The Big Sleep

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAYMOND CHANDLER

Raymond Chandler was born in Chicago in 1888. After his parents divorced when he was a child, he returned to Britain with his mother. There Chandler worked as a civil servant and later a journalist, also attempting unsuccessfully to establish himself as a poet and reviewer. Chandler returned to the United States in 1912, where he worked blue collar jobs until joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1917 and serving in France in the First World War. Returning to the U.S. again after the war, he married "Sissy" Pascal and worked his way up to a management position in an oil company, a job he subsequently lost due to his alcoholism and the onset of the Great Depression. Unemployed and impoverished, Chandler set about learning the trade of fiction writing, publishing in pulp magazines such as *Black Mask*. Chandler was noted for taking far longer than most other pulp writers to produce his fiction, but earned great critical acclaim. He was credited with helping to create the hard-boiled crime fiction genre. Protagonist Philip Marlowe appears in all of Chandler's full-length seven novels, many of which became Hollywood hits. Chandler also turned his hand to screenwriting, contributing to *Double Indemnity*, *The Blue Dahlia*, and *Strangers on a Train*. Sissy died in 1954, and Chandler, distraught, turned to alcohol more than ever before. He died of pneumonia in 1959.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chandler wrote *The Big Sleep* during the Great Depression, which started when the U.S. stock market crashed, sending economic reverberations around the world. Millions of people lost everything, and honest work was hard to come by. This was also a post-Prohibition world, in which the previous total ban on alcohol had been lifted, but the corruption and criminal networks established in the era remained. As such, the cynicism born of both these troubling socioeconomic backdrops permeates *The Big Sleep* and its characters' mindsets.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Most of Chandler's novels became Hollywood movies. *Farewell, My Lovely*, his second novel, garnered three onscreen adaptations. The book also features private detective Philip Marlowe as protagonist, as do all of Chandler's full-length novels, and is set in the corrupt and criminal underworld of 1930s L.A. Critics often compare Chandler's fiction to that of Dashiell Hammett, a former detective who began writing pulp fiction in the 1920s. Arguably Hammett's most famous novel is hard-boiled crime fiction *The Maltese Falcon*, set in San Francisco, which like Chandler's crime novels inspired multiple famous Hollywood remakes.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Big Sleep
- **Where Written:** California, U.S.
- **When Published:** 1939
- **Literary Period:** Modernist
- **Genre:** Crime fiction, pulp fiction
- **Setting:** Los Angeles, U.S.
- **Climax:** Private detective Philip Marlowe locates the missing Mona Mars and must win a shootout against her guard, Lash Canino.
- **Antagonist:** L.A.'s moral decay
- **Point of View:** First-person narration by Philip Marlowe

EXTRA CREDIT

Alcoholism. Chandler's protagonist Philip Marlowe often turns to drink to drown his sorrows. This appears to be partially autobiographical, as Chandler himself had issues with alcohol. He lost his high-paying job in an oil company in part due to his alcoholism, and after his wife's death, Chandler became a less prolific writer as he continued to drink heavily.

Eye for detail. Critics praise Chandler for his eye for details related to character's outfits, interior decoration, and scenery—but less so for plot. When directing the screen adaptation of *The Big Sleep*, director Howard Hawks asked Chandler who was responsible for Owen Taylor's death, and Chandler couldn't give him an answer.

PLOT SUMMARY

Private detective Philip Marlowe arrives at the wealthy Sternwood family's mansion. As Marlowe stands in the impressive hallway, Carmen Sternwood approaches him and begins to flirt. The straight-faced butler, Mr. Norris, soon leads Marlowe to a sweltering greenhouse, where the elderly General Sternwood sits in his wheelchair.

Sternwood talks warmly of his missing son-in-law Rusty Regan, but that's not why he's called on Marlowe. Sternwood is "being blackmailed again," this time by Arthur Geiger, who claims Carmen owes him gambling **money**. The General decides to hire Marlowe to see what Geiger is up to, rather than just pay out. Once Marlowe is finished with the General, Mrs. Regan,

the General's older daughter, has Mr. Norris bring Marlowe to her elegant sitting room. She is under the impression her father has hired Marlowe to find her husband, Rusty; Marlowe provides no information either way, and considers Mrs. Regan "trouble."

The detective goes to the rare bookstore noted on Geiger's business card, which he quickly discovers is a front for pornographic books and is guarded by the attractive Agnes Lozelle. Marlowe stakes out Geiger's store, and after Geiger appears, Marlowe tails him back to his house. There, Marlowe sees Carmen arrive and enter the house.

While staking out the house, Marlowe sees a flash of light and hears a scream from inside. Three gun shots ring out, followed by the sound of someone fleeing out of the back of the house. Marlowe breaks into the house through a window to find Carmen, naked and drunk but unharmed, and Geiger dead on the floor. Marlowe also finds a camera, but the plate holder has been stolen. Unable to rouse a now sleeping Carmen, Marlowe drives her home in her own car. After leaving Carmen in the hands of Mr. Norris and the maid Mathilda, Marlowe walks back to Geiger's place. Geiger's body is gone.

The following morning, the papers make no mention of Geiger, meaning the police are still unaware of the murder. Chief Investigator Bernie Ohls, who had originally put Marlowe in contact with the General, calls Marlowe to tell him one of the Sternwoods' Buicks is being fished out of the sea near Lido pier, with a body inside. Ohls takes Marlowe to go see for himself, telling him that the dead man in the Buick is not Rusty Regan (having assumed that Marlowe is trying to find Rusty). The body is that of the Sternwoods' young chauffeur, named Owen Taylor. It is unclear whether his death is the result of murder or suicide.

Ohls drops Marlowe back in town, where the detective discovers that Geiger's books are being hauled out of his store and put into a moving truck. Marlowe hires a cab to tail the truck, which arrives at an apartment; Marlowe deduces from the mailbox outside that the apartment is that of Joe Brody. Marlowe then takes the cab back to his offices, where Mrs. Regan is waiting.

Mrs. Regan tells the detective that Carmen is being blackmailed for the incriminating photos from the missing plate in Geiger's camera. The two discuss Rusty's disappearance as well as the death of Owen Taylor, who was in love with Carmen. After Mrs. Regan leaves, Marlowe drives back to Geiger's house, where he finds Carmen. When Marlowe asks her about the previous night, Carmen blames Joe Brody for killing Geiger. To himself, Marlowe questions her motives. While they are talking, the gangster Eddie Mars arrives. He and Marlowe size each other up, with Mars revealing that he owns Geiger's house and demanding Marlowe keep his name out of any reports.

Marlowe returns to Joe Brody's apartment, where Brody pulls a gun on the unarmed Marlowe. Agnes is there as well, and Marlowe questions them about their move to steal Geiger's racket. Brody admits to taking the books, but denies the murder. Marlowe works out that Brody has the pictures from the camera he found in Geiger's house. Suddenly, the door bell rings. Brody answers the door to see Carmen, who instantly points a gun to his face and demands her pictures. After a confused tussle, Marlowe manages to grab both Brody and Carmen's guns. Brody hands Marlowe the pictures, and Carmen skips off while Marlowe stays to question Brody and Agnes. Brody admits to tailing Geiger the previous night. He says he was staking out the back of Geiger's house as the Sternwoods' chauffeur Owen Taylor broke in and shot Geiger. Brody then tailed the fleeing Taylor, overpowered him, and took the camera plate, before Taylor drove off, presumably to the pier.

The doorbell rings again. Brody answers and is instantly shot dead by the man on the other side. Marlowe chases after the murderer and catches him: it is Carol Lundgren, a boy Marlowe recognizes from Geiger's store. Marlowe quickly determines this is a misplaced revenge killing. Marlowe makes Lundgren drive to Geiger's place, where he calls chief investigator Ohls to the crime scene. They find Geiger laid out on a bed in a locked room. Ohls and Marlow ethen drive Lundgren to District Attorney Taggart Wilde's house. Ohls and Marlowe explain the situation to Wilde, and give city cop Captain Cronjager their direct assessment of his negligent police work. Cronjager leaves with Lundgren in custody.

When Marlowe gets back to his apartment, Mars calls to confirm that his name was kept out Marlowe's report to the police—Marlowe confirms it was. The detective then rings the Sternwoods, telling Mr. Norris to inform Mrs. Regan that the pictures have been taken care of. The next morning, Marlowe looks over the newspapers, and sees the events of the last few days have been mostly covered up; the Sternwoods are not mentioned at all.

Marlowe next goes to see Captain Al Gregory of the Missing Persons Bureau for details on Rusty, saying he wants to rule Rusty out of the blackmail case. It seems Rusty ran off with Eddie Mars's wife, Mona, who is also missing. Gregory says he doesn't think Eddie is involved, because he's too business minded to act out of jealousy. A "gray Plymouth sedan" later tries to surreptitiously follow Marlowe, who loses it.

That night, Marlowe visits on Eddie Mars at his casino, the Cypress Club. Mars greets the detective warmly and invites him into his office. There, Mars offers Marlowe money for keeping his name out of the police report, but Marlowe refuses to accept it. The two discuss Rusty's disappearance. Marlowe asks Mars if he's responsible for the car tailing him, which shocks and worries Mars. The detective wanders into the main casino, where he finds Mrs. Regan. Marlowe drives her home. On the way, Marlowe asks her what secret Mars is holding over

her, but she avoids the topic. Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe to pull over and tries to seduce him. He kisses her but refuses to take her back to his apartment, asking again what Marlowe has on her. Angry, she demands to be taken home.

When Marlowe gets back to his own apartment, Carmen is waiting for him in his bed, naked. He threatens to throw her out, and she leaves, furious. In the morning, Marlowe sees the gray Plymouth that had tailed him, and confronts the driver, inviting the "small" man up to his office. The man introduces himself as Harry Jones, a grifter, and offers Marlowe the location of missing Mona Mars in exchange for $200. Jones says that Agnes Lozelle told him she saw Mona driving in the hills above L.A., being watched by Eddie Mars's man Lash Canino.

Marlowe thinks on it for the rest of the day before deciding to follow up on the offer. He drives to Jones's office, where, after sneaking in, he overhears Canino questioning Jones about Agnes. Jones drinks whiskey that Canino pours him, and then Marlowe hears Jones die. Canino leaves, unaware of Marlowe's presence. Marlowe smells **cyanide** on Jones's corpse. Agnes calls the office and Marlowe arranges a meeting. Half an hour later, Marlowe hands the $200 over to Agnes, who tells him exactly where Mona is.

It is **raining** heavily as Marlowe drives to the hiding place. He loses control of his car, driving into the curb and bursting two tires. Luckily, he's within walking distance of a repair garage Agnes had described. He talks his way in, and sees Canino there with Art, the garage owner. The two men jump Marlowe and knock him out. Marlowe wakes up on a sofa, handcuffed and watched by Mona. He talks her around to helping him escape. Marlowe then retrieves his gun from his now repaired car—repaired as a spare getaway, he supposes—and sees Canino driving back to the house. He lures Canino back out of the house by starting Canino's own car engine. When Canino comes out with holding a gun to Mona's back, Marlowe shoots Canino four times, killing him.

The next day, in his apartment, Marlowe thinks over the previous night—calling Ohls, driving with Mona to District Attorney Wilde's house, and telling them everything. Eddie and Mona claimed they didn't want to be in the spotlight over Rusty's disappearance, and the police let it slide. Back in the present, Marlowe goes to talk it all over with General Sternwood. Marlowe tells the General that Geiger was trying to find out if the General was scared about something else, applying a little pressure to see how much he could really blackmail him for.

In front of the mansion, Carmen asks Marlowe to teach her to shoot. They drive down to an isolated location together. Marlowe gives her a gun and sets up the targets. Carmen shoots him five times, but he has loaded the gun with blanks. She faints, foaming at the mouth. Marlowe drives Carmen back up to the house and confronts Mrs. Regan with his theory: Carmen tried to shoot him because he turned down her sexual advance, as Carmen also most likely did with Rusty—except Rusty's gun wasn't filled with blanks. Marlowe tells Mrs. Regan she must have helped Carmen cover it up and asked Eddie Mars to help them, who came up with an elaborate cover story. Mrs. Regan admits everything and offers Marlowe hush money, as she doesn't want her father to find out. Marlowe turns down the money with disgust and tells Mrs. Regan to send Carmen to a mental institution, or he will go to the police. Marlowe leaves to go to a bar, where he will think about death, "the nastiness," and Mona.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Philip Marlowe – Protagonist and narrator Philip Marlowe is an experienced and well-networked private detective. He is hired by General Sternwood to discover why Arthur Gwynn Geiger is blackmailing him; district attorney Taggart Wilde, whom Marlowe used to work for, had suggested Marlowe for the job, revealing that Marlowe remains respected among the L.A. police department despite having been "fired" for "insubordination." A stereotypical man's man, Marlowe drinks **heavily**, can shoot a gun while handcuffed, fights well when forced to, and easily withstands the wiles of Sternwood's temptress daughters. Cynical, strategic, and fearless, Marlowe is an ace detective who stands for honor and honesty and always seems one step ahead of his opponents. Marlowe takes his job seriously, looking to uncover the whole story rather than just do what is necessary for a paycheck, and often demonstrates a strong moral compass that most other characters in the novel lack. While Sternwood hired Marlowe only to look into Geiger's blackmail threat, the detective also comes across the mystery of missing person Rusty Regan, the General's son-in-law. The mystery seems to follow Marlowe despite his initial disinterest, and, finally, proves too enticing to ignore; by the end of the novel, Marlowe has solved both cases and revealed the depth of corruption among even the respected members of Los Angeles society. Yet, Marlowe is not without fault. Sexist and homophobic, Marlowe scorns those who do not meet his rigid sense of proper American masculinity. He mocks the homosexual Geiger and his lover Carol Lundgren, despises overtly sexual women, and disdains the short Harry Jones.

General Sternwood – An elderly, rich former general whose family made their money in the oilfields near his L.A. mansion. Sternwood is being blackmailed by Arthur Gwynn Geiger and, on the recommendation of his friend and district attorney Taggart Wilde, hires private detective Philip Marlowe to look into the situation. Marlow learns that the General also had a strong bond with his missing son-in-law Rusty Regan, husband of the general's eldest daughter, Vivian Regan. But General

Sternwood does not directly ask the detective to follow up that case at first; later, when Marlowe starts to investigate Regan's disappearance too, the general offers the detective $1,000 if he can find Rusty. Sternwood is severely ill and dying. His lower body was crushed in a horse racing accident many years before and he now spends his time either in bed or in his scorching orchid greenhouse, waited on by his butler Mr. Norris. Bed-bound but with pull in the city police department, Sternwood represents the elite class who are involved with the city's underworld from a distance, with their names always kept out of the papers by influential friends.

Vivian Regan – General Sternwood's eldest daughter, Vivian Regan's current husband, Rusty Regan, has been missing for some time at the start of the novel. When the General hires Philip Marlowe to investigate why Arthur Gwynn Geiger is blackmailing his younger daughter, Carmen, Mrs. Regan believes her father is trying to locate Rusty. She worries Marlowe will uncover the truth: that she hid Rusty's body after Carmen shot him in a rage. Mrs. Regan had asked the disreputable Eddie Mars to help the sisters hide the body, and then kept Rusty's death a secret from her father. Vivian is rich, beautiful, and "trouble," according to Marlowe. Like the detective, she drinks heavily; she also regularly gambles at Mars's casino. She tells Marlowe that she covered up Rusty's murder to protect her father, so he would not know his blood is "rotten." This image of decay symbolizes that of wider society, as even the elites are without morals or scruples.

Carmen Sternwood – General Sternwood's younger daughter. Philip Marlowe discovers at the end of the novel that Carmen is mentally ill and killed Rusty Regan, her older sister Vivian Regan's husband, in a fit of rage. Carmen at one point also tries to kill Marlowe, shooting at him in revenge for refusing her sexual advances. Early in the novel, Carmen poses naked for Arthur Gwynn Geiger while intoxicated and is present at his murder at the hands of the family driver Owen Taylor, who is in love with her. Marlowe describes Carmen as a "pretty, spoiled and not very bright little girl who had gone very, very wrong, and nobody was doing anything about it." As such, she symbolizes the wider moral decay in American society as the fault of responsible authorities who neglect their duties.

Eddie Mars – Eddie Mars is a "well-dressed," manicured racketeer who runs a casino called the Cypress Club in a suburb of L.A. He first meets Philip Marlowe when the two run into each other at the house of his tenant, Arthur Gwynn Geiger, after the latter's murder. At first Mars is suspicious of Marlowe's intentions, but learns to trust and respect the detective, although he always considers Marlowe a gun for hire rather than an equal. Mars hires Lash Canino to keep his wife, Mona, in hiding after he helps Mrs. Regan hide her murdered husband Rusty Regan's body; after Mrs. Regan's mentally unstable younger sister Carmen Sternwood shot Rusty in a fit of rage, Mars had created the story that Rusty and Mona ran off together, to protect them all. Mars is one of the L.A. criminal underworld's elite, with his manicured hands reflecting his ability to stay out of the dirty work himself. He is often surrounded by hired thugs, and appears to have connections within the city police department, including Captain Gregory, demonstrating the corruption underlying the city's day-to-day operations.

Terrence "Rusty" Regan – Although Rusty Regan does not appear in person in *The Big Sleep*, his presence, or lack thereof, hangs over the text, as he has been missing since before the narrative picks up. Rusty married Mrs. Regan, the eldest daughter of General Sternwood. The son and father-in-law got along well, and the General was personally hurt when Rusty left without saying goodbye. When Sternwood hires private detective Philip Marlowe to investigate why Arthur Gwynn Geiger is blackmailing him, everyone else assumes Marlowe is looking into Rusty's disappearance. At the end of the novel, Marlowe discovers that the General's daughter, Carmen, killed Rusty in a fit of rage. To protect her sister, Mrs. Regan called in local racketeer Eddie Mars to help her cover up Rusty's murder. Mars devises a ruse, hiding Rusty's car at his wife Mona's apartment complex, to make it seem the two ran away together. Mona goes into hiding to keep up appearances.

Arthur Gwynn Geiger – The owner of an illegal pornography store, the overweight and pretentious Geiger blackmails General Sternwood for $5,000, claiming that the old man's daughter, Carmen Sternwood, owes him gambling debts. In response, Sternwood hires private detective Philip Marlowe to investigate Geiger's motives. Marlowe discovers Geiger's store, and tails him back to his house. There, Geiger entertains Carmen before being shot and killed by a fleeing aggressor. Marlowe later discovers that the Sternwoods' driver Owen Taylor is the murderer, having killed Geiger out of jealousy over Carmen. The stereotypically macho Marlowe is crudely dismissive of Geiger, who is homosexual, saying that Geiger's Chinese interior decoration "has a stealthy nastiness, like a fag party." Geiger's companion Carol Lundgren kills Joe Brody in revenge for Geiger's death, mistakenly thinking Brody had murdered Geiger while stealing his racket, or criminal venture. Marlowe mocks Lundgren, saying he must have been fond of "that queen," referring to Geiger. Whether intentional on the part of Chandler or not, Marlowe's disdain and disgust for homosexuals shows the pitfalls of the detective's rigid sense of masculinity. Career criminal Eddie Mars, who tells Marlowe he is Geiger's "landlord," had encouraged Geiger to blackmail Sternwood to see if the old man was hiding anything. If Sternwood paid up on Geiger's casual threat, the implication would have been that he was hiding a much more profitable secret—that is, that he knew what happened to his missing son-in-law, Rusty Regan.

Joe Brody – Joe Brody is a black grifter who tries and fails to steal Arthur Gwynn Geiger's racket, an illegal pornography

outlet. He does so with the help of Geiger's store assistant, "the blonde," Agnes Lovelle. Things do not go to plan, however, when Geiger's other assistant and implied lover, Carol Lundgren, thinks Brody killed Geiger to steal his business from him. Lundgren kills Brody in revenge. Joe is innocent of the murder, but was present at the scene of the crime. Brody tells Philip Marlowe that he tailed Geiger to his house, and heard the gunshots from within. Brody then followed the real murderer, Owen Taylor, and overpowered him, stealing photographic negatives of a naked Carmen Sternwood in the process. Agnes helps Brody blackmail Carmen over the pictures, but Marlowe overpowers Brody and takes the pictures from him. Carmen tries to frame Brody for Geiger's murder because of a past feud. Brody's tale of frustrated ambition demonstrates how regular grifters struggle to carve out their own racket in the chaos of L.A.'s criminal underworld.

Harry Jones – Harry Jones is a grifter who makes money by running a gambling book. He tails private detective Philip Marlowe's car, as he wants to sell Marlowe information on the whereabouts of the missing Mona Mars. Jones knew Rusty Regan, who has supposedly run off with Mona, the wife of local racketeer Eddie Mars. Marlowe mocks Jones, calling him "little man" because he is short. Yet, Jones displays great strength of character—namely, he lies to Lash Canino, Mars's hired assassin, when interrogated about where Agnes Lozelle lives. Canino puts **cyanide** in Jones's whiskey, killing him. Marlowe also notes that Jones is smarter than he first realized, yet still refers to him as "little dead man," his continued lack of respect showing the detective's inflexible notions of masculinity.

"The Blonde" / Agnes Lozelle – Referred to as "the blonde," Agnes works for Arthur Gwynn Geiger's illegal pornography outlet. She also works with Joe Brody to steal the racket from under Geiger. Agnes helps Brody to blackmail Mrs. Regan, as they have Geiger's pornographic photos of her younger sister, Carmen Sternwood, but the plans backfire when Geiger is murdered. Agnes then teams up with another grifter, Harry Jones. She tells Jones she has seen the missing Mona Mars on Foothill Boulevard. The two sell the information to Philip Marlowe in exchange for $200. Jones dies by drinking the **cyanide**-laced whiskey Lash Canino serves him, as Canino's employer Eddie Mars, Mona's husband, "don't like" Jones getting involved. Agnes then takes Marlowe's money and drives off, "not a mark on her," drawing Marlowe's scorn.

Bernie Ohls – Chief investigator at the L.A. police department, Bernie Ohls is a long-time contact of private detective Philip Marlowe. Ohls puts Marlowe him in touch with General Sternwood. He also offers Marlowe information about and receives his assistance in investigating the deaths of Sternwood's blackmailer Arthur Gwynn Geiger, Sternwood's driver Owen Taylor, and the grifter Joe Brody. Chandler portrays Ohls as a competent and straight cop, focused on his cases.

Taggart Wilde – District attorney Wilde is an old friend of General Sternwood's. Wilde puts Sternwood in contact with private detective Philip Marlowe when Arthur Gwynn Geiger blackmails the General. Marlowe used to work for Wilde before being "fired" for "insubordination." Wilde turns a blind eye to the L.A. police's neglect of duty and seeming incompetence, noting that juries ask "embarrassing questions" in a "vain effort" to get to the truth. Wilde keeps his friend Sternwood's name out of the papers despite both of the General's daughters being involved in repeated scandals. As such, he represents the failure of authority figures to protect America's values, allowing moral decay to spread throughout the city.

Lash Canino – Racketeer Eddie Mars's "best boy," Lash Canino is a lethal hired assassin. He kills the grifter Harry Jones, who'd been snooping into Mars's business, by lacing his whiskey with **cyanide**. Canino also keeps Mars's wife Mona in hiding, to keep up the pretense that she ran away with the missing Rusty Regan. When private detective Philip Marlowe finds Mona's hiding place, he has to kill Canino to protect himself and Mona, who helps Marlowe to escape.

Captain Cronjager – An inept and possibly corrupt L.A. police captain, Cronjager dislikes private detective Philip Marlowe's involvement in the Arthur Gwynn Geiger murder case. Marlowe tells Cronjager to his face that the police are neglecting their duties by "allowing" illegal pornography stores like Geiger's to operate in plain sight. However, the newspapers portray Cronjager as the hero captain who solved the case, highlighting the multiple layers of corruption in the city.

