

TO LEROY WRIGHT

6005 Camino de la Costa
La Jolla, California
July 6, 1951

Dear Leroy:

Referring again to the 1945 income tax refund claim recently disallowed, I have dug up some 1939 diary entries which have a bearing on the case. I have no good explanation as to why I did not dig them up before, except that I seem somehow to have derived the impression that since the book *The Lady in the Lake* was published in 1943, we were only concerned with the two years prior to that, that is to say an attempt to establish that during the three years ending with 1943 I was working on the book.

Now the novel *The Lady in the Lake* was based on two novelettes called "Bay City Blues," published in June, 1938, and *The Lady in the Lake*, published January 1939. But in order to demonstrate method, I think it might be necessary to go beyond this. *The Big Sleep* was written in the spring of 1938 and was based on two novelettes called "Killer in the Rain," published January, 1935, and "The Curtain," published September, 1936. Included in this book also was a fairly long sequence taken from a novelette called "The Man who Liked Dogs," published March, 1936. *Farewell, My Lovely* was based on two novelettes called "Try the Girl," published January, 1937, and "Mandarin's Jade," published November, 1937. In the early part of 1939, that is to say up to April 12, I seem except for fumbling around with plots to have been writing novelettes and short stories. There is evidence of about four of them, not involved in this case, being written or partly written in that time. On April 12 I have an entry "Page 10-'The Girl from Brunette's'" with a question mark after it. This is evidently *Farewell, My Lovely*, because almost immediately the title was changed to "The Girl from Florian's" on April 18, when I'd reached page 52. Florian's is the Negro dive on Central Avenue involved in the beginning of the book. There is on March 31 an entry called "Page 14-'Law is Where You Buy It.'" That apparently died right there and frankly I'm not sure what it refers to, since later in the year in the diary there is some evidence that I switched the titles around and applied this particular title to more than one book, although the idea of the title evidently derives from the story "Bay City Blues." That is a story which happens in a town so corrupt from the law enforcement point of view that the law is where you buy it and what you pay for it. To resume, on April 23 I am at page 100 with the notation "First lap-'The Girl From Florian's.'" On April 29 I am at page 127 and there is a reference to a girl named Anne Riordan who appears as a character in *Farewell, My Lovely*. This sort of thing goes on intermittently to May 22, when I'm at page 233, with a notation, "This story is a flop. It smells to high heaven. Think I'll have to scrap it and try something new." After that for several days I seem to have been toying with a story called "Tony Gets Out." I think this eventually developed into the short story called "I'll Be Waiting." On May 29 there is a notation "Tomorrow get out draft of 'The Girl From Florian's.'" On May 30 I evidently did this because I am checking the draft up to page 87, but that's as far as it goes. I didn't like it. Now come the entries, although this foregoing explanation is going to be necessary later on. On June 1, "Page 4-'Murder Is a Nuisance.'" This in itself means nothing except there is a mention of a character named Adrian Fromsett who is a character in *The Lady in the Lake* book and nowhere else. Next day, June 2, I'm at page 10 and I'm calling it *The Lady in the Lake*. This apparently died on me, because on June 5 I wrote 18 pages of a novelette called "Goldfish," but immediately dropped that for the time being. There are many notations that show that I didn't feel well. On June 12 I'm up to page 30; June 13, page 50; June 14, Page 60, and here is a notation "Leave photo of Fromsett," which seems to indicate what I am writing; June 15, page 71; June 16, page 127; June 17, page 148; June 18, page 169; June 19, page 191, and the damned thing is now called "The Golden Anklet." Now this ties it clearly to *The Lady in the Lake* because on the chapter headings of *The Lady in the Lake* novelette, inserted by the magazine editor, (I never used chapter headings myself) was "The Golden Anklet," and a golden anklet does figure in the story. June 20 I am at page 203, I'm now calling it "Deep and Dark Waters." That title is self explanatory. On June 28 I'm up to page 337. On June 29 there is this notation, "Tragic realization that there is another dead cat under the house. More than three-quarters done and no good." This certainly refers to the draft of *The Lady in the Lake* by whatever provisional title I might happen to have been calling it at the time. Now I write on half sheets of paper, turned endwise, and they figure out about six to a thousand words. Therefore 337 of these pages would make about 55,000 words of rough script, which is a very substantial hunk even though all done within a month.

The year 1940, partly from reasons of health and still more from the state of the world, seems to have contained an abnormal amount of vacillation. By the end of November I had made less real progress than I sometimes would make in a week. I also pattered with at least three other stories, only one of which was ever finished. The end of the year finds me having written 157 pages of the novelette "No Crime in the Mountains." I bring all these matters up just to show that I never worked on just one thing at a time for very long. But eventually somehow I would finish practically all these projects, no matter how long it took nor how many things I did in the meantime.

Mostly, but not without interruption, I worked on *The Lady in the Lake* for the rest of that year 1942, but not until April 4, 1943, is there any indication that I finished it. From the foregoing it is clear that from 1939, specifically the month of June, to April, 1943, I had this story in hand and worked on it intermittently, except possibly in 1940. It may be that I did no work on it in 1940. However, I certainly did do work on it in 1939, 1941, 1942, and 1943, and it seems almost certain that during the year 1940 I at least took it out and looked at it and thought about it. On the evidence of these entries and taking into account the method of work—a very bad method one must admit—although in my case it has proved successful—the job of writing the book *The Lady in the Lake* was definitely in hand from 1939 to 1943, that a very substantial amount of writing was done on it as early as 1939 (excluding the novelettes entirely), and that insofar as the denial of the refund claim was based on lack of proof of facts, this deficiency can now be repaired.

Yours very truly,

Ray