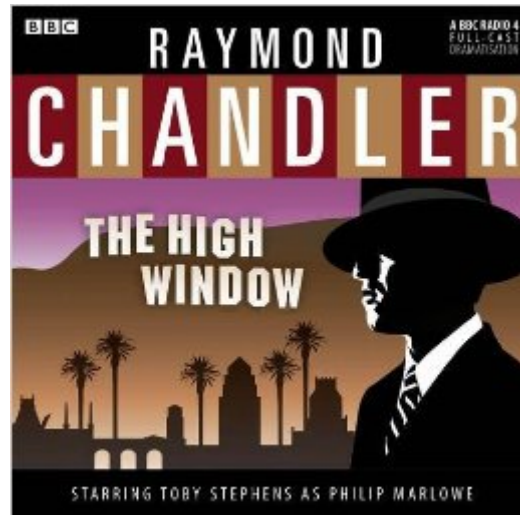


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The High Window



Synopsis

Fast-talking, trouble-seeking private eye Philip Marlowe is a different kind of detective: a moral man in an amoral world. California in the 1940s and 1950s is as beautiful as a ripe fruit and rotten to the core, and Marlowe must struggle to retain his integrity amidst the corruption he encounters daily. In *The High Window*, Marlowe starts out on the trail of a single stolen coin and ends up knee-deep in bodies. His client, a dried-up husk of a woman, wants him to recover a rare gold coin called a Brasher Doubloon, missing from her late husband's collection. That's the simple part. But Marlowe finds that everyone who handles the coin suffers a run of very bad luck: they always end up dead. If Marlowe doesn't wrap this one up fast, he's going to end up in jail or worse, in a box in the ground. Starring Toby Stephens, this thrilling dramatization by Robin Brooks retains all the wry humor of Chandler's serpentine suspense novel. 2 CDs. 1 hr 26 mins.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The High Window by Raymond Chandler The "HighWindow" begins one hot day in Pasadena, when "everything that grew was perfectly still in the breathless air they get over there on what they call a nice cool day." If we don't know we are in a Philip Marlowe novel yet, we do as soon as we meet his new client--a wealthy, obese widow named Mrs. Murdock. From the overgrown, dimly-lit sun room where she holds court, she gives Marlowe his latest p.i. assignment. He's to find a rare coin, the Brasher Doubloon, that was stolen from her possession. He's also to find her daughter-in-law, a former nightclub singer named Linda Conquest, who disappeared at the same time as the coin. "A charming girl--and tough as an oak board," Mrs. Murdock tells him, through sips of her port.

Marlowe's search for the pair leads to a tale more dense and tangled than the thick foliage of his client's sun porch. He quickly finds himself enmeshed with a rich gambler and his philandering, showgirl wife; a thug with a frozen eye; and a mortician who delves into politics. Marlowe also has to contend with the police and a man in a sand-colored coupé who keeps tailing him. Then there are the corpses that keep piling up in his path. There's also his client, who has her own share of tightly-bound secrets. A near-invalid who spends her days lying on a reed chaise lounge, Mrs. Murdock still holds an iron grip on her effeminate son and the fragile woman who works as her secretary. The plot is fast-paced and engrossing, but the real power of the novel lies in the snappy dialogue and beautifully conveyed atmosphere.

Chandler wrote his first four novels in rapid succession, then went to Hollywood for four years before writing the fifth Philip Marlowe novel, "The Little Sister." These first four are "original recipe" Chandler -- the novels that defined high-brow hard-boiled. "The High Window" (the third) is the anomaly of the first batch because it is the only novel prior to "The Little Sister" that was written as a novel; "The Big Sleep," "Farewell My Lovely," and "The Lady in the Lake" were all built using three to four of Chandler's earlier pulp short stories. Chandler called this practice "cannibalizing." Chandler actually put aside the third cannibalized novel, "Lady in the Lake," to work on "The High Window." Its plot is only slightly less convoluted than the other three early novels, and it is slightly contrived, but what is interesting is the way in which it deliberately re-emphasizes concerns developed in its predecessor, "Farewell, My Lovely." Chandler was pressed to make sense of a detective with so much cultural capital and the ability to turn such a fantastic phrase, and in these two novels the emphasis is on developing Marlowe's class animosities and his determination to preserve the free-agency afforded him by his vocation. He comes across as a relative high-brow determined to take out his sense of failure on those who pretend to be his betters, and who employ him, but who are phonies. It is a novel about class and about Marlowe working to control the exploitation inherent in hiring himself out. It may not be the best of the early four novels, but "The High Window" provides a clear and deliberate vision of Chandler's original conception of Marlowe.

Having read a lot of Raymond Chandler through the years and now, finally going back and re-reading everything with a more widened perspective on the genre, *The High Window* easily stands out as his finest work. *The High Window*, unlike a lot of genre Private Detective stories, which so many other authors have spent lifetimes struggling to copy and coming up short, keeps you guessing until the very end. Some authors give you a nibble about half way through a story and it

falls apart in your lap and you figure it out. The High Window defies that solidly. You will be guessing about this one until the very end. Nothing is done ham-handedly or over-quick just to wrap it up either. This book could serve as a role model to other authors about how to write an ending, as I'm sure it has -- even if you don't write Detective Noir fiction. If you're reading this review and a certain Humphrey Bogart film brought you here, and you don't know much about Raymond Chandler, just know that he was and is considered one of the greatest writers of the 20th Century. During his lifetime however he was dismissed as just a regular struggling hack novelist, because of the Genre, and not given a lot of attention. A lot of other authors, like Philip K. Dick for instance, another Angelino, suffered greatly under this prejudice during their lifetime because of supposed conventionalities. Sometimes, looking back you just have to wonder if it really was a West Coast prejudice, where anything outside of the New York circle of authors was thought worthless, or the critics just didn't have enough insight into life. Probably both. The High Window moves very quickly, very smoothly, never misses a beat or falls flat for a single page.

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