Owen Taylor – The driver for General Sternwood and his family, Taylor is in love with his employer's daughter, Carmen. He gives her a small gun as a gift. Taylor later kills Arthur Gwynn Geiger out of jealousy as Carmen poses for the pornographic photographer in his house. Taylor steals the photo negatives, which are later stolen by Joe Brody. Later, Taylor drives himself off a pier at high speed to kill himself. The police lean on the newspapers to keep Taylor's name out of the story about Geiger's murder, to protect the rich and influential Sternwoods.

Captain Al Gregory – "Burly" Captain Gregory works at the Missing Persons Bureau, and is assigned the case of missing person Rusty Regan. He helps Philip Marlowe in his investigation into why Arthur Gwynn Geiger is blackmailing Regan's father-in-law, General Sternwood. Gregory later implies to Marlowe he knew that Eddie Mars's story that his wife Mona Mars and Regan ran off together was a lie. Gregory tells Marlowe he is being as "honest" as he can "in a world where it's out of style." But Marlowe learns from Eddie that Gregory is friendly with the racketeer, suggesting the Captain is corrupt.

Mona Mars – The wife of racketeer Eddie Mars, Mona tells herself that her criminal husband doesn't have blood on his

hands. Mona hides after the disappearance of Rusty Regan to support Eddie's lie that she and Rusty ran off together. In reality, Eddie helped Mrs. Regan hide Rusty's body after her younger sister, Carmen Sternwood, killed him. When private detective Philip Marlowe finds Mona's hiding place, she helps him escape Eddie's hired thug Lash Canino. Marlowe calls her "Silver-Wig," after the wig she wears to hide her cropped hair, which she cut off to prove her loyalty to Eddie.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carol Lundgren – Arthur Gwynn Geiger's companion and implied lover, the young and handsome Carol Lundgren kills a grifter called Joe Brody, who he thinks murdered his partner. Philip Marlowe overpowers Lundgren as he flees the scene of the crime. Marlowe turns Lundgren over to the police.

Mr. Vincent Norris – General Sternwood's butler, Mr. Norris knows all of the family's misdeeds anbutd would "never tell," according to his employer's elder daughter, Mrs. Regan.

Art Huck – A garage owner who helps Lash Canino hide Mona Mars.

The Maid / Mathilda – The Sternwoods' matronly middle-aged maid.

TERMS

Grifter – "Grifter" is a slang term for a petty thief or low-ranking criminal. **Joe Brody** and **Harry Jones** are both examples of grifters. They both aspire to run their own racket. However, both Brody and Jones end up murdered in their respective attempts to step up in the criminal world. They are unwittingly caught up in a much more complex web than they imagined, and their limited intel and resources mean they cannot keep up with the leaders of L.A.'s criminal underworld.

Racket/Racketeer – **Eddie Mars** is the primary example of a "racketeer" in *The Big Sleep*. Described as "manicured" and "well-dressed," Mars runs a casino—his highly profitable "racket." Racketeers are a rung, or many, above lowly grifters in the social ladder of L.A.'s criminal underworld—yet they must protect their business from these aspirational grifters. Grifter **Joe Brody** successfully steals **Geiger**'s racket, an illegal pornography outlet, from him, with help from inside woman **Agnes Lozelle**. However, Brody ends up dead due to the many moving parts of Geiger's world—Geiger is himself murdered by **Owen Taylor,** and Geiger's lover **Carol Lundgren** mistakenly blames Brody, killing him in revenge. Brody's brief hold on his racket (not to mention Geiger's loss of his racket and his murder) show those at the top require sufficient wealth and protection to *stay* at the top.

THEMES

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THE CORRUPTION OF SOCIETY

Raymond Chandler's crime noir novel *The Big Sleep* deals with the dark underbelly of L.A. society. As private detective Philip Marlowe digs ever deeper into this grim world to find out who is blackmailing one of his clients, he becomes increasingly disgusted with what he uncovers. This is not only because of the illegal activities he finds embedded throughout every level of society, but also because of all the supposedly respectable figures he discovers are involved in these activities. The novel implicates senior public figures and social organizations in L.A.'s criminal underworld, including rich businessmen, the police, and the newspapers, who have not only turned a blind eye to such corruption, but have become active participants in it. With the absence of honest leaders, corruption has become so entrenched that it operates in plain sight, with criminal activity occurring even on the "main drag" of town. Through Marlowe's investigations, *The Big Sleep* seeks to illustrate the extent of the moral decay in modern American life as the product of a lack of personal responsibility and integrity.

Marlowe notes repeatedly that even those at the top of society are indicated in the city's shady underworld, regardless of the ways in which they may seek to wash their hands of it; wealth does not equal respectability. This is illustrated by Marlowe's first meeting Mrs. Regan, his wealthy client's beautiful daughter. Marlowe notes, "The drapes lay in heavy ivory folds beside her feet" as she "looked out [the window], towards the quiet darkish foothills." Mrs. Regan appears physically distant from the grim oilfields below as she sits in her "ivory" upper sitting room. This early symbolism of a corrupt individual in a pristine, pure environment far from the dirt below lays the groundwork for later revelations that condemn Mrs. Regan's character—namely, that she drinks too much, gambles other people's **money**, and has even covered up the murder of her husband Rusty.

Later, Marlowe runs into his client's younger daughter, Carmen Sternwood, at the home of pornographic photographer Arthur Geiger, whose murder Carmen had witnessed the night before while naked and intoxicated. Describing her as a "pretty, spoiled and not very bright little girl who had gone very, very wrong, and nobody was doing anything about it," Marlowe does not see Carmen's impropriety as her failure alone, but also that of the responsible figures in her life who are not guiding her

effectively. For example, District Attorney Taggart Wilde, an influential friend of General Sternwood, keeps the supposedly respectable family's name out of the newspapers after Geiger's murder. Despite doing do, he notes Carmen "ought not to be running around loose," adding "I blame the old man for that." Here, Chandler draws a parallel to the fact society's leaders have neglected their responsibilities, including Wilde himself for covering up the family's misdeeds.

Marlowe later uses the same wording, admonishing Mrs. Regan for allowing Carmen to "run around loose," even though she knows her sister is mentally unwell and violent. Marlowe's accusation further underlines these parallel responsibilities toward family members and society: without clear guidance and accountability, society will tend toward self-serving indecency, moral corruption, and decay.

Only a thin veil keeps such immoral activity out of view from wider society, Marlowe realizes, and the novel emphasizes that those tasked with the city's wellbeing, primarily the police, are often to blame. When Marlowe describes Geiger's pornography outlet at the center of his blackmailing case to Wilde, for instance, he asserts that the police are neglecting their duties by "allowing" the illegal store to run in the open. His reference to the police's "own reasons" for this negligence directly implicates the cops in the city's lawlessness. In this way, the novel argues that modern America's slip into moral degradation has much to do with the lack of effective law enforcement. Marlowe further tells Wilde the police "hide" such illegal activity "every other day, to oblige their friends or anybody with a little pull." He alleges that these public servants subvert the law according to their own motivations and for their own benefit. Thus, Chandler shows how those with the power to stamp out criminality are implicit in society's lawlessness.

The free press is another body charged with standing for truth and justice—yet, in the novel, it instead publishes lies, leaving society's corruption unchallenged. Marlowe reads "all three of the morning papers" the day after his meeting with Wilde. The papers keep the Sternwoods out of the story, and praise the police for arresting the murderer, even though Marlowe was the one who had detained the suspect before the police even knew there was a murder. Marlowe's sneering judgment of the morning papers' lies emphasizes this is not a one-time cover-up, but an institutional failure. The papers also mention that "There would be no inquest," according to Marlowe, presumably given the high-ranking names involved in the messy case. Through this, Chandler shows that without a morally upright press, the truth of modern society's corruption cannot be uncovered and addressed.

The Big Sleep thus presents a disturbing vision of American society falling ever deeper into moral decay, and Chandler points the finger of blame squarely at those tasked with upholding American decency. Society has gone wayward because of the lack of oversight and enforcement among families, journalists, the police, and by extension, the government at large. Everyone in the story, across all strata of society, has dirt on their hands, suggesting that few are left to stand up to protect proper American values.

WEALTH, STATUS, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Every character in *The Big Sleep* fits into a specific socioeconomic class, which determines their respective roles in the dark underworld of 1930s L.A. During his mission to find out who is blackmailing his client, private detective Philip Marlowe meets a wide range of characters and sees firsthand how wealth and status give clear advantages to the figures running the city's various rackets. Meanwhile those who start out with nothing struggle immensely to improve their lot. The novel suggests through this lack of social mobility that the American Dream itself is a lie, as those at the bottom rungs of society can never get a foot up while those at the top can never be taken down. In fact, the novel goes so far as to suggest that such unfairness is built into the fabric of American society, whose functioning requires keeping the powerless firmly entrenched in their low social positions.

A shabby private detective, Marlowe belongs to a "soldier" class, available for hire. Such a position grants him access into the upper end of the societal spectrum, yet this is only temporary. Wealthy racketeer Eddie Mars tells Marlowe: "I wish old Sternwood would hire himself a soldier like you on a straight salary." Mars's comment classes Marlowe as an underling, whom the superior General Sternwood can "hire" to do his bidding. **Money** talks in this world, as Mars considers Marlowe someone to be bought, rather than an equal.

Chandler extends this metaphor, as Marlowe equates himself with a **knight** in a chess game he plays alone in his sparse apartment: "The move with the knight was wrong […] Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights." The chess game reflects the wider, symbolic battle for dominance taking place within the city. Each player is vying for victory, and Marlowe believes the game is too big and complicated for him to win alone; knights—like Marlow—do not win. They ensure their king survives. This, in turn, is symbolic of the way in which the upper class relies on lower-class individuals like Marlowe to maintain their power.

In the hallway of the Sternwood mansion, home to Marlowe's clients, the detective sees a "knight in the stained-glass window still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree." Marlowe's focus on the knight's stasis and ineffectiveness reveals his own feelings of powerlessness, as he is unable to put right the wrongs he sees in the world. His low social standing and therefore limited influence cannot interfere with the plans of more powerful men.

In contrast, L.A.'s elite are untouchable. Marlowe's client, the wealthy and aged General Sternwood, does not need to lift a finger to ensure his intentions are fulfilled. At the end of the novel, Marlowe reflects: "He could lie quiet in his canopied bed, with his bloodless hands folded on the sheet, waiting." Sternwood's "bloodless hands" represent the fact he can pay others to do his dirty work. As he lays calmly in his luxurious "canopied bed," in contrast to Marlowe's fold-down wall bed, the old man's wealth and status protect him; he can hire "soldiers" like Marlowe to defend his reputation and so maintain his social position.

Mars is another figure among many untouchable, wealthy men who, Chandler suggests, will never be knocked down. At the Missing Persons Bureau, Captain Gregory tells Marlowe: "I'd like to see the flashy well-dressed muggs like Eddie Mars spoiling their manicures in the rock quarry at Folsom, alongside of the poor little slum-bred hard guys [...] You and me both lived too long to think I'm likely to see it happen." Like Sternwood's symbolically clean hands, Mars has manicured hands, as his hired men get their hands dirty on his behalf.

Meanwhile, those who start out with nothing are unable to drag themselves out of the gutter. The grifter Joe Brody, whom Marlowe considers "smart," fails to steal Geiger's pornography racket from under him because he does not have the resources to perceive or control the wider situation. Instead, Brody ends up shot for a murder he didn't commit. Brody's failure is a direct contrast to the wealthy elites, who have the resources to remain informed of and distanced from the city's complex web of criminality. Another self-identified grifter, Harry Jones, is assassinated by Mars's solider Lash Canino, for getting into a game that's too big for him. Canino tells Jones his "mistake" was contacting Marlowe, which "Eddie don't like." The wealthy elite seek to retain their power and stamp out any upstarts that intrude on their territory.

In *The Big Sleep*, money means power, which in turn ensures and maintains social status. Wealthy men have the resources to distance themselves from the moral filth of L.A.'s criminal underworld, regardless of their complicity in its doings. Their hired men protect the "well-dressed" figures' good names and reputations on their behalf. Meanwhile, "slum-bred hard guys" and even "soldiers" are unable to pull themselves out of the "nastiness," and feel powerless to change this status quo. Chandler argues that this arrangement has become central to life and identity in 1930s America, as even law enforcement cannot imagine the playing field being leveled in the criminal world.

CYNICISM AND SURVIVAL

In *The Big Sleep*, author Raymond Chandler represents life in the dark, criminal world of 1930s L.A. as total war. In doing so, he critiques a self-serving and mistrustful American society in which people turn to violence and dishonesty to achieve personal gain. As Philip Marlowe works a blackmail case for his rich client General Sternwood, he uncovers illegal and immoral activities that "make him sick." One of Marlowe's respectable client's own daughters, for instance, hides the body of her murdered husband to protect her family's reputation. Many of the novel's men also make a living from violence directly, hired as "soldiers" for higher-up racketeers, or by attempting to carve out their own racket. While Marlowe attempts to rise above such "nastiness," he finds himself drawn into this dark world all the same. He finds that cynicism—that is, assuming the worst of everyone he meets—is the only way to survive in this murky underworld.

The novel's frequent physical violence is a result of the characters' struggle to survive in a society characterized by a kill or be killed mentality. After Marlowe finally discovers missing Mona Mars's hiding place, for instance, he is forced to fight for his life against her guard Lash Canino. Both men are simply hired guns for different employers in a larger battle (Canino works for Eddie Mars), yet Marlowe knows the only way to survive his encounter with Canino is to kill his opponent first; as such he shoots him four times. Killing Canino demonstrates how the dark underworld that Marlowe must investigate inevitably draws him into its "nastiness," as he describes it. This world necessitates violent self-defense, and in this way Marlowe's cynicism—his deeply ingrained mistrust of everyone else—is the only thing that protects him from harm.

At other points, Marlowe threatens racketeer Eddie Mars's hired goon with a gun when the latter is waiting for him in the detective's lobby, and physically overpowers Carol Lundgren just after the latter murders the grifter Joe Brody. Each incident further demonstrates Marlowe's innate distrust of others, as he assumes he has to attack first or lose the upper hand. In these encounters Marlowe feels he must physically overcome others for his own survival.

A pervasive cynicism typifies nonviolent personal exchanges throughout the novel as well. The author creates an atmosphere of mistrust in which everyone suspects that those around them have bad intentions. As such, the characters manipulate each other and withhold information for their own personal gain or self-defense. When Marlowe first meets his client's daughter, Mrs. Regan, she is under the false impression that her father, General Sternwood, has hired the detective to find her missing husband Rusty. Marlowe purposefully withholds his true mission (identifying the General's blackmailers) from Mrs. Regan to see what information she might unwittingly divulge in the process. Marlowe's cynicism works in the detective's favor, as he discerns she has something to hide, most likely related to Rusty. In comparison, Mrs. Regan appears naïve and outplayed in failing to mine the wily detective for information.

Later in the novel, when Marlowe finds himself out of leads in

his case, a grifter called Harry Jones offers the detective information in exchange for cash. Their dialogue is a rapid-fire negotiation that resembles a sword fight, with jabs and parries following in quick succession as they figure out how to maximize their benefit from the interaction while limiting any vulnerability. The exchange shows these characters naturally expect the other to take advantage of them. In this way, Chandler depicts a suspicious social climate in which everyone considers everyone else an aggressor.

Even though Marlowe acts as cynically as the other characters, expecting the worst and therefore manipulating others and engaging in ruthless violence, he is still the novel's moral conscience as he is the only character not motivated by personal gain. For example, when Marlowe confronts Mrs. Regan with his discovery that she hid her husband's corpse, for instance, she offers him **money** to keep quiet. He tries "not to sneer at her," makes a sarcastic comment about wanting money, and then reveals his selfless motivation: "to protect what little pride a broken and sick old man has left in his blood."

Since Marlowe does not share the other characters' selfish motives, he can provide a more objective critique of his society. Marlowe's scornful response to Mrs. Regan suggests a broader criticism of 1930s America. He condemns the fact that modern society places personal gain, as symbolized here by money, above all other considerations, including others' lives. Marlowe's own cynicism is thus presented as a natural—perhaps even moral—response to such pervasive and immoral selfishness.

For the characters in *The Big Sleep*, cynicism is commonplace in the scramble to survive. Indeed, the author represents his protagonist's deep mistrust of others as wise and strategically advantageous. Marlowe comes out on top of his exchanges, whether physical or verbal, specifically because he accurately assumes the worst of everyone. In this way, Chandler's novel suggests that the only wise response to America's increasing emphasis on self-gain is deep cynicism.

MASCULINITY

In *The Big Sleep*, Raymond Chandler glorifies private detective Philip Marlowe as an iconic American masculine hero. However, Marlowe's sexist and homophobic prejudices reveal that his gender identity comes at the expense of women and nontraditionally masculine men, as well as Marlowe's own well-being. Marlowe's prejudices cause him great suffering, as the weight of upholding his own strict standards separates him even from potential allies; for instance, Marlowe scorns "little man" Harry Jones on account of his short stature, which does not conform to Marlowe's ideals of manhood. The intensely power-focused masculinity Chandler represents in his protagonist is ultimately unappealing. Though such critique likely was not Chandler's authorial intention, the novel nevertheless betrays the limits and dangers of rigid adherence to stereotypical masculinity.

"Tall," strong and "handsome," Marlowe drinks, fights, and stands for honor and justice. On several occasions, Marlowe buys "a pint of whiskey" either to drink in his car as he stakes out a suspect's premises, or simply to drink away the trials of the day. Chandler depicts Marlowe's ability to hold his drink as indicative of admirable self-control and suggests alcohol as a comfort suitable for manly men. Toward the end of the novel, Marlowe, with his hands cuffed behind his back, manages to shoot his adversary Lash Canino four times, killing him. Chandler uses Marlowe's physicality and fearlessness in this encounter to portray him as a strong and brave man's man. To complete the picture, Marlowe has an honorable moral compass. He claims his motivation in taking General Sternwood's blackmail case has been "to protect what little pride a broken and sick old man has left in his blood." Thus, Chandler characterizes Marlowe's masculinity as fitting the traditional upstanding American stereotype, and as a great personal asset.

Yet Marlowe's masculinity is also inflexible, marring his interactions with women and homosexual men with prejudice. When meeting his client's daughter Mrs. Regan for the first time, Marlowe notes, "She was worth a stare. She was trouble." Mrs. Regan's attractiveness makes Marlowe uneasy. As a result, he feels uncertain of the power dynamics in their encounter, as he implies keeping her under control would be "trouble." This suggests Marlowe sees gender politics as based on power, and in particular that he considers true masculinity as hinging on men's authority. After both Mrs. Regan and her younger sister, Carmen, make separate, unaccepted sexual advances toward Marlowe, the macho hero of *The Big Sleep* is shaken: "You can have a hangover from other things than alcohol. I had one from women. Women made me sick." To Marlowe, confident female sexuality is a threat to be withstood. His inability to stomach the women's forward advances indicates his inability to accept overt female sexuality within his power-centered concept of masculinity.

The fact pornographic bookshop-owner Arthur Geiger and his male companion Carol Lundgren are lovers further offends Marlowe's idea of respectable manliness. He scorns and mocks them, seeing their homosexuality as a failure to achieve appropriate American masculinity. Marlowe also views Geiger's Chinese aesthetic as inappropriately feminine and not part of upstanding American culture: "The Chinese junk on the walls, the rug, the fussy lamps [...] had a stealthy nastiness, like a fag party." The strength of Marlowe's reaction and wording reveals his discomfort with alternative male lifestyles, as Geiger's foreign tastes identify his otherness. The word "stealthy" here implies a form of hostility toward proper—in Marlowe's mind, synonymous with masculine—values.

Marlowe's rigid sense of his own masculinity also scorns heterosexual men who do not meet his strict standards. Grifter

Harry Jones becomes involved with Agnes Lozelle, a fact Marlowe finds highly amusing as he thinks Jones is too short for her. Marlowe mockingly warns Jones "the blonde" will "roll on" him and "smother" him in bed. Marlowe's contempt for Jones emphasizes how he equates masculinity with power and control, requiring an accompanying commanding stature. Yet Jones later lies to his interrogator and then murderer Lash Canino to protect Agnes. This selfless act of courage shocks Marlowe, who realizes he misjudged Jones. Jones's strength of character still cannot win Marlowe's true respect, however, and the detective continues to refer to him as "little dead man" even after his brave self-sacrifice.

Marlowe's disdain for Jones offers an insight into the reason for private detective's solitary lifestyle. Even though Jones is a potential ally, Marlowe ridicules him about his height, a fact that seems irrelevant given the essential information the "little man" can provide, not to mention the courage he demonstrates. As such, Marlowe's notions of gender norms distance him from would-be allies and causes him internal suffering.

Marlowe's adverse reaction to Mrs. Regan and Carmen's sexual advances further constitutes a physical manifestation of an internal struggle. Chandler represents Marlowe's distaste for forward female sexuality as moral strength in withstanding their wiles. Yet, Marlowe's frustrated relationship with these women reveals a form of masculinity that cannot tolerate female sexual autonomy. His masculinity only seeks to dominate, or at least withstand threats to its authority. Again, this approach leaves him isolated.

Chandler represents Marlowe as the ideal manly man—strong, fearless, honorable, and able to hold his drink. Yet Marlowe enjoys these personal assets in isolation. His disdain and prejudice toward women and those he considers lesser men leaves Marlowe with no allies, friends, or confidantes. His scorn for femininity and otherness reveals Marlowe's concept of masculinity hinges on ideas male authority and propriety. He is unable to accept lifestyles that do not fit into this rigid world view, exhibiting physical stress when his values are challenged. Thus, while Chandler's personal masculinity might seem iconic, such a lifestyle is inherently limiting and deeply harmful.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CYANIDE

In *The Big Sleep*, cyanide poison reflects the fact that grim and shameful deaths are largely reserved for the lower criminal classes in 1930s L.A., while certain "elite" criminals remain untouchable. Cyanide thus highlights the hypocrisy and divide within the criminal world, wherein certain forms of "successful" immorality committed by high-powered individuals are accepted. Mona Mars notably hides out near a cyanide factory that produces the poison for bug "fumigation," implying cyanide is a death for lesser creatures. Marlowe also notes how grifter Harry Jones dies "like a poisoned rat" when Eddie Mars's hired assassin Lash Canino laces Jones's whiskey with cyanide. Mars and Canino are powerful yet deeply immoral men in the criminal world, whereas Jones—despite being a grifter—is ultimately presented as a man with integrity. Jones dies only after lying to Canino to protect a friend, meaning he is not a "rat" at all and in fact possesses clear strength of character. The fact that this does not protect him from a gruesome death—while Mars and Canino emerge from this specific encounter unscathed—highlights the unfairness of "justice" meted out in this world and how, ironically, only extreme criminality is protected. Indeed, the novel does not link death by cyanide with any members of the elite criminal world, as successful racketeers like Mars are protected by their social status and financial resources.

The state authorities also notably use cyanide gas as a form of execution. As Marlowe tells murderer Carol Lundgren, "that's what they call humane execution in our state now," referring to cyanide gas. This suggests the authorities also see such lowly criminals as an inconvenience to be exterminated—even as they turn a blind eye to or even work with bigger fish like Eddie Mars. The social immobility of 1930s L.A. means cyanide-related deaths are for the lowly grifters of the city alone.

KNIGHTS

Knights in *The Big Sleep* symbolize private detective Philip Marlowe himself, and come to specifically reflect his growing sense of powerlessness to combat the immorality around him. Marlowe is often referred to by other characters as a "soldier," as he is a hired man with a mission. As Marlowe walks into the home of his client, General Sternwood, for the first time, Marlowe notices a stained-glass window featuring a knight attempting to free a tied up "damsel" in distress. Marlowe thinks to himself that he wants to jump into the scene to help the knight, as the knight does not seem to be making any progress. This reveals Marlowe's moral compass and desire to help those in need.

