarmo and Patton. Although Patton is a small town police officer who has never handled any really tough cases, Patton turns out to be a much better police officer than Degarmo. Although Degarmo belittles Patton and threatens in his high and mighty way to shoot Patton, it is actually Patton who is the better shot. In fact, Patton shoots the gun out of Degarmo's hand before Degarmo is even aware of what has happened. It is ironic that Degarmo is killed by a sentry, a member of the armed forces. Degarmo, as usual, finds himself unable to follow the rules and refuses to stop at the sentry's command. This time he is shot as a result of his offense. This shooting results in Degarmo's death.

# Characters

## Mildred Haviland / Muriel Chess / Mrs. Fallbrook

Throughout the course of this novel Mildred Haviland pretends to be three different characters. First, she introduces herself to Bill Chess as Muriel and becomes his wife. She is soon tired of living with Chess and stages her own disappearance. She kills Crystal Kingsley, dresses Crystal in Muriel's clothes, and puts Crystal's body in Little Fawn Lake. Then Muriel leaves a goodbye note on her dresser, packs her bags into her car and leaves her car in a deserted mountain area for the authorities to find. She then drives away in Crystal's car, which she leaves at The Prescott Hotel after she runs into Lavery there. When Marlowe discovers Mildred at the scene of Lavery's murder, she pretends to be Mrs. Fallbrook, the owner of Lavery's house. Although Mildred does not do a very convincing portrayal of a landlady, Marlowe cannot figure out who she is or why she was at Lavery's house until he meets her again at the Granada, where she pretends to be Crystal Kingsley.

At the end of the novel it is concluded that Mildred is responsible for three murders. First, she killed Mrs. Almore because Mrs. Almore was threatening to make a public scandal of the affair between her husband and Mildred. Second, she killed Crystal Kingsley as a way to escape from Chess. Third, she killed Lavery. Mildred had to kill Lavery because Lavery knew her as Muriel Chess. She couldn't take the chance that Lavery would try to visit Crystal at the lakeside cabin and mention to Chess that he had seen Muriel, who was believed to be dead, alive and well. Mildred is murdered by her ex-husband, Degarmo in the final chapters of the novel.

## Detective-lieutenant Al Degarmo / De Soto

Degarmo is Marlowe's antagonist and the chief bad guy in the novel. Because he has covered up a murder committed by his ex-wife, Degarmo has spread corruption throughout almost the entire Bay City Police Department. Degarmo was the chief investigator at the death of Florence Almore. Although the death was ruled a suicide, it turns out that Degarmo's ex-wife, Mildred Haviland, committed the murder. Degarmo attempts to use his weight as a police officer to cover up the crime. However, because he lacks intelligence, Degarmo makes many mistakes in his cover up attempt. First, Degarmo threatens Marlowe when Marlowe is discovered sitting in his car outside Lavery's house, which happens to be across the street from the Almore residence. Next, Degarmo has the original detective who tried to investigate the Almore case arrested on a false drinking and driving charge. Degarmo attempts to arrest Marlowe on the same charge after Marlowe tries to talk to the investigator's wife. As Degarmo talks to his partner about what happened to Marlowe while he was in the apartment with Mildred Haviland, Marlowe determines that Degarmo knows more about what went on than he could have known if he wasn't there when the attack happened. It is this information that causes Marlowe to determine that Degarmo was the one to attack him and kill Mildred



Haviland. Degarmo dies at the end of the novel when he is shot in his car as he attempt to drive across the Puma Lake Dam without stopping at the sentry's request. Degarmo's car crashes into a canyon, resulting in his death.

## **Chris Lavery**

Chris Lavery is Crystal Kingsley's lover. Lavery is one of the main persons of interest in Crystal's disappearance. Although Kingsley received a telegram from his wife stating she was going to Mexico to marry Lavery, when Kingsley questions Lavery, he knows nothing about the marriage. Marlowe also questions Lavery about Crystal's disappearance with no success. Marlowe then questions the bellhop at the Prescott Hotel, who tells Marlowe that he saw Crystal and Lavery together. When Marlowe tries to question Lavery a second time, he discovers that Lavery has been murdered. Lavery has the reputation of being a playboy with many superficial relationships, none of which are serious. In fact, one of his relationships was with Adrienne, Kingsley's office secretary. Adrienne is forced to tell Marlowe about her relationship with Lavery after a handkerchief with her initials on it is found in Lavery's house after he is murdered.

