



Coward's Kiss

Lawrence Block

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New York City private investigator Ed London has a problem. Or rather, the problem is his brother-in-law's. Jack Enright's mistress, a woman with secrets of her own, has been shot to death in the apartment that he pays for. But when the body, moved by London to Central Park, is finally identified, London knows he must act quickly to find her killer, before the killer and the police find him.

Coward's Kiss Details

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Author : Lawrence Block

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John says

At only 23 years old, Lawrence Block was already penning hardboiled mystery novels that rivaled those of genre veterans like Erle Stanley Gardner. COWARD'S KISS is an unbelievably assured piece of writing for someone so young, and the plot contains plenty of clever twists and surprises (though the ultimate twist can be seen coming a mile away). A lot of reviewers seem very lukewarm on this, and I imagine the reason is because COWARD'S KISS is shorter and pulpier than most of Block's later work. The prose is consistently clever but lacks the literary flair of something like A WALK IN THE TOMBSTONES. And while it fires on all cylinders, COWARD'S KISS is in no way groundbreaking. It's simply a great entry in a well-trod genre. I have a couple minor quibbles with secondary aspects of the plot (like why the hero wasn't frisked before being allowed an audience with the crime boss), but overall it delivered exactly the sort of thrills I was hoping to get from it.

Mike says

Not a bad story and fun to read. I have been reading detective stories one after the other. Many, as does this one, seem to be a parody of the "Maltese Falcon". In the afterword, the author says there will be no sequel. This is volume one of one. The author goes on to describe this story's genesis as an offshoot of a Ray Millard detective TV show from 1959/1960. From the author's discussion, it looks like the book was cobbled together. Dialogue is stereotypical old fashioned private eye. As in, "Dawn was a gray lady with red-rimmed eyes and a cigarette cough". The story occurs prior to Starbucks and mobile phones when there was still a Standard Oil, Polaroid, and Ma Bell on the stock exchange as well as an East and West Germany. Smoking had not yet become a social taboo.

Ellen says

Coward's Kiss by Lawrence Block.

I have been a big fan of L.B. for a number of years especially in regards to the Matthew Scudder & Bernard Rhodenbarr books. Love them.

This was a good story but not one of my favorites by L.B. by a long shot. Ed London a P.I. is trying to keep his brother in law out of trouble. What trouble? Trouble that's spelled with a capital D for death. A body, not just any body, of his bill's mistress has been found murdered. Now Ed has to move that body as far away from his friend/relative as possible. what better place to dump a murder victim than Central Park!

Some fun, some interesting dialogue...not on the same level as the other books by L.B. I've enjoyed.

Glen U says

Chauvinistic, gratuitous sex, violence, I love the pulp mysteries. And Lawrence Block is one of the best. Written in the sixties, "Coward's Kiss" is the forerunner for Block's later popular series featuring Bernie Rhodenbarr and Matthew Scudder. Although the writing style is simplistic and the dialogue can be a bit wearing, Block's prose is still a pleasure to read and the reader will enjoy the trip through the rough and tumble world of the hard boiled PI. A good read.

Dave says

Lawrence Block originally published "Death Pulls A Double Cross" in 1961 and later re-published it as "Coward's Kiss." You wish you had a brother-in-law like Ed London, someone who you can call when times are tough and there's no one else to turn to. Everyone needs a brother-in-law who you can call in the middle of the night when you show up at your mistress's apartment and find her lying in the middle of the living room with a hole in her head and you don't know what to do. London, without even setting a fee, calmly goes and wraps the blonde woman's body up in an oriental rug, and disposes of the damning evidence. He can't find any of her clothes, but the apartment has been ripped apart. Interfering with a police investigation, perhaps playing accessory to a murder, well what pipe-smoking, cognac- drinking private eye wouldn't do the same - particularly for a well-set- up brother-in-law that just spent months making a fool out of your sister.

This story has murder, gunfire, mobsters, and, believe it or not, Joel Cairo. It has many aspects of The Maltese Falcon in it, but instead of Sam Spade, you have the not-so-tough London who takes a beating from hoods who think he has the goods and is caught in the middle between seemingly warring factions all searching for a holy grail that the dead woman may or may not have had, but that everyone seems to think London now has.

The book has some flaws such as the fact that one of the characters you feel as if you met in a movie you know very well and the detective is not as tough or as hardboiled as perhaps you would like. London is simply not Mike Hammer, not by a long shot. But, and the key is this, Block, even early Block in the early sixties, was a great writer and he makes this piece work the way a story is supposed to. In the end, warts and all, it is an enjoyable piece of fiction for anyone who likes hardboiled private eye stories.

