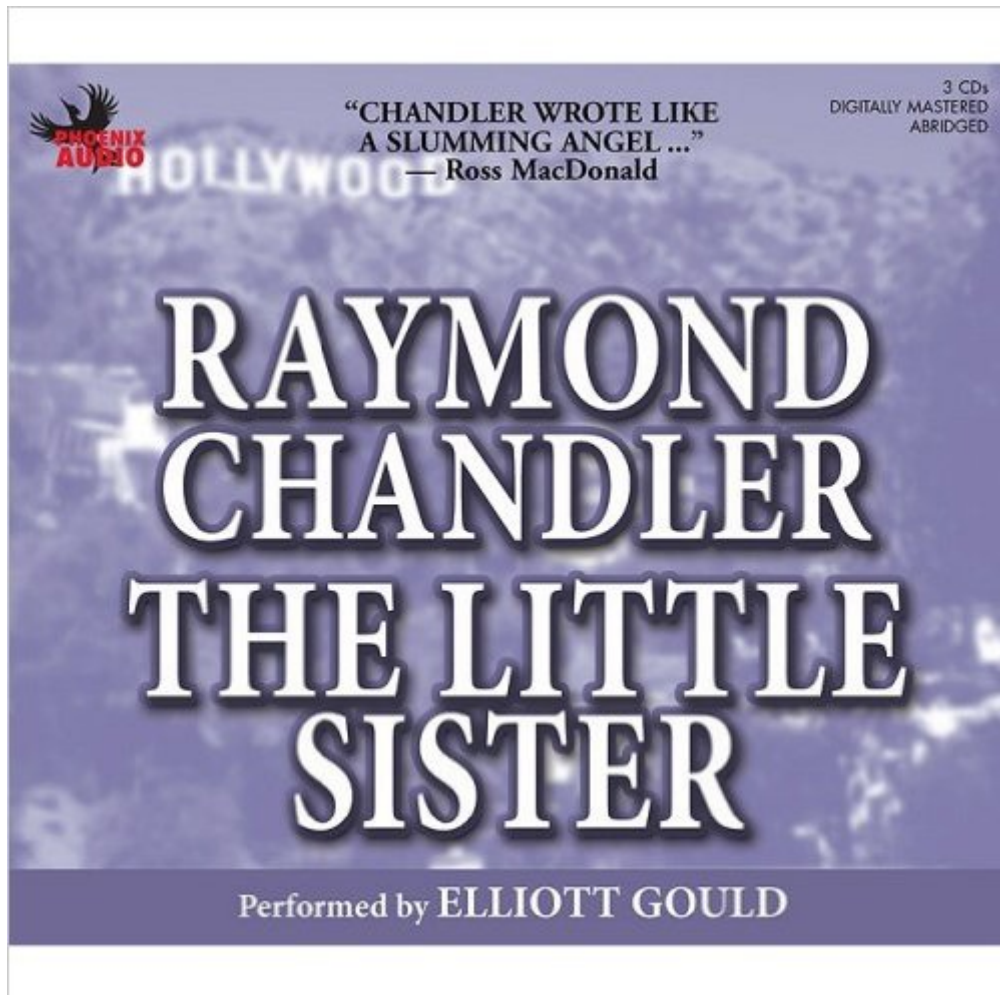


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# The Little Sister



## Synopsis

Her name is Orfamay Quest and she's come all the way from Manhattan, Kansas, to find her missing brother Orrin. Or least ways that's what she tells PI Philip Marlowe, offering him a measly twenty bucks for the privilege. But Marlowe's feeling charitable though it's not long before he wishes he wasn't so sweet. You see, Orrin's trail leads Marlowe to luscious movie starlets, uppity gangsters, suspicious cops and corpses with ice picks jammed in their necks. When trouble comes calling, sometimes it's best to pretend to be out.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Postwar L.A. -- and especially Hollywood -- is the setting for Chandler's fifth Marlowe novel which, like the time and place (and the author himself), is a little "off." Marlowe's beginning to tire, his loneliness is a bit more apparent, and the disillusionment has started to etch permanent lines on him. None of which stops him. Neither does it make "The Little Sister" a bad work. In fact, it holds up remarkably well alongside Chandler's first four novels. Chandler draws upon contemporary events and personages for much of his inspiration here (something he did in several earlier stories and novels, to a lesser degree); the photo which triggers the action in "Sister," for example, is based on an incident involving gangster Bugsy Siegel . . . but then the character of Steelgrave, himself, bears a more than passing resemblance to the then-recently deceased hood. It's equally evident that Chandler relied upon his recent screenwriting experience (and exposure to Paramount and Universal studios) for material and characters. There's an element of gleeful revenge, I suspect, for example, in the character of agent Sheridan Ballou: certain characteristics, such as his tendency to

strut up and down his office twirling a mallaca cane, can only have been inspired by director/screenwriter Billy Wilder (with whom Chandler, collaborating on the screenplay for "Double Indemnity," shared an entirely mutual loathing). Other characters, primarily a pair of mismatched thugs sent to intimidate Marlowe, are pure burlesque; Chandler appears to be simply indulging himself here (while he simultaneously manages yet another dig at the movie industry).

The latest in a long series of visits to LA had me refreshing my memory of one of my favourite novelists. As a young man I knew the Philip Marlowe books nearly by heart before I ever set foot in the city they put on the literary map. I have always thought that Chandler counts as literature not just as crime fiction. He was a professed admirer of the ultra-craftsman Flaubert, and it shows in the way he works at every sentence, indeed every word. He was English and as far as I know unrelated to the 'real' LA Chandlers (he attended the same school as P G Wodehouse, if you can believe it). He maintained that 'the American language' can say anything and in *The Simple Art of Murder* he took a brilliant potshot at the Agatha Christie school of English crime fiction, all tight-lipped butlers polishing the georgian silver and respectful upper-middles gathered to hear the amateur master-sleuth analyse over 5 or 6 pages which of them dunnit. His power of creating atmosphere is phenomenal, his dialogue is legendary, and for me *The Little Sister* is the best of the 7 Marlowes. It's at the crest of the hill, before he started to lose concentration in *The Long Goodbye* and lost just about everything in the sad *Playback*. I can still feel the heavy heat at the start of the book, and the dialogue is the best he ever did. Is there any other instance of anyone silencing Marlowe with an answer the way the beat-up hotel dick does when Marlowe tells him he is going up to room such-and-such and the hotel dick says 'Am I stopping you?'. And I cherish the bit about the same character tucking his gun into his waistband 'in an emergency he could probably have got it out in less than a minute'.

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