About the author

Chandler was born in 1888 in Chicago but he grew up in London. After school, he studied international law and then had a number of jobs in the United States, including teaching and bookkeeping. Although he began writing poetry and essays at an early age, he didn’t become a full time writer until he was forty-five. This was after he had been dismissed from his job as an executive for an oil company. With the help of his wife, Cecily Hurlburt, who was eighteen years his senior and already twice divorced when he married her, Chandler produced his first novel *The Big Sleep* (1939). It introduced the now well-known character of Philip Marlowe, a tough but honest private detective. He then went on to write another six novels, three of which are considered to be very important literary works (*Farewell, My Lovely*, 1940; *The Little Sister*, 1949; *The Long Goodbye*, 1953). Chandler’s work greatly interested those within the movie industry and he collaborated with them on several projects including the screenplay for *Double Indemnity* (1944) which he wrote with Billy Wilder. Six of his novels were successfully made into films including *The Big Sleep* (1946), which starred Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe. Chandler received the Edgar Alan Poe Award for screenplay in 1946 and for novel in 1954. Chandler died in California in 1959.

Summary

**Chapter 1:** The private detective Philip Marlowe arrives at General Sternwood’s house and meets his flirtatious daughter, Carmen. He then has an interview with the General, who explains that somebody is blackmailling him. He shows Marlowe an envelope he has received from a man called Geiger and some notes about Carmen’s gambling debts. Marlowe agrees to help. Then the General’s other daughter, Vivian Regan, asks to see Marlowe and she suggests that her father really wants him to find her husband Rusty, who had disappeared suddenly. Later Marlowe goes to Geiger’s bookstore and talks to a blonde woman, who says that Geiger isn’t there. Marlowe waits and he sees how a man comes into the shop with a package and exchanges it for another package in a back room. Marlowe follows him and gets the package. It contains a pornographic book. He then follows Geiger to his house and while waiting outside, he sees Carmen arrive and go in. Suddenly he hears gunshots from inside the house, then footsteps and a car engine.

**Chapter 2:** Marlowe finds Geiger dead next to a camera, which is focused on Carmen. She is sitting in a chair and she’s drugged. Marlowe checks the camera but there is no film inside. He then finds a notebook with some writing in code. He takes it and drives Carmen home. On returning to Geiger’s house, he finds the body has disappeared. The next morning, Bernie Ohls from the D.A.’s office phones Marlowe and tells him that one of the Sternwoods’ cars has crashed into the ocean. The Sternwoods’ driver, Owen Taylor, is found dead inside the car and it looks like murder. Later Marlowe returns to Geiger’s store and follows a truck that is taking books to the apartment of a man called Joseph Brody. The General had previously told Marlowe that a man of the same name had also tried to blackmail him. Vivian then goes to Marlowe’s office and shows him some photos she’s been sent of her sister at Geiger’s house. Somebody is blackmailing her. Marlowe asks her to get some money and she says she will borrow it from Eddie Mars, the owner of a gambling club and the husband of the woman Rusty Regan had apparently run off with.

**Chapter 3:** Marlowe returns to Geiger’s house again and meets Carmen there. She tells him that Joe Brody killed Geiger. Then Eddie Mars turns up. He has some gunmen with him and they search Marlowe but then they let him leave. Next Marlowe goes to Joe Brody’s apartment and finds him there with Agnes, the
blonde from Geiger’s store. Marlowe accuses Brody of taking the photos of Carmen from Geiger’s house. Then Carmen arrives and asks for the photos. Brody, Agnes and Carmen all have guns but Marlowe manages to control the situation and get the photos. Then Brody confesses he had been outside Geiger’s house and had seen Owen Taylor there in Vivian’s car. It seems he was in love with Carmen and didn’t like what Geiger was doing to her. Brody says he followed Owen and got the photos but that he didn’t kill him. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. Brody opens it and he is shot dead.

Chapter 4: Marlowe runs from the flat and catches the gunman. It is Geiger’s driver and friend, Carol Lundgren. They drive to Geiger’s house and Marlowe discovers that Geiger’s body is now there. He calls Bernie Ohls and they go to see the D.A., Taggart Wilde. Marlowe tells Taggart that he thinks that Lundgren had found Geiger’s body and hidden it so that he could take his things from the house and get away. Later, Lundgren went to watch Geiger’s store. When he saw that the books were taken to Brody’s apartment, he assumed he was the killer and he shot him. Wilde tells Marlowe that the car Rusty Regan had left the Sternwood’s house in had been found in the house where Eddie Mars’s wife Mona lived. Marlowe goes home and receives a call from Mars inviting him to his club.

Chapter 5: Marlowe goes to Eddie Mars’s club and meets Vivian Regan there. She is gambling and she wins a lot of money. Later, outside, Marlowe stops one of Mars’s gunmen from stealing Vivian’s winnings. He then gives Vivian a lift home. Later, Marlowe returns home and finds Carmen lying on his bed. She is behaving wildly and Marlowe throws her out. The next day Marlowe sees a car that has been following him. He speaks to the driver, Harry Jones. Jones tells Marlowe that Eddie Mars had paid somebody to kill Rusty Regan because he had run away with his wife, Mona. He also says that he had seen Vivian give something, maybe money, to Lash Canino, a man who does some jobs for Eddie Mars. Then he says that Agnes will tell Marlowe where Mona is if he gives her some money. Jones arranges to meet Marlowe at the Fulwider building later. When Marlowe arrives there, he hears a conversation between Canino and Jones. Canino then kills Jones with a poisoned drink. Agnes phones and Marlowe arranges to meet her. She says that Mona is at a house behind a garage that belongs to a man named Art Huck. Marlowe drives there. He is attacked by Canino and Art and falls down unconscious.