## **Jim Patton**

Jim Patton is the constable and sheriff deputy of the Puma Point area that includes Little Fawn Lake. Although Patton is a small town officer, he turns out to be a more level headed officer than big city cop Degarmo. Patton meets Degarmo once when Degarmo visits Puma Point in an attempt to locate his ex-wife Mildred Haviland. Degarmo tries to pass himself off as a cop by the name of De Soto. Patton does not like De Soto because of his cocky attitude and does not give him much information. When Marlowe brings Degarmo to Little Fawn Lake so that the two of them can interview Kingsley, Patton apologizes to Degarmo for not being more helpful. In a shooting match against Degarmo, Patton shoots Degarmo's gun from his hand before Degarmo is even aware of what has happened.

## **Philip Marlowe**

Philip Marlowe is the licensed detective hired by Derace Kingsley to find his missing wife. Marlowe is the main character of the novel and the narrator of the action. He is a very intelligent detective with a way of getting the information he needs out of the people he interviews. Throughout the course of his investigation, he knows he is onto something that someone wants covered up because he is threatened, beat up, arrested, knocked out, and framed for Mildred's murder during the course of his investigation.

## **Derace Kingsley**

Derace Kingsley is Crystal Kingsley's husband. Kingsley hires Marlowe to find Crystal after she has been missing for one month. Although Kingsley admits the two are no



longer close, he tells Marlowe he is concerned about her. Kingsley is also concerned that his wife might get into some trouble which could cause a scandal and make him lose his job. Kingsley is so concerned with avoiding a scandal that he offers Marlowe five hundred dollars to prove that his wife did not kill Lavery. Kingsley presents himself as a tough businessman who does not like to be pushed around. When he asserts his toughness with Marlowe, though, Marlowe gets tough in return and calls Kingsley down. At the time of the novel, Kingsley is in a relationship with Adrienne, his office secretary. If he could, he would divorce his wife and marry Adrienne.

## **Florence Almore**

Florence Almore is the wife of drug doctor Albert S. Almore. Although her death occurred nearly two years prior to Marlowe's investigation of Crystal's disappearance, Marlowe solves the mystery of Mrs. Almore's death as well as locating Crystal. Marlowe discovers that Mrs. Almore was given a lethal dose of morphine by Mildred Haviland, who was employed as a nurse by Dr. Almore.

## **Bill Chess**

Bill Chess is a retired veteran and caretaker of Kingsley's lake property. He is married to Muriel Chess/Mildred Haviland. Chess is crippled and is also very fond of drinking. The night Chess's wife, Muriel, leaves him, he has left her alone at home to get drunk. Although it is suspected that Muriel's death might have been a suicide, Chess is taken into custody for questioning about the death.

## **Adrienne Fromsett**

Adrienne Fromsett is Kingsley's girlfriend and personal secretary at the Gillerlain Company. Although Adrienne is Kingsley's girlfriend at the time of Marlowe's association with Kingsley, she had, in the past, had a relationship with Lavery. In fact, Marlowe finds a handkerchief monogrammed with Adrienne's initials when he is investigating Lavery's murder. When "Crystal" calls asking for money from her husband, it is to Adrienne that she speaks. Because Adrienne is not familiar with Crystal's voice, she does not recognize that the woman she is speaking to is not Crystal.

## **Crystal Kingsley**

Crystal Kingsley is Derace Kingsley's wife. She is the woman whom Marlowe is hired by Kingsley to locate. In the final chapters of the novel, Crystal is identified as the woman who is found drowned in Little Fawn Lake. It is assumed that Muriel Chess/Mildred Haviland killed Crystal in a plot to escape from her husband. By pretending to be Crystal, Mildred could have access to the money she needed to make her break from Little Fawn Lake. It is known that Crystal got Bill Chess drunk and had a fling with him on the day she was killed. Mildred's anger with Crystal coming onto her husband may



have made it easier for Mildred to kill Crystal, or might have even been the motive for killing Crystal.