A notable turning point is when Marlowe looks despondently at the chessboard in his apartment after being visited by Carmen Sternwood. Playing chess by himself, Marlowe reverses a move he makes with a knight, commenting, "Knights had no meaning in this game." Marlowe thinks knights, like himself, are not powerful or influential enough to swing the game—in his case, the game of life and death playing out in 1930s L.A. In keeping with this pessimism, at the end of the novel Marlowe spots the same glass panel in Sternwood's home and notes that the knight "still wasn't getting anywhere." Upon this second

viewing, Marlowe quietly accepts the knight's failure, with no suggestion that he wishes to intervene. Despite all of the mysteries the detective has solved and lies he has uncovered, then, Marlowe does not feel that he is actually effecting positive change in this seedy world, or even improving his own immediate situation.

MONEY

In author Raymond Chandler's depiction of 1930s L.A., the characters' obsession with money represents how society's focus on personal gain causes social immobility and moral decay. Those who scramble to make a little money find themselves in danger, as those at the top of society will not make room for them. For example, "little man" Harry Jones ends up dead "like a poisoned rat," for poking his nose into "manicured" Eddie Mars's business, showing how wealthy racketeers keep the lower-class criminals in their place. Meanwhile, those same "well-dressed" elites can afford to buy the police's loyalty and keep their names out of the newspapers, keeping their wealth and social status secure. Philip Marlowe—one of the few characters with a clear moral compass in the novel—scorns society's obsession with money. When Mrs. Regan offers him money to keep quiet about her murdered husband, Marlowe replies ironically "Uh-huh … I haven't a feeling or a scruple in the world. All I have the itch for is money." Here Marlowe directly contrasts morality and money, suggesting the two are incompatible. Marlowe even suggests that it is because of his morals that he does not make much money. As such, the characters' obsession with making money leaves no room for morality, leading to the city's moral degradation.

RAIN AND STORMS

Storms and rain symbolize impending trouble throughout *The Big Sleep*, the ominous weather building tension as the plot moves toward its two main deadly climaxes. As Marlowe meets with his client General Sternwood in the opening pages of the novel, a storm is brewing in the foothills behind the Sternwood mansion. This suggests that trouble is on the way, darkening the horizon as Marlowe agrees to take on a case that will see him beaten, shot at, tied up, and on the wrong side of the city police. Rain notably starts to fall as Marlowe tails Sternwood's blackmailer, Arthur Gwynn Geiger. Following Geiger back to his house, Marlowe notes a camera flash goes off within the house "like a wave of summer lightning," the climax before three shots ring out from inside and Geiger falls to the floor. Later in the novel, the rain returns as Marlowe approaches Mona Mars's hiding place, anticipating a showdown with her lethal bodyguard Lash Canino. Marlowe notably kills his adversary amid a dramatic deluge. Yet just as Marlowe cannot control the torrential rain ripping through the roof of his convertible, neither can he control the wider immoral climate of 1930s L.A., as the city sweeps Marlowe away in its tide of "nastiness" just as it does everyone else.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Big Sleep* published in 1939.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Over the entrance doors … there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair … I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

On the very first page of the novel, author Raymond Chandler depicts his protagonist, Philip Marlowe, as an innately good man focused on action. He is immediately drawn to the knight in the stained-glass, an association that will recur throughout the novel to underline Marlowe's sense of morality. Marlowe cannot stand by and watch injustices continuing to go unresolved. Even when seeing this stained-glass painting in the hallway of the Sternwood mansion, Marlowe's instinct is to intervene and set things right. The private detective's determination to see the damsel saved, as well as him optimism in his own abilities, mark him out as a knight too, one that focuses on getting the job done. As such, the reader has a positive image of Marlowe as a dependable figure from the opening lines of the book. In contrast, the painted knight's ineffectiveness lays the thematic foundation for Chandler's representation of ineffective leadership throughout the story.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ He didn't know the right people. That's all a police record means in this rotten crime-ridden country.

Related Characters: Vivian Regan (speaker), Philip Marlowe, Owen Taylor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Philip Marlowe and Vivian Regan are sitting in the private detective's office, discussing the death of Mrs. Regan's hired driver, Owen Taylor. Taylor had driven himself off a pier the previous night and died. The police discovered Taylor had a criminal record during their subsequent investigation, but Mrs. Regan waves away the supposedly negative connotations of Taylor's record. Her scathing comments imply that Taylor's record is meaningless because everyone in America is a criminal and no one stays on the right side of the law. Only those with the proper connections go unpunished for their misdeeds, she says, underscoring the depth of corruption and unfairness of justice in her world; average men like Taylor face consequences for crimes that those with who "know the right people" would get away with. Mrs. Regan's cynical tone demonstrates how she had given up on American society, assuming the worst of everyone.

"You ought to stop some of that flash gambling," I said. "With the syndicate we got in this county? Be your age, Marlowe."

Related Characters: Bernie Ohls, Philip Marlowe (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Private detective Philip Marlowe worked in the police with Chief Investigator Bernie Ohls before being fired, meaning they have known each other for a long time. In this scene, Marlowe challenges Ohls about what the private investigator sees as neglect of duty—allowing illegal activities to take place without interruption. Ohls patronizes Marlowe with a cynical response that claims to be a realist perspective. The "syndicate" Ohls mentions refers to criminal networks of corruption that include high-level figures in the police. Within this context, Ohls immediately discredits Marlowe's suggestion that the police actually do their job and stop illegal activity. In this way, author Raymond Chandler depicts 1930s L.A. as a hopeless case, if the police themselves are part of the corruption leading to the city's moral decay.

Chapter 12 Quotes

A pretty, spoiled and not very bright little girl who had gone very, very wrong, and nobody was doing anything about it. To hell with the rich. They made me sick.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Arthur Gwynn Geiger, Carmen Sternwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Philip Marlowe and Carmen Sternwood are standing together, looking at each other, in the house of Arthur Gwynn Geiger. Geiger was shot in his own house the previous night in front of Carmen, who was drunk and naked at the time, posing for Geiger's pornographic photography. Marlowe thinks that because Carmen comes from a very wealthy family, she has no excuse for being involved in such immoral practices and criminal activity. Beyond belittling Carmen herself, though, he points the finger of blame at her family, who in his estimation ought to intervene and guide her behavior. Instead, they've let Carmen become "spoiled" and wild. This leads Marlowe to despair of the rich, who do not use the opportunity that wealth provides to keep themselves out of the moral filth of 1930s L.A. The lack of moral guidance in Carmen's life also reflects the lack of moral guidance in the city as whole, which is depicted in the novel as wanting for authority figures with genuine strength and integrity.

Chapter 13 Quotes

His eyes went narrow. The veneer had flaked off him, leaving a well-dressed hard boy with a Luger.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Eddie Mars

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Eddie Mars arrives while Marlowe is still at Geiger's house. This is Marlowe's first introduction to the gangster, with whom Marlowe quickly becomes locked in a battle of wills. Bluffing, Mars says he will call the police about Geiger's murder, and Marlowe agrees that might be a good idea. Mars dislikes the private detective's confidence, as well as the fact that Marlowe shows no fear of Mars or the police. In this moment Mars's pleasant front vanishes, and the gangster's Luger (his gun) shows more about his true identity than his flashy suit. This moment shows that even wealthy racketeers like Mars are just criminals at heart, no matter how proper they may make themselves appear. This particular criminal just has more money than most.

❝ I know you, Mr. Mars. The Cypress Club at Las Olindas. Flash gambling for flash people. The local law in your pocket and a wellgreased line into L.A. In other words, protection.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Arthur Gwynn Geiger, Eddie Mars

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

During their first encounter at the scene of Arthur Geiger's murder the previous night, Marlowe and Eddie Mars continue to size each other up. While Mars does not know who Marlowe is, the shrewd private detective knows plenty about Mars. Marlowe's scathing description shows he has no respect for Mars or his line of business. The private detective's comments reveal that L.A.'s moral corruption has spread from beyond criminal circles into the elite social sphere, the city police, and even the city government. Mars is protected by his connections with the law—which, in Marlowe's mind, makes the law just as corrupt as the criminal before him. With society's leaders involved in such illicit activities, Chandler both despairs at how society can regain morality and blames those in authority for betraying their positions of responsibility.

❝ The muzzle of the Luger looked like the mouth of the Second Street tunnel, but I didn't move. Not being bullet proof is an idea I had had to get used to.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Eddie Mars

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Gangster Eddie Mars has his gun pointed directly at private detective Philip Marlowe, as Mars orders Marlowe to open the front door of Geiger's house. Marlowe ignores the order, refusing to be intimidated. Deploying one of his characteristically vivid similes, author Raymond Chandler represents his protagonist as having nerves of steel. This characterization reflects the world in which Marlowe lives, one in which many guns have been pointed at him, to the extent that he has become desensitized to such a threat. Marlowe's exposure to L.A.'s dark criminal underworld has made him strong and fearless, adding to his strongly masculine identity. Nevertheless, Marlowe's tone also betrays his cynicism. As life and death situations have become routine for him, he almost expects other people to point guns at him.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ "What?" the blonde yelped. "You sit there and try to tell us Mr. Geiger ran that kind of business right down on the main drag? You're nuts!" I leered at her politely. "Sure I do. Everybody knows the racket exists. Hollywood's made to order for it. If a thing like that has to exist, then right out on the street is where all practical coppers want it to exist. For the same reason they favor red light districts. They know where to flush the game when they want to."

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe, "The Blonde" / Agnes Lozelle (speaker), Joe Brody, Arthur Gwynn Geiger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Philip Marlowe is in Joe Brody's house, interrogating the grifter and his lover Agnes Lozelle about their involvement in Arthur Geiger's death. Geiger ran an illegal pornographic store on the "main drag" of town, a racket (criminal business venture) that Joe and Agnes then tried to steal off Geiger. At first, Joe and Agnes aim to deny all knowledge of the racket, but Marlowe doesn't believe their fake outrage. Instead, Marlowe posits why the police allow such stores to run, the explanation itself implying that the authorities are

neglecting their duties. The fact that "everybody knows" about Geiger's illicit store emphasizes the moral decay of 1930s L.A., as even the authorities specifically charged with protecting law and order do not uphold the law when it is being broken right in front of them.

As a narrator, Marlowe's continual reference to Agnes by the color of her hair objectifies her. She is a caricature, rather than an individual. Marlowe's assumption that leering can be done "politely" further emphasizes his perspective of himself as the active subject in the situation, while Agnes is nothing more than an object to be looked at. It seems Chandler wrote his iconic masculine protagonist character from a distinctly male perspective, and for male readers; as this encounter shows, this comes at the expense of the female characters, who lack genuine humanity and depth.

Chapter 18 Quotes

"I'm kind of glad that Taylor kid went off the pier. I'd hate to have to help send him to the deathhouse for rubbing that skunk.

Related Characters: Bernie Ohls (speaker), Philip Marlowe, Arthur Gwynn Geiger, Owen Taylor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Having figured out that Owen Taylor killed pornographic photographer Arthur Geiger, Marlowe has called his long-time police contact Chief Investigator Bernie Ohls to the scene of the crime. Ohls's perspective on the situation reveals his dissatisfaction with the country's legal system. The police were unable to arrest the relatively wealthy Geiger due to his protection via his corrupt criminal network. As such, Ohls is pleased to hear of Geiger's death, and that he will not have to arrest the working-class Taylor for getting rid of Geiger as the police ought to have done themselves. This underscores the corruption and ineffectual nature of the police, who rely on other criminals to do their dirty work. Ohls also is glad that he does not have to arrest Taylor because the boy committed suicide, giving the Chief Investigator's perspective a dark tone and showing the fatal consequences of the city's moral decay.

"It's obvious to anybody with eyes that that store is just a front for something. But the Hollywood police allowed it to operate, for their own reasons. I dare say the Grand Jury would like to know what those reasons are." Wilde grinned. He said: "Grand Juries do ask those embarrassing questions sometimes—in a rather vain effort to find out just why cities are run as they are run."

Related Characters: Taggart Wilde, Philip Marlowe (speaker), Arthur Gwynn Geiger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

District Attorney Taggart Wilde is hearing private detective Philip Marlowe's story of how he discovered the identity of Arthur Gwynn Geiger's murderer. Marlowe describes Geiger's illegal pornography outlet, and criticizes the L.A. city police for "allowing" the store to continue running in plain sight. In a bid to protect his client, Marlowe threatens to add his criticism to his police statement, which would create trouble for the corrupt city police during the inquest. Wilde's knowing response, and his patronizing view of juries' attempts to uncover the truth, reveal the immoral climate in 1930s L.A., where the authorities not only fail to uphold the law but even undermine due legal process.

Cops get very large and emphatic when an outsider tries to hide anything, but they do the same things themselves every other day, to oblige their friends or anybody with a little pull.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Taggart Wilde

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

In a one-to-one conversation with District Attorney Taggart Wilde, private detective Philip Marlowe criticizes the L.A. police force. Marlowe's accusations reveal his cynicism, as he despairs of a hopelessly corrupt system that cannot ensure justice is served. Marlowe sees the system as unfair, as he, a relatively poor and poorly connected private

detective who stays on the right side of the law, nevertheless finds himself on the wrong side of the police. Meanwhile, criminals can influence the authorities as long as they have the money, as suggested by his use of the phrase "a little pull." With the authorities and society's elite engaging in such illicit activities, the city's immorality seems irredeemable.

I've done all my office permits—and maybe a good deal more—to save the old man from grief. But in the long run it can't be done. Those girls of his are bound certain to hook up with something that can't be hushed, especially that little blonde brat. They ought not to be running around loose. I blame the old man for that.

Related Characters: Taggart Wilde (speaker), Carmen Sternwood, Vivian Regan, General Sternwood, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Talking man-to-man with private detective Philip Marlowe, District Attorney Taggart Wilde admits to overstepping the boundaries of his role to assist long-term friend, and Marlowe's client, the rich General Sternwood. Wilde says Sternwood has failed in his parental responsibilities, leaving his daughters to become caught up in L.A.'s criminal underworld. The girls' example shows how the city's immorality has spread into every level of society, as leadership figures, including the parallel examples of fathers and the police, have failed in their duties. Author Raymond Chandler thus blames the authorities for the city's moral decay.

The fact that Wilde and Sternwood both come from old families also reflects how such networks protect the wealthy from the public exposure and punishment that the average person would face when breaking the law as Sternwood's daughters do. As such, social connections determine one's accountability before the law in L.A. Wilde does not seek to hide this unfairness from Marlowe, given the routine nature of such corruption.

Chapter 20 Quotes

"General Sternwood's a rich man," I said. "He's an old friend of the D.A.'s father. If he wants to hire a fulltime boy to run errands for him, that's no reflection on the police. It's just a luxury he is able to afford himself."

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Captain Al Gregory, General Sternwood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Marlowe serves the interests of his wealthy client General Sternwood, as Marlowe explains here to Captain Gregory of the Missing Persons Bureau. This characterizes Marlowe as the rich man's knight, sent out on dangerous "errands" for his lord. This reveals the social structure of L.A.'s dark underworld. While Sternwood is not directly involved in illegal activity himself, he is nevertheless caught up in that world as blackmailers seek his money. At the top of the social ladder, Sternwood can hire protection in the form of Marlowe, rather than getting his own hands dirty. Marlowe, meanwhile, has a wide skill set, but no resources, meaning he must sell his abilities to make a living completing others' missions, rather than seeking his own success.

He's got friends in town, or he wouldn't be what he is.

Related Characters: Captain Al Gregory (speaker), Terrence "Rusty" Regan, Mona Mars, Philip Marlowe, Eddie Mars

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

At the Missing Persons Bureau, private detective Philip Marlowe and Captain Al Gregory are discussing a missing persons case that involves Eddie Mars—his wife Mona is one of the missing people, along with Rusty Regan. Eddie has not been completely cooperative with the police investigation, because, as Gregory notes, Eddie is effectively above the law. Eddie's wealth, earned from his criminal empire, gives him the resources to buy many "friends" across the city. Here, Gregory ties Eddie's

resources and network with the criminal's very identity—it is Eddie's security and social standing that allows him to operate in the way he does. Although immoral and unfair, Gregory states this situation as a simple fact, underscoring the cynicism prevalent in 1930s L.A., as everyone accepts and expects the rampant corruption that characterizes the city.

Chapter 21 Quotes

Eddie Mars would have been very unlikely to involve himself in a double murder just because another man had gone to town with the blonde he was not even living with ... If there had been a lot of money involved, that would be different. But fifteen grand wouldn't be a lot of money to Eddie Mars. He was no two-bit chiseler like Brody.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Joe Brody, Mona Mars, Terrence "Rusty" Regan, Eddie Mars

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

Thinking back over his recent case, private detective Philip Marlowe considers whether Eddie Mars has killed Rusty Regan for running off with his wife Mona Mars. Marlowe thinks it unlikely, because the $15,000 Rusty always wore in his clothes would not have been enough of a draw for Mars to kill him. Mars belongs to a higher social class of criminals, known as racketeers, rather than the lowly criminals known as grifters, like Joe Brody, who scrape by on petty blackmailing schemes. This well-developed ecosystem of criminals highlights the depths of 1930s L.A.'s moral depravity, as interconnecting layers of criminality—murders, thievery, racketeering—all overlap and draw upon one another.

Carol Lundgren, the boy killer with the limited vocabulary, was out of circulation for a long, long time, even if they didn't strap him in a chair over a bucket of acid. They wouldn't, because he would take a plea and save the county money. They all do when they don't have the price of a big lawyer.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Joe Brody, Carol Lundgren

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

After solving the more surface-level aspects of his current case, Marlowe reflects to himself on each of the characters involved. Carol Lundgren has been arrested for murdering Joe Brody in a misplaced revenge killing. Earlier, Marlowe had taunted the boy over the county's chosen form of execution—cyanide. But, Marlowe reflects, Lundgren is unlikely to meet this end. Instead Lundgren will likely plead guilty and face life in prison. Marlowe thinks to himself that this is the only option left to Lundgren as he cannot afford a good lawyer to fight for his freedom. By extension, Chandler shows how the poor are left to rot in prison where richer criminals can buy their freedom, in a failure of the system to allow equal access to justice. Again, this underscores the depth of the corruption and immorality within L.A. society.

I have my pipe line into headquarters, or I wouldn't be here. I get them the way they happen, not the way you read them in the papers.

Related Characters: Eddie Mars (speaker), Captain Al Gregory, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Career criminal Eddie Mars has invited Marlowe into his office at his illegal casino. The two men are now on good terms, as Marlowe has kept Mars's name out of his statement to the police regarding Geiger's murder. Mars's arrogant boasting here, phrased in similar terms to Captain Gregory's earlier statement, reveals the interconnected layers of corruption between L.A.'s criminal world and the city's police. Yet Mars adds another layer into this immoral world, hinting that the newspapers also hide the truth of the city's depravity. Mars benefits from his connections, which keep him in higher social circles and protect him from being arrested for his crimes. As such, L.A. appears innately corrupt and unfair, as those as the top use their resources

to ensure they maintain their social standing and never face repercussions for their actions.

I wish old Sternwood would hire himself a soldier like you on a straight salary, to keep those girls of his home at least a few nights a week.

Related Characters: Eddie Mars (speaker), Carmen Sternwood, Vivian Regan, General Sternwood, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

During a private discussion between Philip Marlowe and Eddie Mars in the latter's office, Mars intends to compliment the private detective on his impressive skillset, but instead characterizes Marlowe as a hand for hire. With limited financial resources himself, Marlowe must sell his abilities to make a living. Meanwhile the wealthy General Sternwood can hire a "soldier" to do his dirty work while he rests at home. Using the term "soldier," Mars draws on a symbol that appears throughout the novel that characterizes Marlowe as a knight, sent out on order by his lord. Here, Mars suggests Marlowe's greatest contribution to General Sternwood's family would be to wrangle the old man's two troublesome daughters, Mrs. Vivian Regan and Carmen Sternwood, a mission worthy of a knight.

Chapter 23 Quotes

"We're his blood. That's the hell of it." She stared at me in the mirror with deep, distant eyes. "I don't want him to die despising his own blood. It was always wild blood, but it wasn't always rotten blood."

Related Characters: Vivian Regan (speaker), General Sternwood, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 148

Explanation and Analysis

On the return trip to the Sternwood mansion after a night at the casino, Mrs. Regan opens up emotionally to Marlowe. She admits to hiding her misdeeds from her father, General Sternwood, so that he would not be ashamed of his family, or blood. Despite her wealth, Mrs. Regan has become embroiled in L.A. criminal circles, gambling, drinking too much, and as Marlowe will later discover, covering up her husband's murder. Caught up in the city's immorality, Mrs. Regan feels powerless, making no attempt to separate herself from or apologize for such depravity. Yet Mrs. Regan's primary motive for keeping these revelations from her father is not fear of punishment, but shame. She represents all the people lost to the city's moral decay, unable to pull themselves out of the "nastiness" that extends far beyond their own actions.

That makes you just a killer at heart, like all cops.

Related Characters: Vivian Regan (speaker), Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

As they drive home from the casino, Mrs. Regan and Philip Marlowe discuss the many recent, fatal events involving them both, as well as her family. Marlowe denies killing two men who had recently been shot, but teases he could also have killed them and not been punished for it. Mrs. Regan dislikes Marlowe's casual reference to killing, characterizing him as being the same as the police—too comfortable with killing. Her cynical attitude reveals a lack of trust in vital state organs, as the police ought to serve and protect their constituents. Instead, Mrs. Regan sees "all cops" as simply killers. Moral boundaries in the city have blurred, as Mrs. Regan suggests all killings in the city have become self-serving as the authorities disregard their moral obligation to uphold law and order.

Chapter 24 Quotes

I looked down at the chessboard. The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Carmen Sternwood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: Book Page 156

Explanation and Analysis

Knights appear frequently in the novel as a parallel to private detective Philip Marlowe's perception of his own abilities. Here, in his own home, as his client's daughter Carmen Sternwood tries and fails to seduce Marlowe, he sees himself as powerless in a wider, cruel game of chess, with many moving pieces that surpass his own influence. Marlowe feels unable to control the situation in which he finds himself, and unable to ensure the victory by himself. Instead, he exhibits indecision, by moving and then replacing the chess piece, unsure if he has taken the right course in solving his current case. This powerlessness reflects Marlowe's relatively low social standing, with little money and few contacts. Men with far greater resources control this game, Marlowe perceives, and even his strong sense of morality can do little to fix the corrupt society in which he operates.

Chapter 25 Quotes

You can have a hangover from other things than alcohol. I had one from women. Women made me sick.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Carmen Sternwood, Vivian Regan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after both Mrs. Regan and Carmen Sternwood have separately attempted to seduce Philip Marlowe, the iconic masculine private detective is physically shaken. He feels sickened by what he sees as their moral depravity, attempting to sleep with a man that is not their husband. Yet his discomfort also belies his inability to stomach confident female sexuality. Marlowe does not feel physically sick, for example, at seeing people shoot others dead before his eyes, clearly a morally reprehensible act. Rather, Marlowe prides himself on his quick, proactive responses in such situations. But here, following a perceived attack on his masculine authority—in which he perceives himself as always the leading, active subject—Marlowe cannot digest his experiences of the night before: unwanted sexual advances. This reflects the novel's broader gender dynamics, as it seems to celebrate stereotypical masculinity at the expense of all other identities.

She's a grifter, shamus. I'm a grifter. We're all grifters. So we sell each other out for a nickel.

Related Characters: Harry Jones (speaker), "The Blonde" / Agnes Lozelle, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Self-professed grifter, or low-ranking petty criminal, Harry Jones sums up his existence to private detective Philip Marlowe by describing his and his comrades', including Agnes Lozelle's, obsession with money. These grifters prioritize money over their relationships, and over anyone else. Their total focus on making money leaves them isolated, with no true allies. As such, grifters represent the depressing fallout of a morally corrupt society. Additionally, grifters' approach to money is not so different from the higher-level criminals known as racketeers, who have the same criminal heart, but a more impressive exterior. Jones's statement, then, takes on wider significance, as he speaks for most of L.A. as he characterizes the city's inhabitants, of all social strata, as crawling over each other as they pursue their own interests.

