



## After the First Death

*Lawrence Block*

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### **After the First Death** Lawrence Block

Lawrence Block weaves his spell in this suspenseful tale of a man haunted by murders he hopes he hasn't committed . . . It was all too frighteningly familiar. For the second time in his life, Alex Penn wakes up in an alcoholic daze in a cheap hotel room off Times Square and finds himself lying next to the savagely mutilated body of a young woman. After the first death, he was convicted of murder and imprisoned, then released on a technicality. But this time he has to find out what happened during the blackout and why? before the police do.

### **After the First Death Details**


Date : Published August 1st 2002 by iBooks (first published January 1st 1969)

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Author : Lawrence Block

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## From Reader Review After the First Death for online ebook

### Steven says

Great story. The set up is a prelude to Matt Scudder; there are elements of his life in embedded.

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### Eric\_W says

Another reissue of a Block classic that was originally published in 1969. A man wakes in a hotel room only to discover he is covered in blood and there is a dead girl he has apparently murdered while in an alcoholic haze. He had done this before, and had, in fact, just been released from prison for the murder of another prostitute. He was sure of his innocence the first time; now he's not sure of what he might have done. Could he have done it again?

A lot of Block's later themes are beginning to show in this book which has the elements of sixties romanticism: the hooker with the heart of gold; redemption, and the Hollywood ending with a slight twist. But it's a good story even though lacking some of the subtleties of Block's later work. Very pleasant airplane read.

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### Pamela McLaren says

The one thing I have to keep remembering is that I'm a bit jaded when I read these books from the 1950s and 1960s. This one is from 1969 and while I always enjoy Lawrence Block's work, this seemed a bit flat to me. But that is what I should remember: this was written in the 1960s and for its time, this is pretty darn good.

Its a tale of a man, recently released from a murder sentence on a technicality, who finds himself in the exact same setting as the first murder. And right away, he believe he killed again. That's the very, very good part of Lawrence Block. Its gritty and its realistic.

He gets himself away from the crime scene but he knows he will soon be suspected of the crime and that its just a matter of time before the cops come after him. So, he does what he has to to elude police. Everything great so far. Then he begins to remember some things and he begins to believe that not only did he not kill this time, he didn't the other. And he draws up a short list of friends and allies that he believes did it. This is where it spins a little awry for me. Its still a great story and there is suspense but the grittiness seems to lighten and I was hoping for an alternate ending that would be darker.

So its probably me. Because I can't fault anything other than the conclusion comes a little too quickly and a little too neatly for me. But then again, Block was probably just getting started and for its time, this was dark, heavy stuff. Today, not so much.

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### George Billions says

#### Another Lawrence Block book

Lawrence Block writes a ton of crime books, and this is another one of them. After the First Death is your classic tale of a wrongly accused guy on the run and trying to clear his name. He has a bad habit of getting black-out drunk, which complicates things. It's not a super-original premise, but as usual Block bangs out a compelling narrative.

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### **miteyphen says**

I didn't realize that this was first published in 1969. It definitely had that atmosphere. Block's later works are better (especially his Matthew Scudder series) But this is still good. I wasn't expecting the ending!

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### **Becky says**

It's always interesting when you wake up after a night of heavy drinking and don't recognize the person next to you. When the person next to you is a murdered hooker, things go from "interesting" to "Fuckfuckfuckfuck!" real fast. Especially when it's your second dead hooker. That's a bad day right there.

This is only my second Lawrence Block book, and while I liked it, it didn't work for me quite as well as The Sins of the Fathers. This book feels a bit dated, with the \$0.44 packs of cigarettes, smoking in theaters, payphones (Crazy, I know!) and \$5.75 hotel rooms. Not to mention things like travelling under an assumed name... on an airline. That is one of those things that people my age have only heard about, and the younger generation will scoff at. Still, it's a good story, and if you can overlook the dated details, it's an interesting mystery.

The end was a bit abrupt though, and more, uhh, uplifting than I would have expected. But this was a decent story, and I definitely plan on reading more of Block's work.

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### **Jeff says**

Great opening chapter but, overall, too many improbabilities make this less than stellar Block, but even at his weakest Block is still better than most.

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### **Andrew Smith says**

Alex Penn has had better starts to the day. After waking up following a night of heavy drinking he can, at first, barely face the day. Once he's persuaded his eyes to open it gets worse – his clothes are covered in blood and what's that on the floor? It's a naked and very dead woman. To rub salt in the wound it's the second time he's experienced the self same scenario. It surely can't be just bad luck...

This book was written in 1969 and it's interesting to see how this simplifies a tale like this. Murderers don't live in fear of DNA evidence pointing a definitive finger in their direction; mobile phone records can't be used to track their movements, whereabouts or actions. On the other hand, simple things we take for granted today were impossible so, for example, there were no cash dispensing machines to allow easy access to money on a Sunday, which created a problem for Alex.