## **Albert S. Almore**

Albert S. Almore is the doctor who lives across the street from Lavery. Marlowe becomes interested in Almore as a result of Almore's suspicious actions as Marlowe tries to question Lavery. Almore calls police officer Degarmo to find out why Marlowe is loitering in front of his house when Marlowe is actually there only to talk to Lowry. Apparently Almore is uncomfortable because his former wife's parents had once hired a private investigator to try to prove their daughter's death was the result of murder. The night Mrs. Almore died, Almore had given her a non-lethal shot of morphine. The nurse who was caring for Mrs. Almore, Mildred Haviland, gave her an additional shot of morphine, making it look like Almore had overdosed his wife. When Almore discovers the extra dose has been given, he carries his wife to the garage and arranges her so that her death looks like a suicide.

## **The Graysons**

The Graysons are Florence Almore's parents. They hire private detective George Talley to investigate their daughter's death. When Talley is arrested and his investigation halted, they try once more to get their daughter's death case re-opened, but with no success. Although they are not interested in hiring Marlowe, the Graysons promise to pay Marlowe if he solves their daughter's murder case. They hope Marlowe will in some way be able to connect Lavery's murder with Almore.

## **Mrs. Talley**

Mrs. Talley is the wife of detective George Talley. She refuses to talk to Marlowe when he tries to question her about what her husband might have found out about Florence Almore's death. It is after Marlowe leaves Mrs. Talley's house that he is followed by two cops, forced to drink alcohol and arrested.

## **George Talley**

George Talley is the original detective that Florence Almore's parents hired to investigate their daughter's murder. Talley took a shoe from the crime scene that he believed was evidence that Mrs. Almore was murdered. It was a result of this discovery that Talley was arrested on a bogus drunk driving charge and put into jail.



# **Objects/Places**

## **The Treloar Building**

The Treloar Building is the building in which Derace Kingsley runs his successful perfume business.

## **The Gillerlain Company**

The Gillerlain Company is the name of Kingsley's business.

## **Puma Point**

Puma Point is a village about three miles from Kingsley's cabin.

## **Little Fawn Lake**

Little Fawn Lake is a private lake on Kingsley's property. It is in this lake that Crystal Kingsley's body is found.

## **The Prescott Hotel**

The Prescott is the hotel where Crystal Kingsley's car is abandoned in the parking garage.

## **623 Altair Street in Bay City**

This is Chris Lavery's address in Bay City.

## **Cahuenga Building**

The Cahuenga Building is the building in Los Angeles where Marlowe's office is located.

## **Puma Lake Dam**

Three armed guards are posted on the road that crosses this lake.



## **Underwater Flooring**

What appears to be underwater flooring in Little Fawn Lake actually used to be a boat landing. It is under this flooring that Crystal's body became lodged.

## **The Indian Head Hotel**

Marlowe stops at this hotel in Puma Point to have dinner on the first night of his investigation.

## **A Silk Slip**

Marlowe finds a brand new silk slip that Muriel has left behind in her dresser drawer. He believes this does not look good for Chess.

## **Athletic Club**

The Athletic Club is the club where Kingsley asks Lavery if Lavery knows where his wife is. This is the same club where Marlowe and Kingsley have a discussion after Marlowe discovers Lavery's murder.

## **A Green Velvet Dancing Pump**

It is this slipper that Mr. Talley has taken from the Almore house as evidence that Mrs. Almore was murdered.

## **Peacock Lounge**

Peacock Lounge is the place where Crystal is supposed to meet Marlowe to get her five hundred dollars.

## **The Granada**

The Granada is the name of the housing complex where Mildred Haviland is living. It is here that she is killed and Marlowe is attacked.