He puffed evenly and stared at me level-eyed, a funny little hard guy I could have thrown from home plate to second base. A small man in a big man's world. There was something I liked about him.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Harry Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Private detective Philip Marlowe repeatedly underestimates petty thief Harry Jones because the latter

is short. Marlowe mocks Jones to his face, patronizes him, and misjudges his strength of character. Yet the only characteristic that Marlowe uses to justify his distain is Jones's height. Thus, Marlowe's sense of his own masculinity, in part tied to his physical might, is flawed. Marlowe is tall, strong, and handsome, which gives him a feeling of superiority over "little man" Jones. Marlowe's masculinity comes at Jones' expense, leading to Marlowe's patronizing tone, and the loss of a potentially key ally. Intentional on the part of Chandler or not, this implicitly highlights the perils of clinging too rigidly to restrictive masculine ideals.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ Once outside the law you're all the way outside. You think he's just a gambler. I think he's a pornographer, a blackmailer, a hot car broker, a killer by remote control, and a suborner of crooked cops. He's whatever looks good to him, whatever has the cabbage pinned to it. Don't try to sell me on any high-souled racketeers. They don't come in that pattern.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Eddie Mars, Mona Mars

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

After Marlowe discovers the missing Mona Mars's hiding place, the conversation turns to her husband Eddie Mars, a racketeer, or criminal boss. The stakes are high for Marlowe, who must convince Mona that her husband would order thugs to kill Marlowe, as the detective is currently tied to a sofa, awaiting the hired goons' return. Marlowe reasons that once someone has abandoned morality in one area, they fully let go of all morals. To the morally upright Marlowe, as he sees himself, there are no blurred lines. Eddie's example represents the wider moral depravity of L.A., a city rife with corruption and criminality of all kinds. To Marlowe, the entire city itself is all the way over the line.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ Being a copper I like to see the law win. I'd like to see the flashy well-dressed mugs like Eddie Mars spoiling their manicures in the rock quarry at Folsom, alongside of the poor little slum-bred hard guys that got knocked over on their first caper and never had a break since. That's what I'd like. You and me both lived too long to think I'm likely to see it happen. Not in this town, not in any town half this size, in any part of this wide, green and beautiful U.S.A. We just don't run our country that way.

Related Characters: Captain Al Gregory (speaker), Mona Mars, Eddie Mars, Philip Marlowe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

After solving the case, private detective Philip Marlowe returns to the Missing Persons Bureau in part to see why Captain Gregory had not found the missing Mona Mars himself. Gregory's speech about the realities of 1930s L.A., including police corruption and the powerful influence of racketeers such as Eddie Mars, highlights a cynicism that pervades the novel. Gregory believes his wishes for law and order cannot be fulfilled, and cannot imagine a town in the USA where justice is served fairly. Wider society has abandoned morality, and those with money get away with it, while those without the resources are at the mercy of a corrupt system, a system in which those on top protect their authority.

❝ The knight in the stained-glass window still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), General Sternwood

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the conclusion of the novel, private detective Philip Marlowe returns to General Sternwood's mansion to debrief the old man on the case. In the lobby, Marlowe sees a picture of a knight for the second time. On his first visit to

the house, Marlowe wanted to step into the scene to help the knight, confident in his ability to save the damsel in distress. On this visit, Marlowe simply notes the knight remains unsuccessful in his attempt to right the wrong before him. Often equated to a knight in the novel, Marlowe's acceptance of the knight's powerlessness reflects his own resigned sense of impotence. This new, pessimistic Marlowe emerges after solving his case has led to multiple deaths, and not to the punishment of key guilty parties.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), Terrence "Rusty" Regan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

In Marlowe's closing remarks, he reflects on the great equalizer—death. Throughout the novel, characters have risen and fallen in a citywide struggle to survive L.A.'s brutal criminal underworld and come out on top. But, Marlowe, reflects, "the big sleep"—or death—makes all that status irrelevant; everyone—rich or poor, cop or criminal—will die, and where one lies in death doesn't matter to the dead themselves. As such, the fact that L.A.'s residents sell each other out in their obsession with money also seems pointless. Marlowe's reference to a "dirty sump" refers to the grim resting place of Rusty Regan, whose remains were unceremoniously dumped in an old oilfield.

❝ Me, I was part of the nastiness now ... But the old man didn't have to be. He could lie quiet in his canopied bed, with his bloodless hands folded on the sheet, waiting.

Related Characters: Philip Marlowe (speaker), General Sternwood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

Philip Marlowe, the novel's narrator, feels he has been sucked into the dark criminal world in his home city, L.A., during the course of investigating a case for his client, General Sternwood. What separates these two men, essentially, is money. The rich old man can afford to hire Marlowe and send the detective out on missions. Meanwhile Marlowe must sell his skillset to make a living, rather than using his abilities for his own personal benefit. Marlowe gets his hands dirty, mired in the city's immoral "nastiness," while his wealthy client Sternwood sits in the wings, watching his employee do his bidding. This moment again underscores the depth of the corruption in this world, where everyone is guilty—whether or not they deign to get their hands dirty.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

A **storm** gathers as first-person narrator Philip Marlowe arrives at the Sternwood mansion near the hills. He is "sober" and "well-dressed" for the occasion. He takes in the impressive hallway and its extravagant decoration, including a **stained-glass window showing a knight** failing to save a damsel in distress, and a dark, brooding family portrait. Behind the house lies a well-stocked garage and a chauffeur, extensive gardens, and a greenhouse.

Marlowe approaches the Sternwood mansion full of confidence—sure of his appearance and certain of his own ability to help damsels in distress. Yet the darkening storm clouds on the horizon herald an ominous future coming for him. The extravagance of his client's mansion underscores their immense wealth and privilege .

A very young, good-looking woman comes into the hallway. She begins to compliment Marlowe, who quips back ironically, uninterested, telling her his name is "Doghouse Reilly." She falls, making him catch her, just as the butler, Mr. Norris walks in. The woman disappears up the stairs, and the butler leads Marlowe away toward General Sternwood, explaining Marlowe just met Carmen Sternwood.

Carmen's shameless flirting serves as Marlowe's first warning that the Sternwood's money has not ensured their moral superiority. Rather, the fact the butler seems unsurprised by Carmen's behavior suggests her manner with Marlowe is routine and always goes unchallenged.

CHAPTER 2

Mr. Norris leads Marlowe through the gardens to the greenhouse. It is swelteringly hot and humid inside, and filled with orchids. At the center, frail old General Sternwood is sitting in his wheelchair, unable to feel the heat. Sternwood offers Marlowe a brandy and Marlowe lights up a cigarette. The General can have neither. Instead, he complains about the smell and look of the orchids, as well as his ill-health. Then, the butler returns with Marlowe's drink.

The frail General contrasts with the greenhouse is ironic, a place of life and vitality. The old man can neither smoke nor drink given his ill health, instead living vicariously through the young, strong, and masculine Marlowe.

The General asks Marlowe to introduce himself. He says that he is 33, somewhat educated, a former police officer, and "unmarried." The General adds that Marlowe seems cynical. The detective responds he was "fired" from the police "for insubordination." The General approves.

Given his age and experience, the General's approval of Marlowe's cynical attitude suggests this is a positive character trait, and a wise approach to a complicated world.

Marlowe tells the General what he knows of the Sternwood family: that the General is a widower, with two "wild" daughters, the eldest of whom, Vivian, is currently married to an "ex-bootlegger" called Rusty Regan. The General admits to being friendly with Rusty, who used to sit with the old man and tell him tales from the Irish revolution. But then Rusty disappeared suddenly a few weeks ago, the General tells Marlowe.

Marlowe's to-the-point assessment of the Sternwoods, as well as the General's unashamed confirmation, shows that moral rectitude is dying out in this city. Even the wealthy elite make no effort to appear respectable. The eldest daughter has married a series of men, the most recent a criminal for whom the General has deep affection.

But the General's main point is that he's being blackmailed, "again." The first time was by a man called Joe Brody, whom the General paid off to leave Carmen alone. The General gives Marlowe the envelope with a threat inside: a note from an Arthur Gwynn Geiger, enclosing $5,000 in gambling-related I.O.U.s, signed by Carmen.

The immorality extends beyond the Sternwood family, as multiple parties have attempted to blackmail the General. His money makes him a target for the city's vast criminal underworld, populated with figures seeking to make their own fortunes.

The General explains he will not talk to Carmen about it, as she would just make a face at him. Marlowe asks for more information about the girls. General Sternwood tells him they go about their own business, and that no Sternwood ever had "moral sense." The girls are educated, he explains, though that doesn't seem to have helped Carmen develop. The General does not claim to be a good parent, but nor is he a hypocrite, he insists.

In this exchange, the General states clearly that the Sternwoods' wealth has never had a positive effect on their morality. Rather, the father has low expectations of his daughters, and thus has offered them little guidance in this respect. Carmen is barely educated, with the General seeming completely unconcerned about her lack of personal development. Indeed, the General has no qualms about admitting his neglectful parenting.

Marlowe advises the General to pay off the blackmailer, as it is not a large amount of money, and will be an annoyance to deal with otherwise. From the way Geiger has delivered his threat, Marlowe thinks the man must be experienced in pressuring rich victims. The detective then asks about Joe Brody, whom the General describes as a gambler. Marlowe next asks whether the General's daughters have their own **money**. Vivian has a little from her mother, while her younger sister Carmen is not yet old enough to enter her inheritance. They both have allowances.

Marlowe's readiness to give in to the blackmailer reveals his cynicism, as he sees such threats as the normal course of action in this society, and as such it is perhaps easier to simply pay up. The commonness of such activities also indicates the self-serving nature of the city. His attackers have no personal grudge against him—they are simply looking to cash in.

Marlowe says he is willing to look into Geiger for the General. He charges $25 a day and expenses. The General says he's willing to leave the matter entirely to the detective's discretion. Claiming tiredness, the General ends the meeting, and Mr. Norris arrives to escort Marlowe out of the greenhouse.

Changing his mind, Marlowe agrees to take the case, setting himself up to earn significantly less than the blackmailers are demanding. This contrast marks Marlowe as an honest man looking to right a wrong, much like the knight in the stained-glass window in the mansion's lobby.

Mr. Norris informs Marlowe that Mrs. Vivian Regan wishes to meet him. Marlowe dislikes that the butler has interfered, but Norris responds that Mrs. Regan could see them from her window. The two men share a strained look.

Marlowe's reluctance to meet Mrs. Regan indicates his pessimism about the meeting. He expects the worst from an unexpected encounter, one for which he has not prepared.

CHAPTER 3

Stepping into Mrs. Regan's vast upper sitting room, decorated in white and ivory, Marlowe can see the **storm** approaching through the window. The detective looks at Mrs. Regan, whom he thinks is "trouble." She hasn't bothered to hide her legs, and looks back at Marlowe over her drink.

Mrs. Regan sits in a symbolic ivory tower, looking out over the grounds below. As the dark clouds close in, Marlowe notes she is "trouble," due to her unconcealed sexuality. This puts Marlowe on edge, as Mrs. Regan's confidence and demeanor do not fit within his rigid ideas of appropriate gender norms.

Mrs. Regan asks Marlowe's opinion of her father, General Sternwood. Marlowe responds politely but she pushes further, asking if they discussed her missing husband, Rusty Regan. Marlowe gives noncommittal responses. Mrs. Regan then asks whether Marlowe thinks he can find Rusty, to which he responds it's the police's business.

The private detective dodges and deflects Mrs. Regan's questions, feeling at turns under interrogation and manipulated. Despite the fact she is his client's daughter, the detective does not trust her. The detective, it seems, trusts no one.

Mrs. Regan sounds a bell to call a maid in to replenish her drink. After the maid leaves, wordlessly, Marlowe asks Mrs. Regan for more information about Rusty's disappearance. When his manner antagonizes her, he defends himself by saying he only came up to her room on her invitation. Marlowe's direct response angers Mrs. Regan, who slams down her glass. Smiling, Marlowe lights a cigarette.

Mrs. Regan's silent commands to her maid demonstrate the distinct lines between the wealthy and servant social circles in this culture. Meanwhile, it is Marlowe's turn to interrogate his interlocutor, which displeases Mrs. Regan as she realizes she cannot maintain the upper hand in this dialogue. As such, their conversation resembles a battle rather than a casual chat.

Mrs. Regan realizes she's made a mistake, and that Marlowe is not looking for Rusty. She tells him to leave, and then to sit down. She appeals to Marlowe to find Rusty, but Marlowe sees through her pretense of emotional marital affection. He asks her when Rusty left. Suddenly cooperative, she tells Marlowe that Rusty left a month ago, and "they" found his car in a private garage. Marlowe tells her he is not looking for Rusty—General Sternwood called him on other business. Marlowe leaves, taking his hat from Mr. Norris in the hallway as he goes.

The battle rages on, as Marlowe maintains stoic patience and Mrs. Regan changes tactics to get the information she wants from him. Marlowe leaves the room suspicious of Mrs. Regan's intentions, and as such effectively wins the exchange, having given no information to Mrs. Regan that he didn't want to tell her, but using the conversation to assess her relevance to his current case.

Marlowe stands just outside the door, smoking and looking at the distant oilfields where the Sternwoods made their **money**. Most of the land has since been made public. But the working parts of the field were still observable from the main house.

The dirty oilfields below the Sternwoods' mansion, from which they made their fortune, represent that money often comes from morally dubious sources. The Sternwoods have a tainted past, which remains visible from the main house.

The **storm** has made it to the nearby hills as Marlowe walks through the grounds toward his car. Marlowe thinks about Mrs. Regan's legs, and how she and the General have more to them than meets the eye. He thinks the old man has set this simple task as a test for something bigger.

Marlowe takes nothing at face value—he is suspicious of Mrs. Regan, and questions his client's real motives in hiring him. The storms clouds gathering nearby suggest that finding the truth will not be easy.

CHAPTER 4

Marlowe finds the blackmailer Geiger's bookstore near Las Palmas. East Asian-style screens and antiques obscure the interior from view. Marlowe walks into an elegantly decorated store, with a partition wall and a closed door in the middle of the room. A beautiful blonde assistant (later revealed to be Agnes Lozelle) walks over to see what he wants.

With a foreign aesthetic and an obscured interior, Marlowe decides immediately that Geiger's store is suspicious. The fake wall in the middle of the room reflects the sham nature of the entire business, with the good-looking assistant merely providing a distraction for this lazily constructed front.

Marlowe asks if they have certain rare book editions, a question Agnes is unsure how to answer. She suggests Mr. Geiger might be able to help him, but that he will not be in until later on. The detective picks a seat and waits, smoking a cigarette.

Agnes is no bookseller, meaning this is no ordinary bookstore. Marlowe takes an indirect approach when talking with her, waiting to see what information he can uncover before revealing anything about himself.

After five minutes a customer walks in carrying a package and shows "the blonde" (Agnes) something in his wallet. She presses a button on her desk and the customer walks through the door in the partition. The customer returns after some time, with a different wrapped parcel than before, pays, and leaves the store.

Chandler represents secrets as belonging to an immoral world, as nothing good could be hidden behind that fake wall. Unlike Marlowe, whom Chandler has already established as a morally upright figure, this customer knows how to get past this fake store's front. This moment foreshadows a later plot twist in which Agnes will be Marlowe's entry point into another secret.

Marlowe jumps up and tails the customer. The detective lets the man see him as they wait at a traffic light, and the customer speeds up. Spying Marlowe again a few roads over, the man nearly begins to run. The detective loses sight of the customer momentarily on a "tree-lined street." After some minutes the customer walks by Marlowe smoking a whistling, without the parcel. Marlowe goes to find the wrapped up package, and leaves with it.

Given that the customer knows the fake store's secret, Marlowe considers him a lead, and pulls at the thread. This chase marks Marlowe as a competent and experienced detective. His confidence as he tails the customer adds to the commanding masculine image Chandler is building. In turn, the customer knows he is in the wrong, and fears being uncovered, placing him in a position of weakness. As such, Marlowe's moral rectitude also adds to his powerful masculine characterization.

CHAPTER 5

At a phone booth, Marlowe looks up Geiger's home address, as well as a couple legitimate rare bookstores. Going into a useful looking nearby bookstore, Marlowe talks to an assistant in the back about Geiger, asking for a description. She considers Marlowe, then describes Geiger as overweight with an unusual moustache and a glass eye.

The bookstore clerk casts a suspicious eye over Marlowe, but ultimately chooses to trust him. This illustrates the cynical climate in the city, as everyone's natural response toward everyone else is hesitant caution. Yet Marlowe presents a trustworthy figure because he talks plainly and honestly with the clerk—his decent dealing with her overcomes her cynicism.

It begins to **rain** as Marlowe runs back over to his car, opposite Geiger's store. Marlowe opens the parcel he took from the customer earlier—it is a rented pornography book of "indescribable filth." Marlowe deduces that, because the store can operate in the open, Geiger must have "plenty of protection." Marlowe lights a cigarette and thinks it all over.

As expected, Geiger's store is a front—for illegal pornography rentals. Marlowe's disgusted response reveals his own code of ethics, one that remains on the right side of the law and common decency in 1930s L.A.

CHAPTER 6

The **storm** has finally hit as Marlowe sits in his flooding car, as rain pours through the vehicle's unsuitable convertible roof. Marlowe stakes out Geiger's store. He buys a pint of whiskey to keep him company. Many well-dressed people get out of flashy cars and go into the store as Marlowe watches.

His convertible's failing roof indicates Marlowe's state of relative poverty, while rich patrons arrive in impressive cars to rent illegal books. Again, Chandler emphasizes that money does not equal morality. Rather, the city's tide of immorality sweeps everyone away in its current. The rain flooding through Marlowe's roof suggests the tide is coming in his direction.

Geiger himself finally appears at 4:00 p.m. A handsome male assistant (later revealed to be Carol Lundgren) comes out of the shop to park Geiger's car. After an hour, the same boy brings Geiger's car back round, and Geiger drives off. Marlowe tails him, keeping out of sight with his headlights off. When they arrive at Geiger's house, Marlowe drives on slightly to avoid suspicion.

This scene adds car tailing techniques to Marlowe's growing list of expertise. He is shaping up to be the perfect private detective, seeing all but seen by none. This fact suggests that Marlowe must have extensive experience of tailing suspects, in turn suggesting many underhanded activities must take place in this corrupt city.


Marlowe stakes out the house amid the "**driving rain**" with his whiskey in hand. After some time, in which Marlowe notes the street is very quiet, a woman drives up and enters Geiger's house. Marlowe searches the newly arrived car and finds Carmen's registration, before going back to his own car to wait.

Geiger's large house in a quiet neighborhood again reflects that the rich are not above the city's moral filth. Carmen's appearance can only serve to complicate Marlowe's evening, as the torrential rain indicates that the situation is worsening.


After dark, a bright white flash goes off and a scream comes from the house. Marlowe runs toward the house, although he notes the scream was not one of terror and more like a scream from a psychiatric patient. Just as Marlowe reaches the front door he hears three gun shots go off within the house.

Marlowe likens the bright flash to a "wave of summer lightning," drawing on the novel's storm symbolism that indicates rising tension. This crescendo marks a turning point in the novel—the first death.

Marlowe hears running inside the house, as someone flees down some steps out back. Because of the way the house is built into the hill, Marlowe cannot follow the escaping shooter. He hears a car drive away out back, possibly followed by another, though he can't be certain. The detective then tries to burst through the front door but it doesn't budge. Instead, he breaks through a window. Two people are in the room. Both ignore him; one is dead.

For the first time in the novel, Marlowe is on the back foot. Caught off guard, he can neither follow the shooter, nor get into the house on first attempt. Even when he enters the crime scene, neither occupant pays him any attention, reflecting the changing tide in Marlowe's control of the case. In a kill or be killed world, Marlowe suddenly needs to find out who is doing the killing.

CHAPTER 7

The big room features East Asian decorations, similar to Geiger's store, and Marlowe takes in every detail. Inside, Carmen is sitting on a throne-like chair, naked. She is awake but seems to not be mentally present. Geiger is dead, on his back, with three gunshot wounds. He has fallen right in front of a totem-pole-shaped camera. Marlowe realizes the flash of light must have come from the camera.

A recently murdered man lies on the floor and an intoxicated and undressed woman sits before the body, posing for an unorthodox camera. Chandler depicts this scandalous scene as not belonging in a morally upstanding American house, as represented in the foreign aesthetic. The totem pole camera equates such forms of sexuality with so-called primitive cultures, suggesting Carmen's behavior debases her.

Marlowe sees a jug filled with some sort of cocktail that has been left on the side with two glasses. Smelling ether and laudanum as he lifts the stopper out of the jug, Marlowe thinks the exotic drink matches Geiger's usual tastes. The detective finds Carmen's clothes and, in an attempt to bring her back to consciousness, he slaps her, dresses her, and makes her walk around the room. Still, she is vacant. She sees Geiger's body and "giggle[s]."

In contrast with Geiger, Marlowe acts the perfect gentlemen, attempting to dress Carmen and bring her back to her senses. Geiger's unconventional tastes disgust Marlowe, who draws a parallel between the abnormality of the exotic cocktail and Geiger's immorality.

Seeing that Carmen cannot be roused, Marlowe lays her on the divan and gathers her things. Marlowe checks the camera, but the plate holder is missing, which worries him. He searches the rest of the house, finding and taking Geiger's keys as well as a notebook written in code. Marlowe carries the now unconscious Carmen out to her car and drives toward her home.

Doing his duty to a damsel in distress, who is also his client's daughter, Marlowe again acts the perfect gentleman and sees Carmen home safely. Meanwhile, Geiger has many secrets, as his coded notebook emphasizes he has further misdeeds to hide from view.

CHAPTER 8

Marlowe arrives at the Sternwood mansion and leaves the unconscious Carmen in the capable hands of Mr. Norris and the maid Mathilda. The detective turns down Norris's offer of calling a cab, instead walking back to Geiger's house in the pouring **rain**. Cab drivers have long memories, Marlowe thinks to himself as he walks.

Marlowe opts not to take a cab as he doesn't want to be linked to the murder at Geiger's house—a cab driver would remember and later report him when the police eventually investigate the murder. The continuing storm suggests the mysteries of the night are not yet over.

After half an hour of walking, Marlowe arrives at Geiger's house, which remains quiet. He takes a swig of the alcohol in his car and smokes half a cigarette before going back into the house. Geiger's body is no longer there, however; Marlowe searches the rest of the house, yet cannot locate the body. He opens the door to a room that was previously locked and observes that it's decorated in masculine style that contrasts with Geiger's more effeminate tastes.

Marlowe again finds himself playing catch up as another unexpected twist sees Geiger's body disappear. Marlowe's sees Geiger's effeminate aesthetic as indication of his questionable morals, as emphasized by the contrast with this masculine room he has discovered. As such, Marlowe sees manliness as something linked to cultural propriety.

Squatting to the floor, Marlowe thinks he can spy two lines on the rug, as though Geiger's two heels had been dragged toward the front door as someone hauled his body out. The detective rules out the police, as they would still be at the scene. He also rules out the killer, who would likely not have returned to the house.

The mystery deepens as another figure has entered the story off-screen. As the police are not present, this person who has moved Geiger's body cannot be on the right side of the law, and must have their own secrets to hide. The rising complexity of the case suggests immorality runs deep in this city.

Marlowe decides the turn of events—the body going missing and the police being unaware of the crime at all—works for him in the meantime, as he figures out how to distance his client from this mess.

Marlowe's decision not to call the police provides the first example of how the detective bends morality to suit his client's interests. The move is a cynical one, as Marlowe seeks to get the best of the situation for himself, rather than doing the obviously "right" thing. It also suggests, however, that he believes the police to be incompetent and perhaps untrustworthy.

Marlowe returns home to drink a "hot toddy" and try to work out the coded notebook's message. He figures out the notebook includes 400 names and addresses, any of which could be the murderer. This, he thinks, will be a tough case.

The original mission General Sternwood gave Marlowe is now concluded. Geiger can no longer blackmail Sternwood, so Marlowe's primary goal has been met. However, the detective cannot let this mystery go, showing his respect for truth amid the dishonesty and chaos of the city's criminal underworld.

CHAPTER 9

When Marlowe wakes the next morning the **storm** has passed and Geiger's death hasn't made it to the papers, suggesting the police don't know about it yet. Chief Investigator Bernie Ohls—the man who had initially put General Sternwood in contact with Marlowe—calls the detective on his home phone line.

