



# READING GUIDE

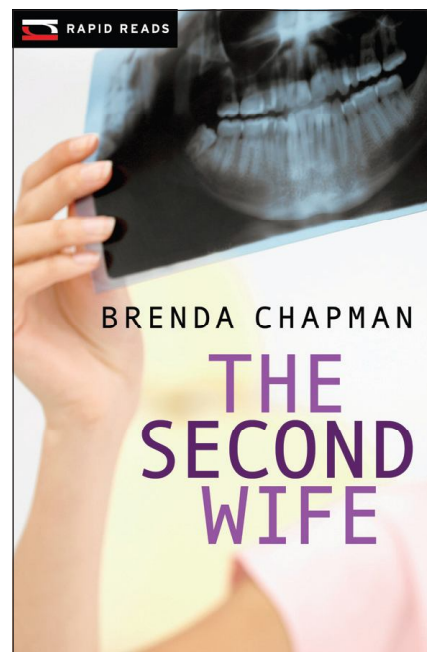
## THE SECOND WIFE BRENDA CHAPMAN

Reading level: 3.3

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, fraud

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### Summary

Gwen Lake works at the police station, an officer in name only. In practice, she handles all the detachment's paperwork due to her affinity for filing and numbers—and because the Chief doesn't really believe women are fit to be cops.

Gwen's husband, Brian, left her a year ago for another woman. Out of the blue, Brian's new wife, Marjory, invites Gwen for coffee. When Marjory confesses that Brian has been displaying violent tendencies towards her, Gwen is stunned. Violent? Doesn't sound like the guy she spent twenty-two years with. But when a woman of Marjory's build—and with the same dental records—turns up dead a few days later, Brian is the prime suspect.

Although she's still angry over her husband's infidelity, Gwen refuses to believe that Brian could have committed such a murder. As if, she thinks; the guy played catch-and-release with flies inside the house and made his living selling shoes. When Brian is jailed for killing his new wife, Gwen hauls out her old uniform and gets to work unearthing every possible piece of evidence.

Gwen's search takes her through Marjory's past, where each clue points more strongly away from Brian being the real killer. Gwen speaks with a prior colleague from Marjory's temp agency, as well as the agency owner. She talks to the old woman who lives next to the apartment Marjory kept before she moved in with Brian. She talks to Marjory's adult son, who stood to gain a healthy inheritance in the event of his mother's death. Gwen sleuths through the files of the dental offices where Marjory worked—and where, it turns out, Marjory recently swapped her own dental X-rays for those of another woman.

The dead woman? Not Marjory.

Piecing the clues together, Gwen reveals the real "killer": Marjory and her son, Jason. Marjory is alive and well...and ready to enjoy a big payout.

When the Chief of Police promotes her to junior detective, Gwen is stunned—but ready for the next challenge. And when her ex-husband reenters the picture, begging her to take him back, Gwen realizes both she and Brian need to spend some time apart, thinking about how—or whether—to move forward together.



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### Questions for Discussion

1. Efforts have been made in recent years to bring more women into occupations that are typically dominated by men. Whereas for years only men could be police officers, fire fighters and military personnel, women now swell the ranks. What are the benefits of having women serve in these protective roles? What are the limitations?
2. Sometimes people turn out to be completely different than who we initially take them for. Describe a time when you discovered this truth for yourself.
3. A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” Authors often use this literary device to enhance a descriptive passage. The second paragraph of chapter 3 begins with this simile: “As usual, the bad news traveled through the station like a head cold.” Why does the author choose to use this simile instead of simply saying the news traveled quickly? How does the use of similes add to the way you experience the story?
4. Stereotypes are ways of categorizing people at a quick glance. At the funeral, Gwen speaks with Tina, a woman who worked with Marjory at the temp agency. Do you think Tina fits a certain stereotype? How are stereotypes helpful to us? Can they be harmful?
5. For what reason(s) is Gwen so determined to solve this mystery herself? Why doesn’t she just let the detectives figure it out?
6. Despite the fact that Brian broke Gwen’s heart when he left her for another woman, Gwen is determined to prove him innocent. What does this say about the kind of person she is? How do you think you might react to a similar situation?
7. What kind of risks would you be prepared to take if you were determined to figure out whether someone you cared about had been wrongfully convicted?
8. At the end of her conversation with Rose Gatto, Gwen invites the aging woman to join her for bingo at the seniors’ center that weekend. What does this tell us about Gwen’s character?
9. As Gwen deepens her investigation, she realizes she’s enjoying herself. She questions whether she’s really satisfied by a desk job. As you see it, what are the positive aspects of being an investigative officer? What might be the drawbacks? Does it take a certain personality to enjoy police work?
10. In chapter 15, Gwen goes to Cal’s house to discuss the murder case. As she imagines how to begin explaining things to him, she thinks, *Always start with some sugar*. What does this mean? Why is this an effective strategy for discussing sensitive issues with other people?
11. In chapter 16, the detachment’s HR woman tells Gwen that Cal solved the case. Of course, Gwen knows Cal didn’t solve the murder: she did. The author describes Gwen’s anger this way:

*My mouth fell open. I could feel anger shoot up from my stomach. I couldn’t breathe. For a few moments I thought that I was having a heart attack. I made myself inhale deeply and pushed the anger back down. There was no use fighting.*

  - How is the author’s description of Gwen’s rage more powerful than if she had simply written that Gwen was angry?



# RAPID READS



12. Does the book's ending surprise you? Does Gwen's decision not to accept Brian back right away change your opinion of her, or of what you thought you knew about her?
13. Companionship is a very basic human need. Look at how happy Rose is to go to bingo with Gwen on Saturday night—and at how eager Brian is to patch things up with Gwen after the case is solved. How does companionship benefit us as social creatures? What are the risks if we don't seek it out?
14. What advice would you give Gwen, if you could?
15. As a group, discuss an alternative ending to the book.



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