# Themes

## Police Corruption

Much of the plot of this novel is built on the actions of a corrupt police officer. It is indicated that Degarmo was still so in love with his ex-wife that he could not bear the idea of her going to jail, so he covered up her act of murdering Florence Almore. Degarmo's first act of corruption only leads to further acts of corruption as he has to continue to try to hide the truth from others. He convinces two of his cop friends to trump up fake drunk driving charges against the investigator who was hired by Mrs. Almore's parents to prove she was murdered. After Marlowe becomes interested in the Almore case, he also tries to find out exactly what happened to Mrs. Almore. Of course, he is looking for evidence that Mr. Almore may have had something to do with Lavery's death. However, Degarmo's guilty conscious gets the better of him and he causes Marlowe to want to find out what happened to Mrs. Almore just because there is so much controversy about the events of her death. Degarmo helps to pique Marlowe's curiosity by first threatening Marlowe as he sat in his car in front of Lavery's house, then by telling Marlowe the two police officers who mentioned that Lavery lived across from the Almore's should be fired.

Degarmo also uses his position as a police officer in other unethical ways. For instance, he goes to Puma Point looking for Mildred Haviland under the guise of needing her for police business. However, Degarmo is actually looking for the lady for his own reasons, reasons that are unconnected to the police department. Because Degarmo knows that what he is doing is not right, he gives a false name to Patton when he questions him about Mildred. Degarmo is suspended from his position on the police department after he gets two more officers to rough Marlowe up and arrest him on drunk driving charges. Luckily, Degarmo admits to his superior that the charges were fake and Marlowe is released with no jail time. Finally, Degarmo murders his ex-wife, then tries to pin this murder first on Marlowe, then on Kingsley.

## Dangers of Being a Detective

It is very clear in the novel that private detectives are not well-liked or respected. Once people learn Marlowe is a detective, they generally voice a strong dislike for him and his position. This distasteful view is probably the result of the job of a private investigator. These investigators are generally trying to find out information that the people they are investigating don't want them to have. For this reason, people feel they have to be guarded because they are unsure what the investigator may be looking for.

In addition to just plain being disliked, private investigators also face a great deal of danger in their jobs. For instance, before he has even gotten very deep into his search, Marlowe is threatened by Degarmo just for sitting in his car outside Almore's house. Degarmo assumes that Marlowe has been hired to investigate Mrs. Almore's death and

is ready to get tough with him before he even knows the whole story. Twice unintelligent cops assume Marlowe is the perpetrator in the murder they have come to investigate and try to arrest him on murder charges. Marlowe also has his car stopped and is beat up by police officers. He is then arrested on false charges. Finally, when Marlowe is attempting to talk to Mildred Haviland, he is knocked on the head and covered with gin in an attempt to frame him for Mildred's murder.

## **Good Cop Versus Bad Cop**

The theme of good versus evil is seen in Chandler's presentation of Degarmo and Patton, particularly in the last chapters of the book. Patton is depicted as a good old boy, the epitome of small town law enforcement. He works as deputy, constable, firefighter, and other position where he might be needed in his jurisdiction. Although he does not show his intelligence, he obviously has a good idea of people work as he stakes out in Bill Chess's cabin waiting for Marlowe to break into the house looking for clues. Patton tells Marlowe he generally believes the simplest explanation of any crime is generally the correct one.

The explanation of the crime that occurs at Little Fawn Lake is anything but simple. Mistaken identity, falsified information and police corruption all figure into the account of the murder. Although Degarmo prides himself in being a tough cop, he is no match for Patton's experience and understanding of the way people work. Patton allows Degarmo to belittle him, claims not to be able to stand up to Degarmo in a shooting match, but then shoots the gun from Degarmo's hand before the others in the room even know what has happened. While Degarmo's reputation as a cop is built on lies and tough talk, Patton has real cop sense and abilities.

# Style

## Point of View

This novel is told in the first person point of view from the view of investigator Philip Marlowe. It is a limited point of view because Marlowe does not have access to the thoughts and emotions of the people he is dealing with other than the actions and emotions that he observes. Because this novel is intended to be a mystery/suspense novel, this point of view is ideal. The reader is given clues and information only as Marlowe receives it. It becomes a challenge for the reader to try and determine how Marlowe will solve the crimes. This style also gives the reader the ability to exercise their own detective skills by guessing the outcome of the novel.

A great deal of this story is told through dialogue. This is because Marlowe must talk to his suspects and witnesses in order to glean information from them. In addition to this dialogue, Chandler includes many sections of exposition. In these sections, Marlowe describes what he observes during his investigation of Crystal's disappearance. In line with his job description, Marlowe describes what he sees in terms of the things that a private investigator would notice. For instance, Marlowe notes if a person he is talking to is fidgety, what sort of expression they have on their face, and how they react to his questions.