Maggie Dwyer says

It's certainly a book of its period, but with a minimal cast he kept us parsing the motives and the roles of each through most of the book.

Eric_W says

Another Lawrence Block winner (are there any losers?) Called to get rid of a body by his friend Jack Enright (who happens to be married to his sister,) P.I. Ed London retrieves the body from Jack's love-nest and dumps it in the park. Soon he begins a search for a briefcase loaded ostensibly with stolen diamonds, is attacked by

several goons, and manages to sort out multiple double-crosses.

A sample: *"I felt only halfway ridiculous holding the gun in one hand while I opened the door. I felt completely ridiculous when the big one knocked it out of my hand. There were two of them—a big one and a small one. The big one was very big, a little taller than I am and a hell of a lot wider. He had a boxer's flattened nose and a cretin idiot's fixed stare. His jacket was stretched tight across huge shoulders. His eyes were small and beady and his forehead was wide and dull. The small one wasn't really that small—he looked small because he was standing next to a human mountain. He wore a hat and a suit and a tie. He had his hands in his pants pockets and he was smiling. "Inside," he said. "Move." I didn't move."*

Please note this was originally published as Coward's Kiss.. Early Block, but already the signs of his genius are apparent.

Joe says

Written in 1961 when he was 23, this may have been Block's first novel. If not, than definitely one of his first. Protagonist PI Ed London may have been the precursor to Block's Matthew Scudder, whom Block featured in 16 novels over 25 years.

The motley cast of crooks in Coward's Kiss reminded me of the crew in the Maltese Falcon; only their quest was for a stash of long lost jewels, rather than the diamond-encrusted Black Bird.

Not as good as his later works, but Coward's Kiss is a must read for all Block fans. You won't be disappointed.

Joseph Bruno says

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Protagonist PI Ed London may have been the precursor to Block's Matthew Scudder, whom Block featured in 16 novels over 25 years, starting in the late 70's.

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Not as good as his later works, but Coward's Kiss is a must read for all Block fans. You won't be disappointed.

Jim says

This was quite a twisty tale with a fairly typical Block hero, but I didn't care for it too much. It was a bit too

twisty & clever, so never seemed real. If I wanted to point to a text book example of the genre, this would be it - text book, no humanity or realism, not fully engaging.

Bruce Nieminski says

8/10

224 pages

Book # 31 of 2017

Great Block page turner set in 1960's New York, featuring private eye Ed London. Our detective's brother in law has contacted him, looking for answers to the murder of his lover. As London investigates, a mysterious briefcase becomes the center of attention.

Solid plot and crisp writing from Block make this a solid, if not unspectacular noir thriller.

Any Length says

I didn't like the book at first, because of the way it was written and because of the writing style.

Then I realized this book must be quite old as the ages of the people in the book just wouldn't have matched up. I looked it up and realized it was first published in 1961. That explains a lot, like the excessive consumption of alcohol, the constant smoking, the overall attitude toward women and people of colour. A fast read for an afternoon or a medium plane ride, but still nothing to write home about.

Karl says

This book being the 1961 first edition first printing by Gold Medal of a book that has been released in many forms and many covers.

David Macpherson says

A hard boiled, sexy detective story in New York City. He has to dump the body of a girl his brother in law was sleeping with on the side. Then people start showing up looking for a brief case, like they do. They are always looking for a brief case in these stories. They are never looking for a recyclable envelope or a murse, it's always the brief case that is the belle of the ball. Anyway, the mystery was not much, but the atmosphere and the description of 1960s New York was terrific.

Andrew Smith says

I'm a huge admirer of LB and having read just about everything he's written in the past 40 years I'm now tracking down stuff he churned out in his early days as a pulp fiction hack. The quality of these is hugely

variable, some being really first rate and clearly showing signs of the talent he demonstrated years later with his Scudder and Rhodenbarr books, for example, whilst other are...well, like this one.

Coward's Kiss is so obscure I couldn't even track down reference to it on the *Fantastic Fiction* site I use as my reference point for just about all fiction novels. And having read this one I can see why the author would want it to slip into oblivion. Ed London is a New York private eye who is asked to undertake a little job by his brother-in-law. This minor duty is, in fact, the removal of a body from the secret apartment he kept to 'entertain' his mistress. So starts this plodding tale. Quite quickly Ed is up to his neck in trouble and being harassed by all sorts of unpleasant characters who believe he's in possession of a briefcase taken from the scene. He isn't. But instead of just coming clean and admitting the fact he chooses to string these bad guys along.

I wont go into the rest of the plot – in fact it's so convoluted I barely understood it – but I will say that despite some good lines it's one to miss. There's plenty of brilliant books by Block out there so do yourself a favour and track one of those down instead.