A man was murdered the previous night and yet no one else has noticed, hinting at the depths of the city's wider depravity. For Marlowe, at least, there is a brief reprieve, as the clear skies indicate.

Ohls informs Marlowe that one of the Sternwoods' Buicks has been found in the sea, with a dead body inside it. The cop cannot confirm that the body isn't that of the missing Rusty Regan, and offers to drive Marlowe down to the scene.

The story's death toll begins to rise as another Sternwood-linked fatality crosses Marlowe's path. Although the rain has stopped, the tide of the city's underworld already has Marlowe firmly in its grasp.

Marlowe meets Ohls at the Hall of Justice, where the policeman confirms the body is not Regan—it's a lad, rather than a man of Rusty's size. Ohls asks Marlowe if he's working the missing persons case. Marlowe offers noncommittal responses before finally admitting he's not looking for Regan.

Ohls had put Marlowe in contact with Sternwood, so it follows that a Sternwood-linked death would drive Ohls to pick up the phone again to inform the detective. Nevertheless, Marlowe does not immediately open up to Ohls, showing his reluctance to give out information for free, even with old friends.

Ohls and Marlowe drive down to the pier on the coast highway, about 30 miles away. A crowd has gathered. The car has already been dragged back onto the deck of a large tugboat, and the two men go to inspect the damaged Buick.

The deepening mysteries tied to Marlowe's case are stretching out across the city. This time, the detective is well and truly behind on the news, as a whole crowd has formed before he reaches the scene of this death.

The dead driver is still seated inside the vehicle, his neck bent grotesquely. The body has changed color, but Marlowe can see the boy was good looking. A bruise is visible against the boy's now pale skin.

The decaying body reflects the city's wider moral decay, the bruise on the boy's head representing the violence of life in 1930s L.A.

Ohls asks the men on the scene for an update. The boy had driven the car fast through the end of the pier, they say, which has splintered. The incident must have occurred around 9:00 p.m., after the **rain** stopped the previous night, as the wood inside the beams of the pier is dry. The way the car landed also means it must have been half tide, meaning before 10:00 p.m. the previous night.

The previous night's rain helps the crime scene investigators to determine the rough time of the incident, and also informs Marlowe that the boy crashed through the pier after the detective had left Geiger's. The police's quick work in identifying the time of the crash shows their familiarity with such scenes.

The policemen, Ohls, and Marlowe are unsure whether it is suicide or murder, as the boy has a bruise on his head but could only have driven *himself* along such a straight line down the pier. A man from the coroner's office examines the body, determining that the broken neck is the cause of death and that the bruise had appeared before this.

The number of possible reasons for the boy's death reflects the depths of wickedness in the city, as the body bears the marks of multiple violent encounters. The complexity of Marlowe's case deepens.

Ohls and Marlowe decide to head back into town. As they drive, Marlowe tells Ohls the dead boy is the Sternwoods' chauffeur. Ohls gives him the name— Owen Taylor. The police identified him because he has a criminal record and had tried to run away with Carmen the previous year.

Further layers of illegal activity emerge, as Owen's checkered past comes to Marlowe's attention. It seems the more Marlowe stays on the case, the more it appears everybody has their secrets to hide.

The story goes, Carmen and Owen ran off to Yuma, but Mrs. Regan went and fetched them back. Mrs. Regan had Owen thrown in jail, later had him released, and then the family then kept him on as a chauffeur, despite the police telling them Owen had previously served six months in jail for attempted robbery.

The Sternwood family seems to have become desensitized to questionable conduct, retaining the same chauffeur that had eloped with the youngest daughter and who had a criminal record. The question follows what kind of act could actually horrify such a family.

Ohls says he must go tell the Sternwoods now. Marlowe asks him to "leave the old man out of it." Ohls thinks Marlowe is sympathetic that General Sternwood is missing Regan, but Marlowe responds that he doesn't care about that case. Ohls drops Marlowe in town and drives toward the Sternwoods' home.

In stark contrast to the shocking events Marlowe has witnessed and discovered, the detective maintains his sense of compassion. Here, he sympathizes with Sternwood, as the news of Owen's death might affect the old man's health. While Marlowe avoids discussing the case of missing Rusty Regan with Ohls, the issue keeps returning to his mind as it also matters to Sternwood, his client.

CHAPTER 10

After eating lunch, Marlowe goes to Geiger's store and asks the unnamed blonde assistant (Agnes) if Geiger is in. Her smile is forced. Marlowe attempts to appear effeminate to throw her off guard, tapping his wrist with his glasses "delicately." He pretends to be a salesman, and "the blonde" suggests he tries again tomorrow, as Geiger is due in.

Again deciding not to talk things out honestly with the assistant at Geiger's store, Marlowe this time goes as far as to play act. Concealing his true nature in this way shows that Marlowe identifies himself as a masculine man, an identity that to him does not include physical delicacy.

Marlowe affects an air of impatience and says he'll just go up to the house if Geiger is ill. Agnes panics, her forced smile disappearing from her face, but she recovers her composure. She says he's out of town.

Agnes' reaction suggests she might know something about the house that she wouldn't want someone to see—it's probable she knows about Geiger's murder. Although no one is telling the truth in this exchange, Marlowe gets the information he needs anyway.

The door into the partitioned room opens briefly, and Marlowe spots the good looking male assistant (Carol Lundgren). He also sees that the store's supply of books is being hauled out. Marlowe takes his leave of Agnes.

If Geiger's books are being moved, the question now is who is relocating them, given that Geiger is dead. This new lead means Agnes is no longer necessary to Marlowe, and so he cuts the act short and leaves.

Marlowe walks round to the back of the property, where he sees a man in overalls shifting boxes into an unmarked black van. Marlowe jumps in a cab and tells the driver to tail the van as it leaves. The excited young driver is happy to oblige.

Whoever is moving the boxes could have killed Geiger to take over his store, so following the van could lead Marlowe to the suspect. This is a lead the detective needs.

They tail the van, briefly losing sight of it at Brittany Place before again finding it unloading in the garage of a nearby apartment block. Marlowe looks at the names on the mailboxes, and spies the name Joe Brody at 405.

Marlowe remembers the name Joe Brody from his first talk with General Sternwood—Brody had previously blackmailed the General and had been involved with Carmen. This disreputable man could be the killer.

Marlowe walks down the stairs to the garage to see the man loading boxes into the elevator. The detective tells him to "watch the weight," and asks where it's all going. Assuming Marlowe is the building manager, the man says the stuff is going to 405.

While not being wholly honest with the delivery man, Marlowe doesn't lie. He allows the man to assume he is the building manager, thereby getting the information he needs. Of course, Marlowe could have just asked without the deception, but the detective knows the city too well to think the man will just provide that information because the detective wants it.

His assumption confirmed, Marlowe gets back into the cab and has the driver take him to his office, where a client is waiting for him.

Marlowe's deceptive approach has given him the information he needs, and he returns home.

CHAPTER 11

Wearing a "mannish shirt and tie," Mrs. Regan turns her nose up at the furniture in Marlowe's waiting room. She makes a half-hearted apology for her rudeness the day before, and Marlowe replies with a half-hearted apology of his own. He then guides her into his main office.

Mrs. Regan is here to do business, as indicated by her masculine outfit. In this way, Chandler emphasizes the differentiated gender roles in this culture. While not allies, it seems Mrs. Regan needs something from Marlowe, so she offers to call off their feud from the previous day.

Mrs. Regan comments that the office is not showy, to which Marlowe responds that one does not make much **money** when staying within the limits of the law, and he is "painfully" so.

Marlowe's response accuses the rich of immorality, and identifies him as morally upstanding, suggesting that is the direct cause of his poverty. Working one's way up the social ladder would therefore require illegal tactics, he implies.

Lighting a cigarette, Mrs. Regan asks how Marlowe got into the business of being a private detective. He asks her how she married an "ex-bootlegger," and she reminds him not to start an argument.

Marlowe's instinctive response is to answer questions with questions, to provide no information but to acquire information from his adversary. Marlowe's attitude reveals his belief there is always something to defend oneself from.

Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe she has been trying to track him down all day. When he asks if it's about Owen, her face and tone reveal sympathy for the dead boy. They discuss Owen's past, including the attempted elopement with Carmen and his police record. Mrs. Regan says the record just means he "didn't know the right people."

Mrs. Regan waves away any suggestion of Owen's wrongdoing by suggesting that everyone in the country has been on the wrong side of the law at some point—only the rich and well-connected get away with their crimes. As such, Owen's criminal record says more about the country's legal system and socioeconomic climate than about that one particular boy.

However, Mrs. Regan explains that she didn't come to talk about Owen. She passes Marlowe an envelope, out of which the detective pulls a photograph of Carmen from the night before, naked on the chair in Geiger's house.

Carmen's misdeeds are following her just as Owen's followed him. While everyone might be guilty of immorality, that doesn't stop wrongdoers from turning on one another.

Marlowe asks Mrs. Regan how much **money** "they" have asked for. She explains that a woman called her demanding $5,000, today, or the photos will be sent to the media. Marlowe dismisses that threat, and asks what else was threatened. Mrs. Regan hesitates, but adds that the woman threatened an unspecified police angle too, which Mrs. Regan doesn't understand.

The third blackmailing attempt related to Carmen, the girl's wild lifestyle leaves her family vulnerable to all kinds of attacks. Carmen's debauched behavior threatens the family's respectability. As such, Chandler illustrates that immoral behavior brings only pain for the individual and those surrounding them. Also, there is always someone ready to pounce at an opportunity to make some money.

Responding to Marlowe's questions, Mrs. Regan explains Carmen was home ill last night, while she was losing at roulette at Eddie Mars's casino. Mrs. Regan says the Sternwoods like to play games to lose—like marrying a husband who goes missing, or, in the General's case, being crippled by a falling race horse in his fifties.

Mrs. Regan gives examples of the Sternwood's bad luck, but emphasizes that the family bring this bad fortune on themselves as their wild antics expose them to undue risk. In this way, Chandler suggests that really there is no bad luck, only bad decisions spiraling out of control.

Marlowe asks Mrs. Regan why Owen had the car, but she doesn't know the answer—he wasn't given permission. He then asks her if she can raise the $5,000, which she thinks she might have to borrow instead of asking the General for it. She says Eddie Mars might lend it to her.

Mrs. Regan opts not to involve her father, most likely to protect her sister and to spare them both the shame of him finding out. Her shame reveals that Mrs. Regan does in fact have a moral compass, as she knows right from wrong. She simply doesn't always choose to do the right thing.Choosing instead to borrow money from a gangster, Mrs. Regan must move in dubious social circles, albeit wealthy ones.

Mrs. Regan suggests telling the police about the blackmailers, but Marlowe says he knows she doesn't consider that a real option. He says he might able to sort it out, which Mrs. Regan approves of. They share a drink.

Marlowe and Mrs. Regan know that involving the police will only complicate matters, and prefer to deal with the issue themselves, suggesting the Sternwoods have more to hide than Carmen's nude photos.

Smiling, Mrs. Regan says Eddie ought to help her out as Mars's wife ran away with her husband Rusty. Marlowe is uninterested, saying he doesn't think Rusty is involved in this, adding that Mrs. Regan has gotten all the information she can from him.

Mrs. Regan brings back the contentious topic of her missing husband, a topic Marlowe both continues to avoid and believes Mrs. Regan is being untruthful about. His unfriendly tone shocks Mrs. Regan, reminding her that Marlowe has not become her ally.

Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe that Rusty is not "a crook." He has **money** of his own, which he stashed in his clothes at all times. He doesn't need low-paying blackmail jobs, she asserts.

Mrs. Regan's defensive tone underlines the social hierarchies within the criminal world. Her husband made his money selling alcohol illegally during Prohibition, and is not a lowly blackmailer. The only clear distinction is that Rusty made a lot of money, thus making him respectable.

As Marlowe sees Mrs. Regan to the door, she asks again what the General has hired Marlowe for. She flirts with Marlowe a little but he doesn't take the bait. She laughs and leaves.

Although parting from each other on better terms than their last meeting, the two are still playing to win, seeking to glean more information from the other than they give away.

Alone, Marlowe calls Ohls on his office phone. Ohls has told the Sternwood butler, Norris, about Owen, and checked the chauffeur's belongings—there is no suicide note. The chief investigator has also confirmed the whereabouts of all the family the previous night. Most of the family were at home, Ohls says, apart from Mrs. Regan who was out at a casino. Marlowe tells Ohls he should do something about the illegal gambling, and Ohls simply laughs at the suggestion. Ohls asks if Marlowe can offer him anything on the case, and the latter declines.

The police have confirmed Mrs. Regan's alibi for the previous night, so Marlowe and the reader know she cannot have murdered Geiger. This confirms her honesty in not understanding the police angle the blackmailers had threatened over Carmen's nude photos. Marlowe's honesty also emerges, as he opposes the illegal gambling taking place in the city. But Ohls is more of a realist, laughing at Marlowe's notion that the police can simply stop wrongdoing given the depths of corruption in the city. Marlowe still holds back information from Ohls, still not reporting Geiger's murder or asking for help on the nude photo angle. He is not totally honest, then, as he prioritizes his client's interests.

CHAPTER 12

Marlowe is back at Geiger's house, the scene of the previous night's crime. He realizes he didn't check the garage at the time of the murder; he won't get a chance to do so now, however, as Carmen is skulking around the front door when he arrives. She is nervous and looks tired. He reintroduces himself as "Doghouse Reilly," and she remembers him.

Marlowe teases Carmen by giving a fake name, not only to poke fun at her simple-mindedness, but also as an instinctive reaction as he does not trust her. The debauchery of the previous night has taken its toll on Carmen, who appears physically weakened by the experience.

In the daylight, Geiger's Asian interior decorations disgust Marlowe, who sees the aesthetic as a "stealthy nastiness, like a fag party."

The strength of Marlowe's feeling and wording reflects the rigidity of his concept of appropriate gender roles. Geiger's "nastiness" contrasts with Marlowe's strict moral code, one that conforms with traditional American masculine ideals.

Carmen can't keep up her smile, which keeps faltering. Her eyes are vacant. Marlowe sees that she is not intelligent or principled, and that no one is guiding her. This makes him angry with "the rich."

Marlowe despises Carmen for her lack of intelligence and moral scruples, yet he also notes that this is not her fault alone. She has been raised poorly, with no one to teach her any better. As such, those in authority over Carmen are as much to blame for her behavior and character flaws as she is.

Marlowe asks Carmen why she is there and how much she remembers. She claims she was sick at home last night. When Marlowe reminds her of the fact that she'd been sitting on the high-backed chair the evening before, she blushes. Once she understands that he is not the police, she relaxes.

Carmen lies to Marlowe, suspecting he is the police. Once she realizes he was the man who helped her the previous night, and has clearly not called the police, she feels more comfortable. Notably, it is Marlowe's moral ambiguity in this situation that warms Carmen to him—she is more comfortable with dubious figures.

Carmen asks Marlowe who else knows about the previous night. He says the police don't, or they'd still be at the house. Maybe Joe Brody, Marlowe says. At this Carmen reacts instantly, declaring that Joe was the murderer.

In an uncharacteristically leading question, Marlowe offers Carmen the idea that Joe Brody was the murderer. Her unintelligent mind, and prior hatred of Brody, latches onto this idea. Perhaps Marlowe thinks Carmen needs more help providing information than the other people he has interrogated so far.

Marlowe doubts Carmen's honesty. She says she hates Joe Brody, which Marlowe points out gives her the motive to blame him for the murder. She struggles to understand his logic. When Marlowe asks her if she'd be willing to testify to the police if he could sort out the nude photo blackmailers, she giggles.

The detective knows to treat Carmen's accusation with skepticism, especially given his leading question. To Carmen, her nude photos are simply funny, all part of the good fun that comprises her decadent lifestyle.

Carmen's laughter becomes hysterical, echoing around the house. Marlowe slaps her. She stops laughing but otherwise doesn't react to the slap; Marlowe supposes all her boyfriends slap her.

Just as Carmen does not react with shame to the nude photos, Marlowe's slap does not shock her. It seems she has become desensitized to debauchery and violence.

Carmen tells Marlowe she knows his real name and that he's a detective, as Mrs. Regan told her so. He tells her that the photo is gone, assuming that's what she came to get. Marlowe reconfirms that she blames Joe Brody, before instructing her to go home and tell no one she was ever there.

Although she is unashamed of the photos while talking to Marlowe, it appears Carmen is aware of the inconvenience of her photo being left at the scene of a murder. Thus, her self-interest has driven her to return to Geiger's house.

As Carmen puts her hand on the door, they hear a car approach. They hear footsteps and then the doorbell rings. Carmen panics. After ringing the bell for a while, the person on the other side of the door puts a key in the lock. A man walks in, looking at Carmen and Marlowe without emotion.

While Carmen physically shakes with fear at the sound of someone at the door, both Marlowe and the man who enter maintain their composure, indicating the author's depiction of self-control and fearlessness as a masculine characteristic.

CHAPTER 13

Eddie Mars stands at the front door, dressed smartly in an all gray suit. He takes his hat off when he sees Carmen. Marlowe sees that Mars is no regular "tough man." Mars closes the door and steps inside, one manicured hand in his pocket. Mars and Carmen exchange a smile.

Eddie Mars belongs to an elite class of criminal, as illustrated in Marlowe's appraisal of Mars's dress sense, as well as the man's manicure. Mars is not one to get his own hands dirty.

Mars asks if Geiger is home. Marlowe says he and Carmen are business acquaintances who found the door open and stepped inside; they don't know where Geiger is. Marlowe tries to leave with Carmen, but Mars says he'd like to have a word with Marlowe. Mars adds he has two "boys" outside, as incentive to remain. Carmen runs off to her car and drives away, unfollowed.

The two men in the room instantly assess each other as adversaries. Their instinct leads them to distrust the other, and in Mars's case, to attempt to intimidate Marlowe. As a woman, Carmen does not pose a threat to Mars, who allows her to leave. Mars focuses on Marlowe as the one worth interrogating, the one likely to have any worthwhile information.


Sighing, Mars says he knows something is wrong and threatens Marlowe to not obstruct him. Mars inspects the room and quickly finds the pool of blood where Geiger had fallen. Mars stands back up with a gun in his hand. Marlowe feigns confused interest.

Marlowe does not let his pretense fall, pretending not to know about Geiger's death. As the detective does not know how deeply Mars has been involved in the case, he prefers to wait and see what information Mars will give away. Marlowe does not want to play his hand too early and misjudge his opponent.

Sitting down at a desk in the room, Mars suggests calling the police. Marlowe agrees, calling Mars's bluff. This displeases Mars, who asks Marlowe's name. The detective responds truthfully and claims he had come with Carmen to talk to Geiger about settling a blackmail dispute. Marlowe asks Mars why he had a key to the house. Mars explains he's the landlord, and that Geiger is his tenant.

As Mars' bluff fails, the two men decide instead to change tactic and to proceed with cautious honesty. They provide enough true information to coax the other into providing a little information too. Marlowe's small lie indicates Mars is likely withholding the full truth too.

Putting his gun away, Mars asks Marlowe if he has any theories on what happened. Marlowe responds with various scenarios, including one in which Geiger killed a live chicken in the sitting room while preparing for dinner. Mars says he "don't get" Marlowe's "game."

Marlowe successfully confuses Mars, who cannot read the detective. This demonstrates Marlowe's cool nerves under pressure, and ability to hide what he does not want the other person to see.

Marlowe tells Mars he knows exactly who he is—a well-protected and well-connected gangster who runs a casino and oversees Geiger. Mars says he thinks someone has gone for Geiger and his pornography racket. Marlowe agrees, especially as the books from Geiger's store have been moved.

Not only does Marlowe hide what he doesn't want seen, he also sees through his adversary, as he is more informed than Mars previously realized. Evening the playing field, after Marlowe tells Mars he knows about the high-level racketeer, the detective provides the information that Geiger's books have been moved. Providing this information freely offers a cautious truce.


Mars calls in his men to check Marlowe. He tells the detective to open the door, pointing a gun at him—Marlowe refuses. Mars opens the door himself and his men search Marlowe, finding he is unarmed. They also find his private investigator's badge.

Still suspicious about Marlowe's motives, Mars points a gun at Marlowe and has him searched. Marlowe's composure during this threat again provides testament to his tough masculinity.

Confident that Marlowe is who he says he is, Mars tells him to "talk." Marlowe doesn't think the book thief is also the murderer, but likely knows what's going on. The jumpy blonde at the store is probably involved too, he thinks. Marlowe says he won't give any more information, as he has a client involved.

Marlowe only tells Mars what the gangster could work out for himself, as the detective states he's got a client involved. Not only does Marlowe want to protect his client, the detective also wants to be paid for what he finds out. Discovering certain information provides his income, after all.

Mars gets frustrated with the constant back and forth in their conversation. He demands that Marlowe tell him what happened to Geiger because he's worried the police will get involved, though he knows Marlowe wouldn't go to the police or they'd be there already. Marlowe says he can't say anything or he'd have nothing to sell to his client, and asks to leave.

Again, Marlowe acts in self-interest, responding to Mars's questions defensively as the detective does not fully trust Mars, and he wishes to sell his information to make a living. Mars also notes that Marlowe has not informed the police of what he knows either, presumably for the same reasons.

Marlowe asks Mars how Mars's missing wife is. Annoyed, Mars tells Marlowe to leave, and not to mention his name in any write up. Marlowe leaves the house unobstructed, and drives away without being tailed.

Antagonizing Mars, Marlowe makes it clear that the two men are not allies. Mars lets Marlowe leave, perhaps because he has no real reason to stop him, doesn't need more murders in his tenant's house, or because he still doesn't yet really know who Marlowe is.

CHAPTER 14

It is evening as Marlowe returns to Joe Brody's apartment. The door opens slowly after the detective's knock, and "a brown expressionless face" fills the narrow opening. When Marlowe asks for Geiger, Brody says he doesn't know the name.

Given Geiger's books were moved to Brody's apartment, the man is presumably lying to Marlowe. Given Geiger is dead and the books were stolen, Brody lies for good reason.

Trying to talk his way in, Marlowe tells Brody he has Geiger's notebook filled with clients' names; because Brody has the books, they should work it out. Brody lets Marlowe in. The room is nicely though sparsely furnished. Marlowe sits down without invitation.

Marlowe appeals to Brody's business sense to keep the conversation moving and to gain entry to the apartment. Self-interest appears to be universal among all the novel's characters.

Moving carefully, Brody sits opposite Marlowe and throws him a cigar from across the room. As Marlowe reaches to catch the airborne cigar, Brody pulls a gun out. Marlowe is unintimidated, and tells Brody he's the second guy to pull a gun on the detective that day. Brody doesn't know who Eddie Mars is.

While Marlowe has information useful to him, Brody does not trust Marlowe, gaining the upper hand as soon as possible. Yet Marlowe's masculine composure remains. He has become used to facing down guns in this city.

Brody half apologizes for the gun, saying he's "not a tough guy—just careful." Marlowe tells him the way he stole Geiger's books was poorly done, "not careful enough." The detective also advises the hidden figure who is concealed behind a curtain to come out.

Brody explains that the gun is for protection—he is not an aggressive man, it is simply about survival. Marlowe has mentioned dangerous names in his apartment, and Brody must take appropriate precautions. The hiding figure behind the curtain took their own precautions too, by hiding.

Without looking away from Marlowe, Brody calls Agnes—the blonde from Geiger's store—out from behind the curtain. She tells Marlowe she knew he was "trouble." Agnes lights another lamp and Marlowe lights his cigar.

Chandler finally gives Agnes her name, who is no longer simply "the blonde," though Marlowe's narrative voice more frequently opts for this description rather than using her name. In wording similar to Marlowe's assessment of Mrs. Regan, Agnes calls Marlowe "trouble." Perhaps he could take it as a back-handed compliment, as it was intended for Mrs. Regan, given her sexuality prompted warning signals for Marlowe.