## Setting

This novel is set on the west coast of the United States of America during the early 1940s. It can be determined that this is the proper time period for the novel because there are several references to World War II. First, it is because of the war that there are sentries posted on the Puma Lake Dam. Second, in one of the restaurants where Marlowe eats, there is a man trying to tune his radio into a station that carries war news.

During the course of his investigation, Marlowe travels from his hometown of Los Angeles to the fictional tourist mecca of Puma Point. Since it is cooler in Puma Point than in Los Angeles, it is assumed that Puma Point is further north and also in a higher elevation than Los Angeles. However, Puma Point is not so far away from Los Angeles that it cannot be reached in a few hours drive.

Specific settings in the novel include Kingsley's office building and office, Marlowe's office, Lavery's home, and the Prescott Hotel. Important settings in the Little Fawn Lake area include Bill Chess's cabin, the Kingsley's cabin, and the lake itself. There is also a location near Coon's Lake where Patton locates Muriel's car, still packed with all of her belongings. The Puma Lake dam is important because it is on this dam that Degarmo is shot and drives his car into a canyon. The accident results in Degarmo's death.

## Language and Meaning

This novel is written in the language of the private detective. It shows the observation of detail that a private investigator must possess in order to be good at his job. Although the plot of the novel deals with a grim subject, the language of the novel is very relaxed. Some of Marlowe's observations and descriptions even border on humor. For instance, he describes the blonde at the switchboard in Kingsley's office as being like a kitten in a house where kittens are not liked. Marlowe also indicates the folds in Adrienne's handkerchief look sharp enough to slice bread. These exaggerations are common in the novel. For instance, Marlowe talks about Patton's leather vest as being new about the time of Grover Cleveland's first term of presidency. Assuming the time setting of the novel is in the early 1940s, that would make the vest about fifty-five years old. Although it could have been, it is doubtful the vest was quite that old.

The novel moves along quickly and the reader becomes engrossed almost in the first pages. The balance of detail and description with dialogue is equal and both aspects work together to create the mystery and build suspense. After the novel is finished and the reader learns the outcome, it may even be desirable to re-read the novel to appreciate how well-written the book actually is. Even before Marlowe discloses that it was not Muriel Chess who was drowned in Little Fawn Lake, there are indications that the observant reader may pick up on to help them determine the outcome of the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into forty-one chapters, each with only a chapter number as a heading. The novel details Marlowe's investigation of Crystal Kingsley's disappearance as it occurs over the course of three consecutive days. The action begins the first morning when Marlowe meets with Kingsley in his office and ends two days later when Marlowe ties together and solves the murders of Mrs. Almore, Crystal Kingsley, Chris Lavery and Mildred Haviland. There are no flashbacks or interruptions in the action of the novel. The reader is given the details that Marlowe is given as he is given them. Although at first it appears that there are several plots, it turns out that all of these plots are intertwined. For instance, it appears at first there is no connection between the drowning of Muriel Chess, the death of Florence Almore and the murder of Chris Lavery. At the conclusion of the novel, however, Marlowe determines all these crimes were related to one another.

## Quotes

"My wife went up the middle of May, came down twice for weekends, was due down the 12th of June for a party and never showed up. I haven't seen her since." Chap. Two, p. 12

"The day before yesterday, however, I met Lavery in front of the Athletic Club down on the corner here. He said he didn't know where Crystal was." Chap. Two, p. 13

"Lavery said he hadn't gone away with her, hadn't seen her in two months, hadn't had any communications with her of any kind." Chap. Two, p. 13

"Nuts to you, pal. And nuts to Kingsley. So he hires himself a dick to come up here and see am I wearing his pajamas, huh? Listen, Jack, I might have a still leg and all, but the women I could get-" Chap. Five, p. 39

"'Here I am sitting pretty, no rent to pay, a good pension check every month, half my bonus money in war bonds, I'm married to as neat a little blonde as ever you clapped an eye on and all the time I'm nuts and I don't know it. I go for that.' He pointed hard at the redwood cabin across the lake." Chap. Five, p. 42