It's is a pretty simple plot, albeit with a few twists along the way. The story telling is fluid – well it is from the hand of Lawrence Block – and the characters are reasonably well drawn. On the downside, the simplicity of the tale does make it a little 'samey' throughout and I started to find it a little tedious towards the end.

There is an excellent 'afterward' by LB in which he explains that a good deal of the story (though not the killings!) was inspired by actual events in his life. He'd experienced the late night heavy drinking and subsequent blackouts and had frequently inhabited the seedy areas surrounding Times Square at that time.

A small complaint: in the Kindle version I read there were quite a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. I'd have hoped these could have been ironed out before it went on sale.

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### **Ron Hefner says**

I've been going back and reading some of Block's backlist stuff that has been re-released, and this one is the best yet. As another reviewer said, it's "perfect noir." It was published in 1969, when Block was 31 years old, not yet famous, but writing feverishly. You can feel the enthusiasm coming off the page. It's like Block knew he was going to make it big if he just kept on writing. And of course, he eventually did.

The plot takes off running and never slows down: A man wakes up in a hotel room after an alcoholic blackout, and there is a dead prostitute on the floor who has been killed with a knife. He doesn't remember a thing. The twist is, he has previously served prison time for a similar crime years before--which he also doesn't remember. As his memory slowly comes back, he realizes that he is innocent of both crimes and has been framed. But by whom? He is a former college history professor, an ordinary man with no enemies--or so he thinks.

The book also invokes wonderful nostalgia for 60's New York, when a subway token was 20 cents, and so was a pack of cigarettes.

If you're a noir fan and you know what Block is capable of, no more need be said. Read and enjoy!

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### **Eddie says**

An excellent 'guy wakes up next to a dead hooker and has to figure out what's going on' story. I finished it in 2 sittings, and it feels like it's meant to be read that way. Fast paced first person narrator takes you through seedy old Times Square of 1969 in search of the 'real' killer.

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### **Mara says**

*Alex Penn* is having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. He wakes up painfully hungover, coming out of a blackout drunk. When he finally gets out of bed, he discovers his clothes are all messed up, covered in blood it would seem and, just when he thinks things might have been looking up (*not* having a nosebleed counts as a win in these circumstances), he turns his head. In what I assume is an homage to the words of

Julius Caesar: "*I looked, I saw, I vomited.*"

Sorry Alexander, Penn's got you trumped now, because you, my ginger little friend, did not wake up with a bloodied, dead hooker.\* (See clarification re. terminology below). Oh, and did I mention Alex Penn was fresh out of prison on a Supreme Court ruling technicality? Also, he was in prison in the first place for (you guessed it!) killing a hooker.

More bad news for Mr. Penn, the fact that you have no memory of the crime in either case courtesy of voluntary intoxication doesn't get you off in the *mens rea* department (especially since we're in 1940s New York, and there's not much case law for you to run with). So what's a fella' to do?

This wasn't Scudder-level Block for me. I tend not to be big on reading about junkies (though Alex is not one himself) - too much talk of needle marks and being "on the nod" makes my stomach lurch. But, as always, *Lawrence Block* is a master of the grimy noir ambiance that gets richer in his later work.

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\* Terminology clarification and life wisdom courtesy of one *Sterling Archer*:

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### Cindy says

Interesting with a wham! ending. Beginning to think author must have nightmares and writes 'em down. :)  
Reader: Peter Burkhart did a good job. Have read author before and will again. ©1969 text/ 2014 audio

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### Jim Davis says

When I finished this book I wasn't that sure of how I felt about it. it puts you in the shoes of Alex who went to jail for killing a prostitute during a drunken blackout, gets released 4 years later on a technicality and apparently does it again with another prostitute. Alex goes from thinking he's guilty of both murders to thinking he was actually framed for both murders. The ending is very interesting in the fact that it doesn't support either explanation. After the surprise of the ending has settled in I think that I like very much the ambiguity and slightly amoral resolution. The novel has some plot holes and coincidences but they fade away when you reach the end.

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### Rob Smith says

I'm a recent fan of Block's work. This is an example that I need to add \*some\* of Block's work. I wasn't nutty about this moody, dark tale. The ending didn't help - Especially in that I never doubted what it would be.

The writing is certainly better than most all done today. But the plot is lacking. There are good elements in it,

but seems Block was on a tear punching out books and this may have been a victim of speed. The idea that a man is wanted for murder and then runs pretty freely around as if the police have closed shop for vacation, is not good writing. And there is a part involving a Hide-A-Key that seems to be a trap door Block used to get out of a plotting problem.

The characters; drunks, prostitutes, etc.; are standard for this type of book.

Bottom line: I don't recommend this book. 5 out of ten points.

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### **Kim Scripture says**

Good mystery noir...

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