Marlowe explains the list of clients in the notebook is coded; with hundreds of names, the racket must be profitable—enough to kill Geiger over. Agnes is "outraged," or at least pretends to be. Brody tells her to shut up and denies he has anything to do with the racket. Agnes acts disgusted that Marlowe could suggest this pornography store operated right on the "main drag." Marlowe says the police must find it convenient to it to operate there, where they can see it.

Agnes feigns outrage over Marlowe's accusations that such an illegal and immoral store could operate in plain sight. But Brody sees that Marlowe will not fall for such a simple trick, and instead looks to distance himself from the store. Marlowe assessment of the profitable racket shows that Brody and Agnes are attempting to work their way up in the criminal world. His disdainful assessment also captures the police's negligence. As the public body charged with enforcing the law, they have missed a fairly obvious target, apparently willfully.

Brody reminds Agnes to shut up and tells Marlowe to keep talking. The detective says that Brody shot Geiger to take over the store, took the camera plate with him when he left, and even went back to hide the body later so he'd have time to move the books.

Marlowe has already told Eddie Mars he doesn't believe the book thief is necessarily the murderer, so Marlowe's accusation here represents a cynical tactic. By over-accusing Brody, Marlowe hopes he will scare the grifter into confessing to his actual, lesser crimes.

Still holding a gun, Brody denies the murder. Marlowe tells him it doesn't matter; Brody had the motive and there is a witness who will say he did it. At that, Brody loses control and shouts, "That goddamned little hot pants!" Marlowe can see Brody has jumped to thinking of Carmen, so the detective responds that he knew Brody had the photos from that night.

Sticking to his line of questioning, Marlowe all but threatens Brody. Brody, panicking, angrily curses Carmen, which tells Marlowe Brody must know she was at Geiger's the night of his murder, meaning he is involved somehow. This success marks the detective as a master interrogator.

The room is silent for a while, and Marlowe leaves it that way. Brody begins to deny having the photos, but Marlowe says he must have known that Carmen was there, meaning Brody was also there, or at least got the camera's plate holder afterward from someone. The detective then says that Agnes must have called Mrs. Regan to threaten the police angle. As such, Brody and Agnes both knew Carmen was at the house the night Geiger was killed, and what had happened.

Brody tries to cling onto a full denial but it is too late. Marlowe has won, and now has the upper hand despite having no gun. If Brody and Agnes have the photos, that also explains why Agnes panicked at the shop when Marlowe suggested he should go to Geiger's house—she knows about the murder too. Just one piece of information helps Marlowe start to piece together the whole story, showing why the characters hold their secrets so close to their chest.

Brody demands **money** for the naked photos of Carmen from the night Geiger was shot. Marlowe refuses. Brody asks how the detective found him and Agnes. The detective explains he was tailing Geiger for a client and heard the shots from the house. Interrupting, Brody points out that Marlowe hasn't gone to the police, and asks how the detective knew about the books. Marlowe admits he tailed the books from Geiger's store, which led him to Brody.

Marlowe now provides information in return, in part to intimidate Brody with how much he knows already, and in part to create an atmosphere in which Brody might spill more information. But the detective doesn't give too much—he is still playing in his client's interests and will not pay out yet if he can win for free.

Marlowe asks Brody and Agnes if they've ever been to Geiger's house, which they deny, insisting they weren't there the previous night. Marlowe says he could talk Carmen out of her accusation that Brody is behind the murder if Brody were to give up the photos. Just as Brody is about to give up and hand over the photos, the door buzzer goes off.

Marlowe's strategy has played out just as he hoped. He has leveraged Carmen's accusation to obtain the pictures from Brody (nearly), not to mention gaining information from the grifter that might otherwise have been impossible to get.

CHAPTER 15

As the buzzer keeps ringing, Brody worries. Marlowe is uncomfortable too, as he doesn't want to get involved with the police, or with Eddie Mars. Agnes is also tense. Brody gives Agnes a gun to point at Marlowe. He then goes to open the door, his own gun still in hand.

The sudden insistent buzzing at the door puts Brody, Agnes and Marlowe on edge, as they assume an aggressor waits on the other side, showing they always assume the worst in this chaotic, violent city.

As Brody opens the door, he is instantly sent walking backward: Carmen is on the other side and is pointing a gun at his face. As Agnes moves to point her own gun at Carmen, Marlowe uses the opportunity to overpower Agnes.

With two guns now involved, the scene quickly transforms into a fight for survival. Marlowe doesn't let the opportunity pass to try to grab the gun from Agnes, not only to protect himself, but also his client.

Carmen and Brody ignore Agnes and Marlowe's fight, and Carmen demands her photos from Brody. She says she saw him shoot Geiger. Marlowe, who now has Agnes's gun, tells Carmen to calm down. Agnes uses the opportunity to launch another attack on Marlowe.

Carmen has decided to use threat of lethal force to coerce Brody into handing over her photos, a completely different approach from Marlowe's. Given the photos place her at a murder scene that she has not yet reported, this is a matter of life and death for Carmen.

Brody tries and fails to grab Carmen's gun, which she then shoots through a window pane. Brody falls to the floor, tripping Carmen and causing her to lose her grip on the gun. Marlowe hits Agnes harder than before and she gives up. The detective picks up Carmen's gun and points it at Brody, making Brody hand over another gun in his pocket.

Carmen means business, letting off a round as Brody attempts to wrest control of the gun. Finally, Marlowe ends up the winner from this scuffle, holding all the guns in the room. He has now won both the battle of words and weapons.

Marlowe makes Brody hand over the photos and the negatives. The detective pockets them and Carmen leaves, flirting with Marlowe as she goes. She kisses him on the mouth as she passes him, before running off down the hallway.

Marlowe has completed his mission for his client by obtaining the photos, protected Carmen from aggressors as well as herself, and saved himself from physical harm. His cautious approach and well-timed use of force leaves him the victor of the exchange, showing his cynical attitude comes from experience of many exchanges such as this.

CHAPTER 16

When Marlowe goes back into Brody's apartment, he sees that Carmen's little gun has blown the window out. On the gun's grip reads "Carmen from Owen." Marlowe thinks she must have all men wrapped around her finger.

Carmen, like her gun, is more dangerous than first glance suggests. Her "cute" demeanor manipulates all men, although Marlowe sees straight through it. His self-control and wisdom when it comes to women adds to his masculine portrayal.

Back to questioning Brody, Marlowe asks why he blackmailed Mrs. Regan rather than her father. Brody says he'd already "tapped" General Sternwood before and thought he might call the police this time. He adds that Mrs. Regan is likely to have some "soft spots" that would work in Brody's favor.

Marlowe is now fully in control of the exchange, given he had outwitted Brody when the latter had a gun, whereas now Marlowe has two guns. Brody's frequent attempts at blackmail represent his self-serving nature, just as his approach seeks to maximize his returns.

Marlowe asks Brody how he came by the photos. Brody tries to avoid the question, to Agnes's exasperation. The detective says they all need to agree on a story, firstly that Carmen was not involved. Brody is still evasive about how he acquired the photos of Carmen, and Marlowe replies sarcastically that Brody picked them up off a random guy he "just passed in the street."

Despite Marlowe's clear upper hand, Brody still attempts to hide something. Agnes despairs of his idiocy, but given all the characters tend to hold out until the last moment before divulging any information, Agnes should not be surprised. Perhaps she is more frustrated to see Brody backed into a corner in this way.

As Brody remains evasive, Marlowe heads for the door and places Brody's guns on a table, saying the current situation is going to lead to Brody ending up in jail for the murder of Geiger—and that of someone else. Brody is taken by surprise, and tells Marlowe to stay and explain.

Again, Marlowe chooses a passive aggressive threat and a carefully deployed revelation to intimidate and confuse Brody, rather than swinging a gun around. This approach gives the detective an air of class, or at least more rational control of the situation.

Marlowe asks Brody where he was the previous night, and Brody admits he had recently been tailing Geiger to see who else was in on his racket. Brody was parked at the back of Geiger's house that night, and saw a Buick parked there. He checked and it was registered to Mrs. Regan.

The detective's ploy has worked. Brody starts to spill the whole story in his fear of Carmen testifying that he is the murderer. Brody's sudden compliance demonstrates Marlowe's wide experience outsmarting such criminals, who only seek their own advantage, or simply survival.

Brody claims he left after inspecting the other car, and Marlowe tells him the Buick ended up in the sea with a corpse in it. Worried, Brody says Marlowe cannot tie him to that death. Marlowe thinks he can—he suggests that Owen killed Geiger in jealousy over Carmen, took the photo, and then Brody chased after Owen to take the photo back.

Marlowe doubles down on his accusations, telling Brody he will take the fall for Owen's murder instead. Whether Marlowe truly believes Brody killed Owen is debatable, but accusing Brody to his face certainly provides the pressure to force a panicking Brody into confessing his actual actions.

Brody agrees that's probably what happened, but it doesn't follow that Brody also killed Owen. He admits he heard the shots and followed the fleeing Owen, but only hit him on the head to search him. He took the plate holder out of curiosity, after which Owen regained consciousness and drove off.

Again, Marlowe's play comes up trumps, as Brody begins to gush the remaining parts of the story. Brody stealing the photo plate seems likely given his proven thieving nature, and the police were certain Owen had driven himself down the pier, so the story seems to fit.

Marlowe asks Brody how he knows it was Geiger who was killed. Brody says he assumed, and was sure of it after he had the photos developed. Brody says he saw that Geiger's death meant it was a good time to steal Geiger's books and blackmail the Sternwoods "for travel money." Brody denies moving Geiger's body, though, saying he worried the police would show up.

Brody and Agnes had been planning to steal Geiger's racket from under him for some time, and his death provided the perfect opportunity. These heartless thieves place their own profit above any sense of loyalty or honor, finding any way to make money quickly.

The door buzzer rings again. Looking at his guns on the table, Brody thinks that Carmen must be back. He strides over to the door, gun in hand. As he opens the door, someone says "Brody?" and shoots him twice. Brody falls forward against the door, dead.

Here, the reader learns the fate of those who do not assume the worst from a new situation in this city. Brody, thinking an unarmed Carmen has returned, decides not to grab his gun. This misjudgment costs him his life. In a city such as this, with innumerable aggressors each seeking their own ends, one cannot afford not *to assume the worst.*


Marlowe launches himself out of the door, along the hall and down the stairs. Someone in a "leather jerkin" is fleeing up the road. The person turns back and shoots toward Marlowe. The detective continues to pursue the figure, getting into his car and driving around the block. He gets out of the car, hides between two vehicles, and jumps the leather-clad figure when he passes by.

Again demonstrating his superior tailing techniques, Marlowe soon chases down Brody's murderer. Providing Marlowe with an aura of infallibility, in this scene he appears as a man in full control of his surroundings at any given time.

With Carmen's gun in his hand, Marlowe asks the figure for a light, and recognizes the good-looking kid from Geiger's store. Marlowe quips, "You must have thought a lot of that Queen," and the kid swears at him.

Marlowe's unsympathetic mockery of Geiger reveals his disdain for the dead man's lifestyle, and presumably that of this boy who it seems has killed Brody in misplaced revenge. To Marlowe, these nonconforming men are not real men.

Police sirens sound, and Marlowe tries to convince the boy to go with him instead of the cops, saying he is a friend of Geiger's. The boy continues to swear at Marlowe, reaching into his jacket for his own gun.

As he did previously with Brody, Marlowe appeals to the boy's survival instinct. Marlowe's dishonest offer shows his willingness to bend the truth to see justice served.

Marlowe sticks his gun deeper into the kid's stomach, takes the gun in the boy's jacket, and makes him get into the detective's car. The kid gets in the driver's side as instructed. They let the police car pass them.

Seeing the boy is more interested in shooting Marlowe as a means to escape, the detective decides to resort to force instead.

They begin to drive toward Geiger's house, and Marlowe asks the kid his name—Carol Lundgren. Marlowe tells him he shot the wrong guy, and that Brody didn't kill Geiger, his "queen." Carol just swears at him again.

Marlowe heartlessly mocks Geiger's mourning friend, again highlighting Geiger's effeminacy as he disdains the dead man's unconventional lifestyle. While Marlowe's disgust would indicate his proper moral compass at the time of the book's release, looking back, Marlowe's rigid notion of masculinity comes at the direct expense of nonconformist men such as Carol and Geiger.

CHAPTER 17

It is nighttime as Marlowe and Lundgren pull up outside Geiger's house. Marlowe tells Lundgren to open the door, as he knows "the fag," meaning Geiger, gave Lundgren a key. The detective tells Lundgren he knows the masculine-style bedroom in the house is his.

Marlowe continues to verbally abuse Lundgren and Geiger's memory, acting more aggressively toward them than he has toward any other characters. Their homosexuality seems to offend him more than the pornography, gambling, or even killing. To Marlowe, this betrayal of proper masculinity is a heinous crime. In comparison, Marlowe had expressed sympathy for Owen, also a killer, whom Carmen had manipulated.

Marlowe has the gun pointed at Lundgren, who is so angry he punches Marlowe anyway. The detective gets hit, but tells himself that "a pansy" can't punch properly. Marlowe drops the gun on the floor to bait Lundgren, who lunges for it. As Lundgren reaches for the gun, Marlowe hits the boy hard, and Lundgren falls to the floor. They tussle, and finally Marlowe gets Lundgren into a headlock and chokes him until he passes out. Marlowe then handcuffs him.

Again, Marlowe emphasizes Carol's lack of conventional masculinity as a critical character flaw, something that defines and weakens every aspect of him. The two men fight for survival, one to avoid the executioner and the other to avoid being shot with his newly acquired guns.

Marlowe moves the car and drags the unconscious Lundgren into Geiger's house. As Lundgren starts to come back to consciousness, Marlowe mocks him by telling him how he'll be trying not to breathe when he's in the government "gas chamber," executed by "**cyanide** fumes."

Marlowe continues to mock and verbally abuse Lundgren, taunting him about the execution by cyanide awaiting him—a death resembling insect fumigation. Carol is a bug, unwanted and set to be disposed of.

With Lundgren incapacitated on the floor, Marlowe searches the house again. Geiger's body is on the boy's bed, surrounded by incense and candles. The detective doesn't approach the body.

Carol presumably moved the body previously, which now lies in a mock funeral parlor. Marlowe cannot bring himself to look at the scene for longer than necessary, disgusted by the sentiment.

Marlowe calls chief investigator Bernie Ohls. The private detective asks the cop if they had found a gun on Owen Taylor's dead body, adding that it should have three empty shells. Ohls is astounded. Marlowe tells him to come to Geiger's address and he'll see where the shells were spent.

Having previously held back vital information for Ohls's case, Marlowe now provides a crime scene and suspect, ready for collection. Marlowe timed this revelation to suit his client's interests.

CHAPTER 18

Ohls stands in Geiger's house, looking at Lundgren. They don't need a confession from the boy, Marlowe tells the chief investigator, as the private detective has Lundgren's gun.

Ohls stands in the crime scene with Marlowe as the latter offers the details on the entire web of illegal activities that branch out from that central moment.

Ohls tells Marlowe they will all have to drive over to District Attorney Taggart Wilde's place. The chief investigator adds he's glad he doesn't have to arrest Owen Taylor for killing Geiger. Ohls grabs Lundgren and looks at him with distaste as he pups the boy into his car.

Similarly to Marlowe, Ohls expresses sympathy for Owen, even implying him killing Geiger was not necessarily an immoral act. Yet Ohls looks at Lundgren with distaste, despite the fact his victim was also a criminal. As such, it is Lundgren's sexuality that disgusts Ohls and Marlowe, rather than him committing murder. Killing has become commonplace in the city, but these men cannot accept nonconformance to gender roles.

Marlowe follows in his car as they drive to Wilde's house. The house is white framed and traditional. Wilde is clearly from a well-known and wealthy family. There are two vehicles there already.

Wilde's large and traditional house marks him out as being from a wealthy social circle. But as Chandler has shown with the Sternwoods, this does not mean Wilde is morally upstanding.

The group is led through a large, well-furnished house, to a study. Inside, Wilde is smoking a cigar and drinking coffee as "cold-eyed" Captain Cronjager looks at the group. Ohls introduces the captain and Marlowe.

Wilde relaxes at his ease in his home, as the men from the city's frontline report back to him. Like Sternwood and Marlowe's relationship, Wilde draws on lower ranking officials to do the hard work.

Ohls asks Cronjager how he's progressing on finding Joe Brody's murderer. The police have picked up Agnes, and the two unfired guns in the apartment, but nothing else. When Ohls pushes, Cronjager says they also have a description of the murderer.

Ohls knows that Cronjager must have nothing, as he has the suspect in his own car. As such, this question is disingenuous, serving to set up Ohls' own dramatic revelation and show up Cronjager.

Ohls tells Cronjager he has the suspect in his car right outside, and puts the gun on the desk. Wilde finds this amusing. Ohls adds there are two more deaths involved, asking if Cronjager has heard of the car found in the sea that morning. Cronjager admits he hasn't, with a sour look.

With glee, Ohls offers his revelation, with a predictable response from Cronjager. Perhaps unpredictable is Wilde's approval of this competition between policemen. It seems he is aware of the police's wider lack of cohesion and mutual support.

Helping Cronjager catch up on the situation, Ohls explains the dead man was a driver for a wealthy family who were being blackmailed, and who had called Marlowe in to help on Wilde's recommendation. Cronjager dislikes the fact Marlowe has not kept the police up to date on circumstances.

Again predictably, Cronjager voices displeasure that Marlowe had kept the police out of the loop. Cronjager has some right to be displeased, as Marlowe was acting in his client's interest, and to protect his own safety and income, rather than following the letter of the law.

Ohls explains further that the dead man (Owen Taylor) had killed Geiger the night before. Lundgren, the boy in Ohls's car outside, had lived with Geiger. At this point, Ohls offers the stage to Marlowe, to explain the rest of the story.

Ohls narrates the interweaving tale of various characters' illegal and questionable acts. Marlowe, who has been caught up in this web for the past two days, steps in to provide the finer details. The complexity of the story reflects the depths of the city's moral decay.

Marlowe tells the room of policeman everything that had happened, apart from Carmen threatening Joe Brody and Eddie Mars showing up at Geiger's house.

Marlowe decides to keep two non-crucial aspects of the story to himself, for reasons that benefit himself and his client, as he later reflects.

Cronjager accuses Marlowe of allowing Joe Brody's murder to take place by not telling the police about Geiger's murder earlier. Marlowe defends himself by saying he could not have guessed that Lundgren would go after Brody. Cronjager replies that that's the police's decision, as "a life is a life." Marlowe mocks this assertion, suggesting the police have no such values.

Cronjager's objection is valid, as Marlowe had not reported the crime as he legally ought to have. Yet Marlowe's assertion that the police do not follow their own moral code undercuts Cronjager's suggestion that the rule of law is effective, or even a positive force, in the city.

Wilde interjects, stopping the argument. He demands Marlowe explain why he's so sure of his story. Marlowe asserts that Joe Brody doesn't seem the killing "type," while Taylor had motive to kill Geiger, as he loved Carmen.

Familiar with the complexity of the city's criminal world, Wilde challenges Marlowe's version of events, which seems too simple. Wilde knows that such criminals could commit any number of wicked acts.

Cronjager asks why Lundgren would have hidden the body. Marlowe suggests it would have given the boy time to pack and leave, though he later regretted it and placed his friend in a better resting place. Wilde agrees. Marlowe adds Lundgren probably later tailed the books to Joe Brody, and assumed Brody killed Geiger to get his racket.

Lundgren assumed the worst of Brody, leading him to make a terrible mistake. Yet, it seems Lundgren, for one, was not driven by survival but by grief. Only those who unwaveringly ensure their own survival will remain unscathed in this dog eat dog environment.

Marlowe puts all the evidence on the table: Geiger's blackmail letter, Carmen's photos, and Geiger's blue notebook. Looking at Geiger's note, Wilde opines that Geiger was probably seeing if General Sternwood was scared. If the General paid up, Geiger would have begun to really work him.

The evidence on the table represents the many, imaginative forms of decadence and depravity exhibited among L.A.'s residents. What is more, these are only reference points, as the full story lies much deeper, such as Geiger's blackmailing attempt being a test of Sternwood's resolve.

Wilde asks Marlowe if he has told the full truth. Marlowe admits he has left out some personal details on behalf of his client, and expects the Sternwoods' names to be left out of the write up. Cronjager cries "Hah!" and Wilde asks Marlowe why.

Marlowe admits to acting in others' interests, and Cronjager's knowing "snort" in part displays his surprise Marlowe openly admitted to holding back nonessential information for his own reasons.

Marlowe gets the pornography book from his car and shows the policemen. Marlowe says the police "allowed" Geiger's illegal shop to operate in plain sight, which would be embarrassing for the police if the whole story came to light. Cronjager takes that moment to leave, and Ohls follows him to hand over Lundgren.

In response to Wilde's question, but also to rebuff Cronjager's triumphant shout, Marlowe points out that the city police overlook their own duties when it suits them, so Cronjager cannot act morally superior. Cronjager doesn't try to, and leaves.

Wilde offers soothing words to Marlowe, excusing Cronjager's anger. The district attorney tells Marlowe he'll need to write statements, and asks why the private detective is so comfortable with turning the police against him.

Left alone with the District Attorney, Marlowe seems to have won the exchange with Cronjager. Marlowe's cynical attitude toward the police has challenged Cronjager's lax policing, to which the captain cannot respond.

Marlowe explains he's working a case, and must protect his client, as he is trying to make an honest living with the skills he has. He says he doesn't regret the "cover-up" because police do the same every day for their "friends."

Marlowe distances himself from the police's methods, as the detective openly works for his clients, whereas the police claim to serve the public but really serve whoever pays the most. At least Marlowe is honest about his cover ups.

Wilde tells Marlowe that his father was good friends with General Sternwood, and Wilde himself has often done much to help the "old man," but his daughters (Carmen and Mrs. Regan) are wild and it's their father's fault. Wilde adds the General is likely worried his missing son-in-law, Rusty Regan, is somehow involved in blackmailing him.

Wilde admits to offering his friends favors, as his assistance to General Sternwood has artificially preserved the rich family's respectability. This example shows how the wealthy use their connections to maintain their social positions. Yet Wilde says Sternwood is at fault for his daughters' misbehavior, a parallel example to how the authorities' mismanagement of the city has led to its moral decay.

Marlowe explains that the General had bonded with Rusty and simply wishes to know he is well. That changes Wilde's demeanor. Wilde hands the nude photos and Geiger's blackmail note back to Marlowe.

Wilde gives Marlowe back the evidence that would connect the Sternwood family with the murders of Geiger and Brody. The District Attorney has decided once again to protect his friend, despite the escalating immorality tied to that family's name.

CHAPTER 19

As Marlowe steps into the lobby of his apartment building, one of Eddie Mars's men is waiting for him. Tired and irritable, Marlowe dares the man to get to his gun quicker than him. The man says he has no orders to fight, so he leaves. Left in peace, Marlowe gets into his apartment and cleans Carmen's gun.

In a bad mood, Marlowe readies himself to fight the thug sent to collect him, as the detective assumes the worst of the situation and steels himself to meet his perceived aggressor head on. Marlowe's show of force has the intended effect, and he is left in peace.

The phone rings as Marlowe holds a freshly made drink. He picks the phone up and Eddie Mars asks the detective if he has kept the racketeer's name out of his report to the police, who are now at Geiger's house. Marlowe confirms he did, and Mars thanks him. Mars then asks who murdered Geiger. Marlowe gives evasive answers, finally explaining that the murderer was someone Mars had never met.

Although relatively safer on a phone call rather than in person, with guns involved, Marlowe is still on the defensive, unwilling to give Mars more information than necessary. Mars offers a truce, but Marlowe remains reluctant to draw too close to this disreputable figure.

Mars asks Marlowe if the private detective is looking for the missing Rusty Regan. Frustrated, Marlowe says he's not, but Mars invites Marlowe to his casino to talk about it anyway.

Mars does not believe Marlowe, indicating he is aware the private detective avoids offering directly truthful answers.

After Mars hangs up, Marlowe calls the Sternwood house and gets through to Mr. Norris. He leaves a message for Mrs. Regan that he has all of Carmen's nude photos. The butler sounds relieved.