"'I only met Bill Chess this afternoon,' I said. 'He struck me as a quick-tempered lad and from his own account he's no saint. But he seems to have been in love with his wife. And I can't see him hanging around here for a month knowing she was rotting down in the water under that pier.'" Chap. Nine, p. 68

"'I don't figure Bill meant to kill her,' he said sadly. 'He could choke a girl to death without meaning to at all. He has mighty strong hands. Once done he has to use what brains God gave him to cover up what he done.'" Chap. Eleven, p. 87

"She was murdered by somebody out of her past. Somebody who had lost track of her and then found it again and found her married to another man and didn't like it." Chap. Twelve, p. 92

"It's only Marlowe, finding another body. He does it rather well by now. Murder-a-day Marlowe, they call him. They have the meat wagon following him around to follow up on the business he finds." Chap. Sixteen, p. 119

"Now why would he think it necessary to call a cop? And why would the cop think it smart to say that the last fellow who tried to put the bite on Almore ended up on the road gang? And why would the cop ask me if her folks - meaning Mrs. Almore's folks, I suppose - had hired me? If you can answer any of those questions, I might know whether it's any of my business." Chap. Eighteen, p. 133



"The whole set-up indicates a dame,' Degarmo said. 'You know what these private eyes work at. Divorce stuff. Suppose we'd let him tie into it, instead of just trying to scare him dumb.'" Chap. Twenty-one, p. 152

"But if there was nothing funny about the Almore case, why get so tough with anybody who shows an interest in it? It could be coincidence that George Talley was hooked for drunk driving just when he was working on it. It could be coincidence that Almore called a cop because I stared at his house, and that Lavery was shot before I could talk to him a second time. But it's no coincidence that two of your men were watching Talley's home tonight, ready, willing and able to make trouble for me, if I went there." Chap. Twenty-seven, p. 188

"I got a rather different idea of you,' I said, 'from Kingsley.'" Chap. Thirty-one, pg 207

"People have made a bad mistake about you. They have been thinking of you as a reckless little idiot with no brains and no control. They have been very wrong." Chap. Thirty-one, p. 212

"Only a heel would have done what Almore did, only a heel and a badly scared man who had things on his soul that wouldn't stand daylight." Chap. Thirty-five, p. 246

"Suppose the body had come up out of the lake for a year, or not all, unless the lake was dragged for it. Muriel Chess was gone and nobody was going to spend much time looking for her." Chap. Thirty-nine, p. 260

"If it hadn't been for Lavery, we might not be here talking about it now. Lavery is the key to the whole thing." Chap. Thirty-nine, p. 261

"Crystal Kingsley could make the men do a little jumping through hoops too. She made Bill Chess jump and Bill Chess's wife wasn't the girl to take that and smile." Chap. Thirty-nine, p. 262



## Topics for Discussion

Consider the various ways in which the other characters in the book react when they learn that Marlowe is a private detective. Why do you believe these private detectives have such a bad reputation?

Compare and contrast the personalities of Mildred Haviland and Crystal Kingsley. What clues did Marlowe use to determine it was Crystal who was drowned in Little Fawn Lake and not Mildred Haviland?

Compare and contrast the investigating styles of George Talley and Phillip Marlowe. Why is it that Marlowe gained some degree of respect from the police while Talley was thought of as nothing but a blackmailer and a snitch?

Why does Marlowe lie to Degarmo about Kingsley's scarf that was found at the scene of the Mildred Haviland's murder? Did Marlowe really believe Kingsley might have done the crime or is he covering up the fact that he really knows that Degarmo was involved?

Compare and contrast Patton and Degarmo. Whom do you believe is the better cop? Why?

Consider the way in which Degarmo's attempt to cover up the murder his ex-wife committed led to first one lie, then another, then another. How do you think Degarmo should have handled the original murder of Frances Almore? How might things have turned out differently if Degarmo had handled this murder in a different way?

Explore the way in which Marlowe uses his intelligence to stay alive even though the entire Bay City police department is turned against him by Degarmo. Do you believe that if Marlowe had handled the original Almore case he would have solved it at that time? Why or why not?