Chapter 6: Marlowe regains consciousness. He is tied up and Mona Mars is there. She frees him and Marlowe goes outside. Canino drives up and goes into the house and then Marlowe tricks him into coming out and he shoots him dead. The next day, Marlowe goes to see the General and he offers him more money to find Rusty. Outside he meets Carmen and she asks him to teach her how to shoot. They drive down to some old oil wells and Carmen has a crazy fit and tries to shoot Marlowe but the gun isn’t loaded with real bullets. She faints and he drives her back to the house. Marlowe tells Vivian she knows what has happened. Carmen had shot Rusty down by the oil wells because he had rejected her. Vivian, wanting to protect her sister and her father, had asked Eddie Mars for help hiding the body. Eddie later hid his wife away so that it looked like Rusty had run off with her. He could then blackmail Vivian. Marlowe says he will keep the murder a secret if Vivian promises to take her sister away.

Background and themes

Money: The search for money is a theme that runs throughout the book. People steal, bribe and kill for money. Marlowe despises the attitude of the rich Sternwood family, who despite their money are terribly unhappy. This is particularly significant because the story is set during the Great Depression (1930s), when most Americans were struggling financially.

Crime, corruption, and vice: Virtually all the characters are corrupt or involved in vice in some way. Even the police are portrayed as dishonest when they turn a blind eye to protection rackets. Although Marlowe seems honest at first, even he in the end feels part of a dirty world when he promises to keep Rusty’s murder a secret.
Discussion activities

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Write *Los Angeles* on the board and put students in small groups to say what they know about the city. Get feedback from the whole class.

2 **Pair work:** Write *private detective* on the board and put students in pairs to answer the following questions: *What famous private detectives do you know from books or movies? What kind of people are they? What kind of things do they do at work?* Get feedback from the class.

3 **Research:** Tell students that the story is set in the time of the Great Depression of the 1930s. In pairs or individually, students use the Internet to get information about this economic crisis. Get feedback in class.

Chapter 1

After reading

4 **Write and guess:** Write the names of the following characters on the board: *Marlowe, General Sternwood, Carmen, Vivian, Geiger.* Put the students in small groups and tell them to choose one character each. Then ask them to write three sentences about that character, two of which are true and one of which is false. Students then read their sentences out to the rest of the group and the others have to guess which is false.

5 **Discuss:** Remind students that Vivian has been married three times and that, according to her father, her last marriage to Rusty had lasted only a month. Now put them in small groups to answer the following questions: *Why do some marriages not work? Why does this happen more often today than in the past?*

Chapter 2

After reading

6 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *code, pier, mark, boxes, $15,000.* Put students in pairs to talk about how these words were important in Chapter 2. Get feedback from the whole class.

7 **Write:** Tell students to imagine that they work for a Los Angeles newspaper. Get them to write an article about the car that crashed off the pier. Tell them to include a headline and to speculate about what happened.

8 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss what they think might be the answers to the following questions: *Why was Carmen at Geiger’s house? Who do you think shot Geiger and why? What was the writing in code in the notebook about? What happened to Geiger’s body? Was Owen Taylor killed? Who killed him? Why doesn’t Marlowe tell the police about what happened at Geiger’s house? Why are the books going to Joe Brody’s apartment? Should Vivian pay money to the blackmailer? Why or why not?*

Chapter 3

Before reading

9 **Debate:** Explain to the class that the next chapter is called *Guns, Guns, Guns* and that in the United States it is legal for people to have guns for their own personal use. Divide the class in half and ask one half to think of arguments for this law and the other half to think of arguments against it. Allow them to use the Internet to get information, if you have time. Now have a class debate. End the debate by having a class vote in which students vote for what they really think.

After reading

10 **Write and guess:** Write *When Carmen started to laugh loud, Marlowe shot her.* on
the board. Elicit which word is wrong, from
the students (hit, not shot). Now students
choose another sentence from Chapter 3 and
rewrite it, changing one word. Students
mingle, reading out their sentences and the
other students have to identify and correct
the mistake.

Chapter 4

After reading

11 Write, ask and answer: Write What did
Marlowe find on the bed at Geiger’s house?
on the board and elicit the answer (Geiger’s
body). Now tell students to write similar
questions about Chapter 4. Students then
mingle with each other, asking and
answering each other’s questions.

12 Discuss: Remind the students that Marlowe
doesn’t tell the whole truth to the D.A. and
the D.A. promises to keep some of the story
secret. The next day the newspapers also
report stories that are not true. Now put
them in small groups to answer the
following questions: Do you think
newspapers always tell true stories? Do you
think the police ever keep secrets? In what
other jobs do you think people are
sometimes not honest? Is it always bad to
tell a lie?

Chapter 5

Before reading

13 Pair work: Put students in pairs to answer
the following questions: Do a lot of people
gamble in your country? What do people
usually gamble on? Is it usual to gamble on
the Internet? Is this a dangerous thing in you
opinion? Get feedback from the whole class.

After reading

14 Write: Put the students in pairs and tell
them to talk about the evening that Vivian
and Carmen have had, what happened to
them and how they feel about Marlowe. Get
feedback from the class and then ask the
students to choose Vivian or Carmen and to
write a diary entry for that evening. Tell
them to write in first person and encourage
them to include how they felt.

Chapter 6

After reading

15 Pair work: Put the students in pairs and
ask them to decide whether Marlowe did the
right thing by keeping the secret about
Carmen and Rusty. Encourage them to give
their reasons. Get feedback from the whole
class and have a class vote.

16 Discuss: Point out that the Sternwoods are
rich but they aren’t happy and that many of
the characters do bad things in order to get
money. Now ask the students to discuss the
following questions in small groups: Does
money make people happier? How does
money sometimes become a bad thing?
What things are more important to you than
money?