Rather than dealing with Mrs. Regan directly and entering another battle of words and wits, Marlowe leaves a message with Norris. Although reluctant to deal with a verbal exchange, Marlowe has been acting in Mrs. Regan's and her sister's interests.

A few minutes later, Marlowe's phone starts ringing but he doesn't answer it. It continues to ring on and off throughout the evening, and Marlowe muffles the bell when he goes to bed.

Marlowe still has no energy to contend with the outside world, in which every interaction is a battle of wills. He opts for a quiet night instead.

In the morning, Marlowe reads the newspapers and sees the Sternwoods have been kept out of the stories as agreed. Owen's death is not connected to the other murders. Captain Cronjager supposedly solved the other cases—Brody supposedly shot Geiger and Lundgren shot Brody in revenge. Marlowe sneers at the newspapers' typical wild inaccuracies.

As agreed with the police, the Sternwood family name has been kept out of the reports, showing how high connections protect the wealthy. Yet the fact that even the newspapers do not tell the truth shows the depths of corruption in the city.


CHAPTER 20

At the Missing Persons Bureau, Captain Gregory is considering Marlowe, who sits across a desk from him. Marlowe is asking the Captain for help on behalf of General Sternwood, but isn't being specific about what he is working on. Seeing the Captain's frustration, Marlowe makes a move as if to leave.

In his typically evasive approach to personal interaction, Marlowe allows Gregory's assumptions to run unchecked, as Marlowe wants to see what the Captain knows. The Captain does not appreciate this treatment.

Gregory asks if Marlowe knows District Attorney Wilde. Marlowe explains he's an ex-cop who used to work for Wilde, and knows Ohls well. Gregory calls Ohls's office and confirms this, and asks for a physical description of Marlowe.

Too used to the unwholesome characters in this city, Gregory calls Ohls to make sure Marlowe is who he claims he is.

Looking back at Marlowe, Gregory asks if he's after information on Rusty Regan. Marlowe replies "sure." Gregory thinks General Sternwood should let the matter rest rather than get Marlowe involved, but the private detective explains that the General was friendly with Rusty. Marlowe adds that he wants to make sure Rusty isn't involved in the blackmailing venture.

With Ohls's recommendation in hand, Marlowe's play gains him ground, as Gregory jumps right into admitting there is an open case on Regan's disappearance. Marlowe offers some small details of truth to further cement Gregory's trust, to encourage the Captain to open up more.

Gregory tells Marlowe that Rusty is missing and won't be found. The Captain then asks an assistant to get Rusty's file. Flicking through the file, Gregory offers Marlowe the keys facts: Rusty went off in his car but no one saw him leave. The car was later found in a private garage, Eddie Mars's wife's garage. It seems they disappeared around the same time.

Gregory offers the details of the case to Marlowe now without hesitation, as the detective has won his confidence. The Captain is pessimistic about the hopes of ever finding Rusty, knowing how well criminals can hide from the system, for a time at least.

The Captain explains that Rusty was rich in his own right and didn't need money from the Sternwoods. Rusty was a former alcohol smuggler during Prohibition, and kept $15,000 on him at all times. Gregory doesn't think Rusty was killed for the money though—he was too tough.

Chandler again emphasizes that Rusty is a high-level criminal, a distinction that largely rests on the fact that he was financially successful. Yet, different from the likes of Eddie Mars, it is Rusty's own toughness that protects him, rather than his connections.

Marlowe asks for a photo of Eddie Mars's wife, but the police don't have one. Gregory offers Marlowe a picture of Rusty instead. Gregory explains they questioned Eddie Mars at the time of their disappearance and don't think he killed off Rusty in jealousy over an affair with Mars's wife. Gregory explains that Mars is too smart for that, and even a successful double bluff would make his life too hard with the cops keeping an eye on him.

Smart, successful criminals do not kill out of emotion, a failure that led to Carol Lundgren's botched revenge and imprisonment, as well as Owen Taylor's suicide. Instead, the likes of Eddie Mars are cool and calculated, accepting a personal slight as a matter of business, if the risk of retaliating is too high and the payout too low.

Gregory's theory is Mars's wife and Regan ran off together, as they never found her car. As such, he says the best course of action is to wait until they reveal themselves. The Captain also explains that they can't get photos of Mars's wife from Eddie because he wants his wife to be left alone; Mars has too many friends in town for the police to pressure him too hard.

Eddie Mars is a well-connected racketeer with friends in high places. This network of contacts keeps him safe from unwanted pressure or attention from the police. As such, it is hard to imagine such a well-protected criminal being bullied into any course of action he did not agree with.

The Captain considers Marlowe a little more, and asks if he really thinks Eddie Mars killed both his own wife (Mona) and Rusty. Marlowe agrees with Gregory that the two missing people likely ran away together.

Whether Marlowe is telling the truth is debatable. He could just be reassuring Gregory. After all, the detective tends to avoid the direct truth and certainly expects the worst of everyone he meets.

As Marlowe leaves the office and drives away, a "gray Plymouth sedan" follows him. The detective leaves an opportunity for the driver to talk to him, but the mysterious tailer doesn't take the opportunity, so Marlowe drives off and loses the car.

A confident tailer himself, Marlowe wants to know what this new adversary wants. Marlowe's total control of the situation contributes to his masculine portrayal.

CHAPTER 21

Marlowe sits in his office and thinks everything over. He is thinking about making a drink, even though drinking alone isn't much fun, when the phone rings. It's Norris. The butler tells the detective that the General read the newspapers and assumes the case is concluded. Marlowe explains he didn't shoot Geiger, and will destroy the photos. Norris says he's sending Marlowe a **check** for $500.

Marlowe's wealthy client General Sternwood knows how deals are made behind closed doors, and can read through the papers' version of events to see that Marlowe has concluded the case. With his check comes the end of Marlowe's official services for Sternwood, meaning the detective no longer needs to serve the old man's interests.

Marlowe makes the drink he'd promised himself. He thinks about Rusty, leaving his rich and good-looking wife for someone else's. The police were clueless, and General Sternwood hadn't wanted to admit he had gone to the police in the first place. Marlowe agrees with Gregory that Mars is probably too smart to kill both Rusty and his own wife (Mona) out of jealousy.

Marlowe, now a free agent, cannot stop thinking about his recent case, which is transforming into a different one. Although Marlowe tells himself he believes the versions of events he has heard, his innate skepticism means he cannot stop turning the matter over in his own mind.

Marlowe thinks to himself that Mrs. Regan and Eddie have a good relationship, not just because she spends money at his casino, but because their spouses ran away together. No wonder she could borrow money from Mars. Marlowe also thinks how Lundgren is now out of the picture, likely to be sent to jail for life if not executed by **cyanide**.

The city's elite know and assist one another, while an average boy who got out of his depth in a complex criminal world will be spending the rest of his life in prison, a life that might be cut short by execution. Carol's potential execution would involve poisoning, reflecting the toxic environment that led him to such an end.

Marlowe sees that the matter is mostly tied up, and that the sensible option would be to move on. Instead, he calls Eddie Mars to tell him the detective will head down to the casino that evening.

The private detective cannot let the matter lie, unhappy with hearing only other people's opinions. He wants to close the case completely, to his own standard.

That evening, Marlowe arrives at the "outwardly shabby" Cypress Club in an L.A. suburb. One of Mars's men escorts Marlowe into the boss's office. Mars and Marlowe shake hands, and the detective gets straight to the point, asking Mars what he wants. Mars wants to have a drink first, but Marlowe is more focused on business. The well-dressed Mars forces a drink on Marlowe.

Marlowe steps into the venue for Mars's illegal gambling racket, again an establishment barely hidden in plain sight. Mars receives Marlowe warmly, as the latter has gained Mars's trust by keeping the gangster out of his report to the police. Yet Marlowe remains distant, unwilling to form alliances.

Marlowe admits to coming to the casino during Prohibition. Mars tells the detective that Mrs. Regan is in the casino right then, winning on roulette. The racketeer offers Marlowe **money** for keeping his name out of his statement to the police, which Mars knows about through his links in the department. Marlowe declines in a roundabout manner, asking for information on Rusty Regan instead.

In his typical style, Marlowe maintains his indirect manner during the exchange, as his guard is still up. Eddie admits to buying police loyalty, with inside informants keeping him up to date. His connections represent how wealthy criminals have the resources, and therefore the connections, to protect themselves. In turn, this demonstrates the police's negligence, and outright corruption.

Mars tells Marlowe indirectly that he knows the detective got information from the Missing Persons Bureau already. Marlowe asks Mars if he killed Rusty Regan, at which Mars laughs, denying it. Marlowe laughs too, saying he knows Mars doesn't have men who could take Regan on.

Mars has an informant even within the Missing Persons Bureau, a niche area, meaning his network is wide, making him yet more secure in his social standing. It is unsurprising then, that Eddie is not a suspect in Rusty's disappearance, though Marlowe also discounts this theory.

Sipping his drink, Mars asks Marlowe if he's looking for Rusty Regan. Marlowe responds noncommittally, adding that General Sternwood would like to know where Rusty is, rather than Mrs. Regan.

Although warming to each other, both men are still on the defense. They both still want information from each other, and don't want to divulge too many of their own secrets.

Marlowe explains he wants to rule Rusty Regan out of the blackmail story. Mars tells the detective that Geiger tried the blackmail angle on anyone he could.

Although it is not Marlowe's direct duty, he wants to ensure he has covered all the aspects of his case, as he knows there are always more layers behind criminal activity than what meets the eye.

Mars tells Marlowe that he wishes General Sternwood would keep someone like Marlowe on salary to control his girls. He explains that on balance he loses **money** to someone like Mrs. Regan because of the way she gambles so much, without much personal income.

Mars intends to compliment Marlowe's abilities, but his comment classes the detective as a hired underling rather than an active player in the wider game of life itself. It is Sternwood's interests that Marlowe focuses on, rather than his own, because Sternwood pays him.

Marlowe says he's going to see the casino for himself. Mars announces the two men are friends, and Marlowe agrees. Mars offers Marlowe a favor in future, without needing to go through Gregory. Marlowe says he knew Mars had him paid off.

Marlowe does not seem the type to have many friends, and his agreement with Mars is no doubt part manners, part cynical attempt to stay on the right side of this high-level racketeer, who has bought out police captains.

As he leaves, Marlowe asks Mars if he's having the detective tailed by the gray sedan. Mars seems worried, denying all knowledge of this.

Marlowe's mysterious tailer remains an unknown quantity, and Mars's genuine surprise in turn worries Marlowe.

CHAPTER 22

The main hall of the casino used to be a ballroom. Now, a Mexican band is taking a break amid the traditional interior decoration. Marlowe spots Mrs. Regan across the room as he leans on the bar. The bartender watches her too, telling Marlowe that Mrs. Regan is having a lucky night.

Previously a grand ballroom, the main hall of the casino is a warped version of its former self, its glory replaced with illicit decadence, reflecting the moral decay permeating the city.

Two other men come to the bar, exclaiming about Mrs. Regan's incredible run at the roulette table. The man running the roulette table tells Mrs. Regan loudly that the table cannot meet her bet. Marlowe wanders over.

Mrs. Regan is outdoing the casino itself in pursuing self-indulgence. Reckless and wild, wealthy Mrs. Regan has money to burn and gambles unrestrainedly, knowing her family name will not be smeared given her connections.

Money is strewn across the table in front of Mrs. Regan, who looks paler than usual. She is angry that the table doesn't have the money to cover her bet. Eddie Mars appears, well-dressed as usual, to top up the table's cash.

Mrs. Regan and Eddie Mars belong to a social elite that can throw stacks of money onto a table, knowing they might not get it back. Yet Mrs. Regan shows sign of strain, suggesting she has come to the table to relieve some form of stress.

Mars suggests arranging for someone to drive Mrs. Regan home, and she blushes. She demands to put all of her **money**, $16,000, on red, "the color of blood."

Mrs. Regan has death on the mind—perhaps that of Owen Taylor, Joe Brody, or Geiger, or perhaps fears for her husband.

Everyone watches as the croupier counts the **money** and sets the ball rolling. Red wins. Mrs. Regan laughs. Mars smiles. The crowd breathes and leaves.

Mars's dignified response to his and the casino's loss suggests he has the cash to spare. But the crowd looks on in awe at the high stakes.

Marlowe leaves before Mrs. Regan, and takes a walk outside, toward a cliff over the sea. As he passes through some trees, Marlowe hears a man cough. Marlowe hides, and sees that the man is masked.

Even on a casual stroll on a cliff by the sea, Marlowe has his guard up, expecting the unseen man to be an enemy. He is right.

CHAPTER 23

Marlowe hears an unseen woman approaching. The man steps out, brandishes a gun, and demands the bag that the woman is holding. With the bag in hand, the man passes the spot where Marlowe is hiding; the detective holds his pipe like a gun and calls out to the man, telling him to drop the bag. After the man drops the bag, Marlowe takes a gun out of the man's pocket. Marlowe tells the man to leave, and he runs off.

His suspicion of the character at first glance has allowed Marlowe to maintain his characteristic cool, as he takes control of a potentially life and death situation despite being outgunned. Saving this damsel in distress feeds into Marlowe's heroically masculine characterization, drawing on traditional concepts of knights.

Marlowe picks up the bag and returns it to the woman, who it turns out is Mrs. Regan. She quips that the detective is now her bodyguard. Mrs. Regan asks why he is here and Marlowe gives evasive answers about telling Mars that the detective is not interested in Rusty Regan.

Despite just having saved her, Marlowe does not consider Mrs. Regan an ally, remaining ambiguous in his responses. This man trusts no one, though it seems he will help anyone that needs assistance.

Mrs. Regan and Marlowe walk to the garage, where Mrs. Regan's escort Larry Cobb is drunk and asleep in his car. Cobb drove himself rather than bringing a driver, meaning Mrs. Regan is stranded. She pays an assistant to look after her unconscious boyfriend. Mrs. Regan instructs Marlowe to drive her home.

Her missing husband is no barrier to Mrs. Regan's self-assured sexuality, as she openly dates other men, despite being a married woman. Her confidence reflects the security of her social position.

Marlowe leads Mrs. Regan to his car. He drives toward home, and after a while stops at a drugstore to get Mrs. Regan a drink. They sit on two stools and order coffee to go with the whiskey. The clerk tells them they can't drink there but they ignore him.

No one really expects the clerk's nagging to prevent Mrs. Regan and Marlowe from drinking in the pharmacy whether it is illegal or not. The pettiness of the rule pales in comparison with the greater crimes they have witnessed, even this week.

While he pours the whiskey, Marlowe tells Mrs. Regan that Mars's casino was guarded by police during Prohibition. He asks her what Eddie Mars is holding over her, but she avoids the question. Instead, he asks how much General Sternwood knows. Mrs. Regan figures District Attorney Wilde tells the General everything.

In the clearest sign yet of the rampant corruption in the city, Eddie Mars's police guard demonstrates the officials' and authority figures' lack of accountability, given their flagrant negligence of duty. As well as controlling the police, Eddie also has some kind of hold over Mrs. Regan, Marlowe perceives, although she doesn't trust him enough to confide in him.

Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe that she worries about her sister Carmen all the time, and often keeps things from General Sternwood so he won't know that his blood is "rotten."

Not for the first time, Mrs. Regan reveals her moral compass, although she doesn't follow its direction. Her shame shows she respects her family name, and knows she is tarnishing it.

Mrs. Regan accuses Marlowe of being "a killer." He explains he didn't kill Geiger or Brody, though he would have if needed. Mrs. Regan says that makes him "a killer at heart, like all cops." She suggests they leave "this rotten little town."

Familiar with the brutal realities of life and death in the city, Mrs. Regan declares that all cops, and Marlowe, are killers. She despairs of the city's law enforcement, depicting the whole of society—both cops and criminals—as wicked.

Marlowe pays and he and Mrs. Regan get back in the car. They drive along a coast road. After a while Mrs. Regan asks Marlowe to stop at a viewpoint overlooking the sea. Other cars are parked in the same area. Once parked, Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe to move closer. They kiss, and she again calls him "killer."

Her perception of Marlowe's moral deficiencies does not deter Mrs. Regan's interest, who after all married a criminal. Instead, she seems desensitized, or even actively attracted to the idea of Marlowe's immorality, a characterization based on her own assumptions.

Mrs. Regan asks Marlowe to drive to his apartment. He again asks her what Eddie Mars is holding over her. Mrs. Regan becomes angry, and swears at Marlowe. They squabble. Marlowe explains the attempted robbery was faked, and he wants to know why Eddie lets her win just to steal it back. Mrs. Regan says she would kill Marlowe if she had a weapon.

Even sharing a kiss cannot bring these two headstrong characters to a truce. Marlowe admits to enjoying the kiss, but allowed it to happen only to see if Mrs. Regan would let her guard down and give him the information he wants. The detective remains focused on his end goal: seeing the case solved to his standard.

Marlowe and Mrs. Regan are silent the whole drive back to the Sternwood mansion. After dropping off Mrs. Regan, Marlowe drives back to his own apartment, alone.

With the battle lines redrawn, neither Mrs. Regan nor Marlowe are willing to let their guard down and reveal information the other is seeking. They realize the other is not willing to give them what they want, so they have nothing left to say to the other.

CHAPTER 24

Marlowe rushes home for a drink. As he steps into his apartment, he can sense that something is not right. He turns on the light, and sees Carmen in his bed.

The detective's night is not over, even at home his defenses are instantly raised, as he notes things are not as they should be. Carmen is launching her own personal brand of attack on Marlowe.

Marlowe turns on more lights and moves a **knight** on his chessboard. Meanwhile, Carmen is giggling from the bed. She tells him she is naked. She sweeps away the covers to reveal herself. He asks her how she got in, and she explains the manager let her in.

Carmen's shameless attempt at seduction appears childish and naïve, especially as her efforts fall flat. Her giggly debauchery disgusts Marlowe, whose only concern is how his apartment's security was breached.

Exasperated, Marlowe tells Carmen to get dressed. He explains he has a professional duty to General Sternwood. Marlowe looks at his chessboard and moves the **knight** back.

Marlowe's exasperation with Carmen reveals his wider exhaustion with the constant battle that is life amid the city's moral decay. He sees that he, as a knight, cannot change the tide of this battle—his influence and power are too minor.

Walking into the kitchen to make a drink, Marlowe promises Carmen she can have a drink if she dresses herself. When he returns she is still not dressed. Marlowe pushes the point, and Carmen begins to hiss. She calls Marlowe a "filthy name."

Marlowe treats Carmen like a child, bribing her to behave properly. His attempt to guide her toward propriety contrasts with the lack of parenting in her life, as evident in her ridiculous, offensive behavior.

Standing in his own house, surrounded by his few possessions, which nevertheless carry emotional meaning, Marlowe becomes angry. He threatens Carmen to dress and leave or he'll throw her out naked. She storms out, and Marlowe sips his drink in peace. As she drives away, he rips apart his bed in fury.

Marlowe's fury is slightly ridiculous in this scene, but reveals the strength of his reaction to Carmen's perceived attack. Chandler includes this moment to portray Marlowe as staunchly opposed to immorality.

CHAPTER 25

The next morning, Marlowe feels he has a hangover from women.

The detective's physical reaction to the sisters' sexual advances shows he sees their actions as attacks not only on his morals but his masculinity. Their assertive sexuality challenges his perception of his dominant social role, making him deeply uncomfortable.

As Marlowe leaves his building, he sees the Plymouth that has been tailing him. He drives around the block to get a look at the driver, a small man who is by himself. Marlowe shakes off the car as it tails him, doubles back round the block, gets out of his own car, and walks over to the Plymouth. He opens the door and invites the man up to his office after he has his breakfast.

Marlowe is unintimidated by this adversary as he notes the man is smaller than him, highlighting how Marlowe equates masculinity with power. As such, although the car was previously an ominous presence, Marlowe now approaches the driver head on, without fear.

In his office, Marlowe finds his **check** from General Sternwood. The small man enters Marlowe's office, and introduces himself as Harry Jones. They both light a cigarette.

The General's check reminds the reader of the two men's relationship: employer and employee. Marlowe is working toward his client's ends, not primarily his own. Marlowe again focuses on Jones's height, almost mockingly.

Harry Jones introduces his history as a grifter, at which Marlowe scoffs. Marlowe tells Jones to get to the point, saying he must be connected to Joe Brody, which takes Jones by surprise.

Jones is upfront and to the point, showing he also has no fear of Marlowe, though Marlowe shows no respect to the "little man," again displaying his perception of masculinity as power.

Jones says he's in contact with Agnes, and has information that he wants to sell to Marlowe for $200. Marlowe scoffs that Jones and Agnes are partners, laughing that she would crush Jones, which Jones responds to with dignified affront.

As Marlowe had mocked Lundgren for being a lesser man, so he openly ridicules Jones because his lover is taller than him. To Marlowe, masculinity comes from following traditional gender roles, in particular manifesting physically dominant manliness. Jones' dignified response shows Marlowe's arrogant masculinity distances the detective from potentially useful allies. Meanwhile, Jones is primarily looking out for himself, hoping to make some money off Marlowe.

Marlowe asks what the information is about, and Jones said it would help find Rusty Regan. Jones says Mars killed Regan, but Marlowe doesn't believe him. Jones says Regan was a good man and in love with Mona Mars, Eddie's wife. The way Jones talks tells Marlowe the grifter has brains and the vocabulary to match.

Instead of readily offering Marlowe the information so that the truth will be uncovered, Jones hopes to make his own profit from the whole situation. Jones's intelligence, particularly his eloquence, takes Marlowe by surprise, as he constantly underestimates the "little man."

Jones tells Marlowe he noticed Rusty wasn't around, and then noticed that Mars's tough guy Lash Canino, who usually keeps his distance, was in town. Jones told this to Joe Brody, who then tailed Canino and saw Mrs. Regan pass Canino something that looked like **money**.

Jones and Brody both involved themselves in Rusty's business because they thought there was a way to make money from it. Most grifters fear Canino, meaning the men would not have put themselves in harm's way unless they expected a profit.

For the $200, Jones tells Marlowe he can tell him where Mona Mars is now. That gets Marlowe's attention. Jones says Mona never ran off with Rusty, but is "being kept" just outside the city. He explains that Agnes had seen Mona herself, and will tell Marlowe where when she has the **money**, after all she's a grifter too. Marlowe likes Jones' manner, and agrees to the deal, but he needs to get the cash first.

Rather than simply helping Mona, Jones would rather somebody else do the dirty work, while he just takes some cash home. Agnes has the same approach, which defines these grifters, who have no loyalty to each other as they pursue their love of money.

Jones tells Marlowe to come to his apartment that evening with the **money**. Jones leaves, and Marlowe goes to the bank to cash his check. Marlowe then sits in his office thinking it through, wondering why Captain Gregory hadn't found Mona yet. Maybe he hadn't tried, he wonders, as the **rain** falls.

Given Marlowe knows that Eddie Mars has paid off Gregory, Marlowe's question centers more on how much of a hold Mars has over the Captain. Marlowe is wondering how much of the truth Gregory knows but is concealing.

CHAPTER 26

The **rain** has stopped but the roads are "flooded" as Marlowe drives to Jones's office, "a nasty building." Marlowe finds the office on the fourth floor, and hears Jones's voice identify Canino, with whom he is talking. Marlowe hears Canino respond menacingly.

The office building is full of sham businesses, as are many across the city. Hearing Canino's voice instantly puts Marlowe on the alert, not only because of his reputation but also his threatening tone.


Marlowe breaks into another door to Jones's office, and stalks through the adjoining rooms to peer through a door into the room Jones and Canino are in. From his hiding place, the detective hears Canino telling Jones that "Eddie don't like" the fact Jones went to talk to Marlowe.

Marlowe remains hidden, unwilling to expose himself to a dangerous situation. Canino explains that Eddie doesn't appreciate a lowly grifter potentially messing up his plans.


Jones gives Canino a weak excuse for why Agnes wants to talk to Marlowe, which doesn't go down well with Canino. Canino asks where Agnes is, but Jones won't tell him. Canino pulls out a gun, and repeats the question. Jones gives in and gives Canino an address.

Answering Canino's questions well is a life or death matter for Jones, as well as for Agnes. In the most transparent example in the novel, Jones is fighting for survival with only his words as his weapons.

Canino pours a couple of drinks for him and Jones. There is a sound of choking and vomiting, then a "thud." Canino quips aloud that Jones got "sick from just one drink." There is no response. Canino leaves.

Jones has failed in his bid for survival. With Jones's death at the hands of Canino, Eddie maintains his superiority in the criminal world without even doing the dirty work himself.


Marlowe enters the room to find Jones dead in his chair. The detective sniffs the whiskey bottle and smells **cyanide**. Marlowe picks up the phone and finds the number for the address Jones gave Canino. The person who answers believes Marlowe's pretense that he is a cop, and confirms there is no Agnes at the address—Jones had lied to protect her.

Jones's death by poisoning reflects his low social standing in this society. He has been exterminated by a person of higher standing for straying into the wrong situation.Marlowe, seeking to warn Agnes, finds out that Jones's last act was to protect her, which is both a selfless act and displays Jones's shrewd assessment of Canino's nature.

Standing over Jones's corpse, Marlowe marvels that the "little dead man" was so honorable. He searches Jones's body, but doesn't find anything useful.

Even after Jones's death, Marlowe still treats him with disdain, focusing more on the man's height than on his selfless act, showing Marlowe's rigid concept of masculinity focuses on physical power and social norms rather than honorable character traits.

Marlowe begins to leave the office when the phone rings. It's Agnes. Marlowe tells her that Jones ran off when Canino started looking for him, though Agnes doesn't believe Marlowe. Nevertheless, she wants the **money** and arranges to meet with him.

The detective still wants the information from Agnes, and so doesn't want to scare her off by telling her Canino murdered Jones and is looking for her. Agnes meanwhile, is focused on getting paid.

CHAPTER 27

Agnes is in the gray Plymouth, demanding the **money** from Marlowe with an outstretched hand. She asks what happened to Jones. Marlowe repeats the story that Jones ran for it, scared of Canino.

Agnes and Marlowe, on two sides of a deal, meet each other with their own goals their main priority. Agnes is worries about Jones, but that doesn't stop her from taking the money. Meanwhile Marlowe wants his information, and doesn't want to scare Agnes off, and so continues to conceal Jones's murder.

Agnes recounts seeing Mona Mars driving with Canino in the car a couple weeks ago. Agnes was with Joe Brody at the time, and they tailed the car to the hideout location, near a garage which is near a **cyanide** plant in the hills. When it was dark, Joe went up to see the house Mona was hiding out in.

The ominous presence of the cyanide plant near Mona's hideout suggests death lurks near the house. If Marlowe is to go there, it will be a fight for survival. The fact the plant produces the poison for fumigation, as Agnes specifically notes, indicates those who die by cyanide were treated like vermin.

Marlowe gives Agnes the **money**. Agnes says to wish her luck, as she's had a hard time, but Marlowe sneers. As she drives off with the money, Marlowe thinks of all the men who have died—Geiger, Brody, and Jones—while Agnes doesn't have a scratch.

For Marlowe, suffering is primarily a physical phenomenon, as he focuses on deaths rather than other forms of suffering as the worst fate to befall someone. He emphasizes the importance of survival over success, perhaps the best to hope for in this city's kill or be killed climate.

The **rain** is falling hard as Marlowe drives north. He passes through towns and empty fields. As he takes a curve, he loses control of the car and hits a curb, blowing out two tires. He only has one spare. Luckily, there is a garage nearby.

As the storm grows, the tension builds, and Marlowe drives toward what he knows will be a hard battle. Given that General Sternwood considers the case closed, Marlowe continues under his own steam, perhaps because this knight wishes to save the damsel in distress, and perhaps because he wants to see the truth come to light. Either way, it will be his own life on the line, in exchange for no personal victory, unlike most of the other characters' approach to life.

Marlowe hides his driver's registration and takes a gun from the car, hiding another in a sealed compartment. He walks to the garage—Art Huck's Auto Repairs. Marlowe knocks the door and tells the voice inside he's got two flat tires. They try to turn him away but he insists. They pull a gun on him.

Marlowe prepares for the worst, expecting a tough fight. Usually unarmed, the detective decides to take a gun with him, suggesting this will be a fight to the death. Marlowe's flat tires offer him the perfect cover, leading to the question of whether he really lost control of the car at all.

Art invites Marlowe in, keeping his gun aimed at him, explaining there was a bank heist in the next town. Marlowe says he is a stranger in this town, and didn't pull the heist. Canino tells Art to back off. Marlowe gets his first glance at Canino.

Neither Art not Marlowe is telling the truth. Marlowe finally locks eyes with Canino, and sees he is as fearsome as Jones said.

Art sets off to sort out Marlowe's tires. Canino pours himself and Marlowe a drink as they wait for Art. Marlowe sniffs the glass before he sips. It's safe. The men make small talk as Art's cursing drifts in from the **rain**.

His guard fully up, Marlowe is not likely to unwarily sip from a cup Canino offers given what he just witnessed. The rain provides an ominous backdrop to their conversation, blanketing the scene with growing tension.

The door opens and Art rolls in the two flats. He fixes them quickly. As Art is bouncing one of the repaired tires, and with no break in rhythm, he brings it down over Marlowe's head. Unable to move his arms, Marlowe can't reach his gun or protect his face from Canino's punch. Marlowe falls unconscious from the second punch.

Despite being fully alert, Marlowe is outnumbered and outmaneuvered. He notes with some praise that the two men made no visible signal of their well-coordinated attack, showing they are even more practiced in deception than Marlowe.

CHAPTER 28

Marlowe comes to, and sees a blonde woman in a sitting room. Marlowe sees he is tied up tightly on a couch. He looks at the woman and says "Hello." She turns to look at him. She asks how he's feeling, and knows his name.

The detective finds himself in a strange situation. He is tied securely, but watched over by an unintimidating figure. He is unsure how to approach the situation, not least because his head is still hurting.

The woman explains that Canino looked through his pockets and found his wallet. In response to Marlowe's question, she confirms they're in the house near Art Huck's garage, and that the two other men are not there. Marlowe is surprised to hear she's not a prisoner.

Marlowe's first instinct is to gather information—where the other men are, what has happened, and what they know about him. He immediately begins to assess the situation and his options, focused on escape and survival.

Mona Mars doesn't like it when Marlowe tells her he knows who she is. She says that's a shame for him, as she dislikes killing. Marlowe mocks her for that, as she's Eddie Mars's wife, and asks for a drink.

As the reader has come to expect, Marlowe is better informed about the situation than he at first lets the other person believe. He also doesn't let Mona's false impressions of the world, in particular her husband's transgressions, go unchallenged.

Marlowe takes in the room as he tells Mona that Eddie killed Rusty. She asserts that Eddie isn't like that. Marlowe accuses her of liking racketeers. She tries to defend Eddie, but Marlowe says that Eddie's "all the way outside" the law.

Marlowe's sense of morality is absolute, with a clear line differentiating morality from immorality. He asserts that one cannot dip a toe in immorality, but is either entirely ethical or entirely beyond the line of no return.

Mona becomes angry, repeating that Eddie is not a killer. Marlowe says Eddie orders Canino to kill, and that the detective has seen Canino kill. Wanting to fill the silence, Marlowe says Mona's platinum hair is out of style. She shows him it's a wig—she cut her hair off to show Eddie she was serious about hiding out so people wouldn't think he'd killed Rusty.

The detective has no interest in sparing Mona's feelings, telling her exactly what kind of man Eddie is. He does this in his own interests as well, as she is the only one who can untie him, and so convincing her he really is in mortal danger is Marlowe's only hope for survival. Overwhelming Mona in this way also leads her to tell Marlowe more than she might have otherwise divulged.

Mona leaves the room and returns with a knife. She cuts the ropes holding Marlowe down, but doesn't have the key for his handcuffs. Canino does. Mona explains she didn't think Eddie was a killer. She collapses into a chair.

Mona it seems, wishes to stay on the moral side of the divide. This ensures Marlowe's continued hopes for survival, as it seems he has finally made an ally.

Marlowe can stand but still has his hands cuffed behind his back. He tells Mona to leave with him, but she tells him not to waste time. He calls her Silver-Wig as she gives him a cigarette. Marlowe tells her about Jones's death, and how Eddie ordered it. Mona tell him to leave, and laughs, saying she still loves Eddie.

Marlowe might have won Mona's trust, but not her heart, as she mocks herself for still loving Eddie despite what she now knows about him. As with Lundgren's misplaced revenge killing and Owen's suicide, Mona's emotions do not drive her toward self-preservation. Instead she rather illogically frees Marlowe, now an enemy of the dangerous man that she loves. In contrast, the surest route to survival would be focused self-interest, but Mona thinks only of others, to her own detriment.

Marlowe tries to convince "Silver-Wig" to go with him, but she won't. The detective warns Mona that Canino might kill her, but she says she's still his boss's wife. Marlowe says Canino could kill Eddie easily. Mona tells Marlowe to leave again, and he kisses her before he does. She kisses him back. Marlowe leaves, walking out into the **rain**.

The rain is still falling, suggesting Marlowe is not yet safe. Caught up in the adrenaline of the moment, the two share a kiss, as both know their survival is in the balance. Marlowe walks out into the rain, embracing his fate, but determined to fight until the end.

CHAPTER 29

Marlowe doesn't run into Canino or Art as he goes back to his car in the pouring **rain**. He thinks about Mona, who hid to protect Eddie, whom she loves. He also thinks through how Canino likely planned to kill him, while not letting Mona find out.

Marlowe's train of thought, that Canino wouldn't think twice about killing him and lying to Mona, emphasizes this is a fight for survival against a known murderer.

Making it to his car through the driving rain, Marlowe finds that Art had fixed it, leaving it as another getaway car option. In his car, Marlowe gets his hidden gun out, and has to quickly hide to avoid the headlights of Canino's returning car.

Having prepared for every eventuality, Marlowe runs back to his car to get his stashed gun. Art and Canino have also planned for all outcomes, preparing a second getaway car just in case.

Marlowe gets his gun ready at his side, as far round as he can reach it, and walks back toward the house. He climbs into Canino's empty car and turns the ignition, the motor sounding through the night. Marlowe then gets out of the vehicle and hides down behind the back of the car.

Marlowe's determination to survive is coupled with his wide-ranging abilities, which stretch to being able to hold a gun while handcuffed behind his back. This depicts Marlowe as a physically adept man's man.


Canino opens one of the house's windows and fires three gun shots into the driver's seat. Marlowe yells in fake pain. Canino laughs from inside the house.

Baited into Marlowe's trap, Canino believes he has the upper hand, or has even killed Marlowe. Again, Marlowe remains in total control of a potentially chaotic situation.

The front door opens, and Mona steps out, with Canino holding a gun to her back. Mona screams and says she can see Marlowe behind the driver's wheel. Canino pushes her over and fires three more times into the driver's seat.

The author emphasizes Canino's evilness as he holds a gun into an innocent woman's back, firstly making it clear who stands on the wrong side of the moral/immoral line as Canino uses Mona as a human shield, and secondly leaving no doubt that Canino intends to kill.


Marlowe gets up and calls Canino, who faces him. Marlowe shoots him four times and Canino falls to the ground, dead. Standing near Mona now, Marlowe begins to laugh maniacally. Mona asks if he had to kill Canino, stopping Marlowe's mad laughter. She gets the key and undoes Marlowe's handcuffs, saying she guesses he did have to kill Canino.

With Canino fully established as the villain, Marlowe killing him is an unquestioned victory. Despite the fact killing Canino can be considered justifiable, the act still has an adverse psychological effect on Marlowe, who temporarily loses reason. Although he has survived, the detective is now a killer, as Mrs. Regan had accused him of being earlier.

CHAPTER 30

Marlowe is sitting across from Captain Gregory at the Missing Persons Bureau. The cop has heard all about Marlowe's encounter with Canino. The Captain asks who told Marlowe where Mona was hiding, and Marlowe tells him about Jones. Gregory says maybe he ought to have found Mona himself, and Marlowe agrees.

The two men discuss Marlowe's encounter with Canino openly, as both know where the other stands; in particular, Marlowe knows that Eddie Mars has paid off Gregory. Marlowe does not hide his disappointment in the corrupt cop.

Gregory says *maybe* he left Eddie and Mona to "play a little game like that." Marlowe says he hadn't thought about that, even though Eddie had known that Gregory and Marlowe had talked last time.

Marlowe hadn't considered that Gregory could still be acting according to his own intuition, under his own autonomy, because as seen before Marlowe tends to see things in black and white, even though he bends the rules when it suits him too.

Captain Gregory raises his eyebrows and says he's as honest as policemen come in this world. He says he wishes the world was fairer, but Eddie Mars will not likely end up in prison anytime soon. That's not what the country is like, he says. Marlowe sits in silence.

Gregory claims to be a realist, suggesting that within the morally corrupt climate of the city, he's an honest man who still wants to see justice done. He just doesn't expect real justice to be served anytime soon, and he feels powerless to make society more fair by himself.

Gregory continues that he doesn't think Eddie killed Regan, and that Regan will likely appear sometime soon. The Captain explains that Eddie confessed to hiding Mona to the police the previous night, but Eddie had said he hadn't realized that Canino was a killer, and claimed he hadn't heard about Geiger's racket.

Given Eddie already admitted to Mars he knew about Geiger's racket, the reader can assume Eddie's other claims are also lies. Eddie gets away with his obvious falsehoods because he has friends in high places to protect him, not to mention within the police force itself.

Captain Gregory tells Marlowe that the private detective "played it smart" by telling the police everything about his encounter with Canino. Marlowe explains he and Mona had filed statements and the police let Mona go.

In contrast, Marlowe protects himself by staying just on the right side of the law and dealing completely honestly with the police when it comes time to disclose his statement. Marlowe doesn't have the same influence as Eddie Mars, and so has to play it safer.

Sighing, Gregory tells Marlowe he's "too rough" for the Sternwoods. Marlowe gets up to leave, and Gregory asks the detective if he still thinks he can find Regan. Marlowe says he's not even going to try, and leaves.

Marlowe has already endangered his life several times to investigate a mystery that is not even technically his case. With nothing to gain from investigating further, perhaps Marlowe is telling the truth this time.

Marlowe drives home and tries to sleep, but can't. He makes a drink and tries to sleep again. He thinks back to the previous night, when he had driven to District Attorney Wilde's place with Mona and told the police the whole story. He had taken them to Jones's office to show them the body, and they had found Canino's print to verify Marlowe's version of events. Later, Eddie Mars had also gone to Wilde's place to collect Mona and smooth things over.

While Eddie Mars has the resources to devise elaborate ruses to misguide the police, Marlowe's only hope to avoid imprisonment or worse is to tell the whole story to the police. For him, his freedom is secured by the one fingerprint Canino left behind in Jones's office to confirm his story. Eddie, in comparison, breezes in and out of Wilde's office with a few words of thanks.

Back in the present, Marlowe's phone rings. The Sternwoods' butler, Norris, is calling to invite Marlowe to a meeting with General Sternwood. Marlowe makes himself presentable and drives straight over.

Marlowe remains on call for his former client, General Sternwood. Given that Marlowe has already received his pay, his promptness in responding to Sternwood's invitation reflects a sense of loyalty born from their employer/employee relationship.

Only five days since the first time he rang the bell on the pristine mansion, it feels to Marlowe like a year has passed. He sees the **knight** in the stained glass window again, noticing the knight still hasn't saved the damsel.

While at the beginning of the novel Marlowe wanted to help the ineffective knight in the picture, now he simply observes that nothing has really changed. His acceptance of this situation reflects his inability to meaningfully improve his corrupt city.


Norris greets Marlowe and leads him to General Sternwood's room, where the old man is resting in bed at midday. The general tells Marlowe he was not hired to find Rusty. Marlowe tells the old man he had wanted the detective to find Rusty. The General says he feels betrayed. Marlowe offers his **money** back, for an "unsatisfactory job."

In contrast to the other characters in the novel, who use any opportunity to make money or further their own ends, Marlowe admits fault and offers money to an already rich man to makes things right. Thus, Marlowe is focused on higher goals than his own survival.

The General asks Marlowe why he went to see Captain Gregory. Marlowe tells Sternwood he thought the old man was afraid Rusty was involved in Geiger's blackmail scheme somehow. Marlowe explains Gregory knows a lot more than he lets on, so Marlowe let Gregory believe the detective was looking for Rusty, to see what the Captain knew.

Marlowe had been following up on potential leads as he read through the lines of his employer's original request, to see what the old man really wanted to know. To do the job to his high standards—Marlowe's true goal—the detective had investigated deeper than the old man had requested.

Continuing, Marlowe explains Norris thought the job was done when Geiger was out of the way, but Marlowe didn't see things that way. The detective says Geiger was trying to find out if Sternwood was hiding anything, that is, if he knew something about Rusty.

Marlowe's conscientiousness had brought him to the real mystery behind the case—why Geiger would specifically blackmail Sternwood. If Sternwood paid out on a small threat, that meant he was scared of something much bigger, something Geiger could make a lot more money from.

The General tells Marlowe to see the job through, offering the detective $1,000 if he can find Rusty, and just to make sure Rusty is okay, or if he needs **money**. Marlowe says he'll try. The General is exhausted, and Marlowe leaves to let him rest.

The General's intentions are mixed. While he wishes to soothe his own sense of pride by reassuring himself Rusty hadn't fooled him, the old man also wishes to help Rusty for his own sake. The General in part assumes the worst in Regan, but also hopes he has assumed incorrectly.

CHAPTER 31

Norris brings Marlowe his hat as he leaves, saying the General is not as weak as he looks. Marlowe walks out the front door, and sees Carmen sitting on the front steps. He approaches her and returns her gun.

Marlowe seems to have let his guard down, as he has never handed anyone a gun so far. Yet the gun belongs to Carmen and so it is rightfully hers. Thus, by his own moral code, Marlowe cannot keep it.

Carmen asks Marlowe to teach her to shoot, down by the old oil wells. Marlowe asks for the gun back until they're in a safe place to practice. They drive downhill for ten minutes to a secluded location. The pollution and rusted waste materials from previous industry make for a depressing environment.

The grim destruction of this now rotting environment references the moral decay of the Sternwood family, who made their fortune by creating this pollution.


Marlowe gives Carmen the gun and goes to set up a tin can as a target. He tells her to be careful as its fully loaded. As Marlowe walks back to her, Carmen begins to hiss and points the gun at him.

In an uncharacteristic expression of trust, Marlowe leaves himself completely open to attack, of which Carmen unexpectedly takes full advantage.

With the gun pointed at his chest, Marlowe laughs and walks toward Carmen. She fires four times before he gets to her, and a fifth time close to his face. Seeing that she still hasn't hit him, Carmen begins to foam at the mouth and seize up. Marlowe catches her. He puts the now unconscious Carmen in his car and drives back up to the Sternwood mansion.

Yet Marlowe has not actually let his guard down at all. He remains in control the whole time and Carmen is unable to shoot him. Her shock at her failure brings on a fit, and he drives her home, still the perfect gentleman despite her betrayal.


CHAPTER 32

Marlowe walks up to Mrs. Regan's sitting room, led by the maid Mathilda. Mrs. Regan calls him a "brute" for killing Canino and terrifying Carmen into a fit. Marlowe asks how Carmen is doing, and Mrs. Regan replies that she is asleep.

Mrs. Regan's worst fears about Marlowe seem confirmed, as she accuses him of being a killer and of intimidating her sister.

Marlowe tells Mrs. Regan he returned Carmen's gun to her, and Mrs. Regan falls silent. He explains they went down to the old oil wells to practice shooting, and it was "pretty creepy" down there, so maybe that upset her.

Marlowe doesn't tell the whole story at once, preferring to see how Mrs. Regan will react. Her sudden silence speaks volumes, as Marlowe can tell she has already assumed the rest of the story.

Marlowe then asks Mrs. Regan what Eddie Mars has on her, and Mrs. Regan responds that she's "tired" of the question. Marlowe tells Mrs. Regan everything ties together: Eddie Mars was behind Geiger's blackmail scheme, because he wanted to know if General Sternwood was hiding anything. If not, he would have to wait until Mrs. Regan got her inheritance.

The detective begins to offer up more details, to see which will get a rise out of Mrs. Regan. His story is building up to a crescendo, as he tells her everything she should already know, and he looks for signs of agreement in her body language.

Continuing in a long monologue, Marlowe explains Eddie knew where Rusty was and didn't want the police to find out, which is why he hid Mona to create a useful diversion. Mrs. Regan says she's bored.

Again, these are facts that Marlowe assumes Mrs. Regan will know. As such, telling her that he knows lays the foundation for the revelation he is about to make.

Marlowe tells Mrs. Regan that Carmen fired all five bullets in her gun at him, but he had swapped them for blanks. Mrs. Regan says he can't prove it. Marlowe says he doesn't care about this time—he's thinking about the last time, when the gun wasn't loaded with blanks.

Rather than denying Marlowe's accusation or countering it with her own accusation he is lying, Mrs. Regan simply states that Marlowe cannot prove Carmen tried to shoot him, as she knows it is possible her sister committed such a terrible act. As such, her response lends credibility to Marlowe's next accusation, that Carmen had already done something similar.

Instead, Marlowe is talking about when Rusty went missing. When Carmen shot him in anger too, anger for being turned down. Marlowe describes finding Carmen in his bed and kicking her out, and assumes the same happened with Regan.

Knowing Carmen as well as he does, Marlowe does not find it hard to jump to a likely conclusion in the missing Rusty case, stating that Carmen was the killer.

Mrs. Regan tells Marlowe she assumes he wants **money** and offers him $15,000. He attempts "not to sneer." He mocks her, saying that's how much Eddie expects to collect someday. She swears at him, and he agrees sarcastically, he is "a son of a bitch" as she called him, because he charges his clients $25 a day and to tries to protect an old man's pride.

Mrs. Regan confirms Marlowe's suspicions as she offers him hush money. Thinking the detective must seek the same as everyone else in this corrupt city, offering him money is the obvious answer. Instead Marlowe reveals he has been driven by sympathy for an old man, as well as pride in his own work.

Unable to respond, Mrs. Regan remains silent. Marlowe tells her just to take Carmen away to an institution where she'll be safe. Mrs. Regan confesses, to hiding Rusty's body and to calling in Eddie to help her. She says she did it to hide it from General Sternwood. She doesn't care if Eddie bleeds her white. Mostly, she drinks a lot to cope with the guilt.

With nothing left to hide now, Mrs. Regan finally tells Marlowe what Eddie Mars has been holding over her this whole time. While her methods are different, she has also been motivated by her desire to protect her father's pride, although in her case it is her own shame that threatens the old man's honor.


Marlowe repeats his order, to take Carmen away. Mrs. Regan agrees, asking what he will do, as Eddie will want to kill him. Marlowe isn't scared—he already killed Eddie's "best boy" (Canino). Marlowe leaves.

They both know that Eddie Mars will be after Marlowe, as they both know the racketeer too well to think he will let Marlowe walk away unchallenged. That is something Marlowe has already resigned himself to.

Outside, driving away in his car, Marlowe thinks that it doesn't matter where you end up after death—"you were sleeping the big sleep," no longer involved in the "nastiness." General Sternwood is far distant from the "nastiness," alone in his bed. Once back in town, Marlowe hits a bar and drinks Scotch, thinking about Mona.

Marlowe cannot keep himself out of the "nastiness" as General Sternwood can afford to. Rather, the detective has directly entered the "nastiness" in his service to the old man. But, Marlowe observes, these social distinctions do not matter after death, after which morality and money have no meaning anymore, despite all the efforts people make to hold onto one or the other while alive.


HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tenn, Camilla. "*The Big Sleep.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 14 Mar 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tenn, Camilla. "*The Big Sleep.*" LitCharts LLC, March 14, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-big-sleep.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Big Sleep* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Chandler, Raymond. The Big Sleep. Vintage. 1939.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Chandler, Raymond. The Big Sleep. New York: Vintage. 1939.