



The Devil She Knows

Bill Loehfelm

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An audacious thriller from a major new talent

Life isn't panning out for Maureen Coughlin. At twenty-nine, the tough-skinned Staten Island native's only excitement comes from . . . well, not much. A fresh pack of American Spirits, maybe, or a discreet dash of coke before work. If something doesn't change soon, she'll end up a "lifer" at the Narrows, the faux-swank bar where she works one long night after another. But just like the island, the Narrows has its seamy side.

After work one night, Maureen walks in on a tryst between her co-worker Dennis and Frank Sebastian, a silver-haired politico. When Sebastian demands her silence, Maureen is more than happy to forget what she's seen—until Dennis turns up dead on the train tracks the next morning. The murder sends Maureen careening out of her stultifying routine and into fast-deepening trouble. Soon she's on the run through the seedy underbelly of the borough, desperate to stop Sebastian before Dennis's fate becomes her own.

With *The Devil She Knows*, Bill Loehfeld has written a pitch-black thriller in a fresh, compulsively readable voice, with pages that turn themselves. This is the real deal: a breakout novel by a writer whom *Publishers Weekly* has praised for his "superb prose and psychological insights."

The Devil She Knows Details

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From Reader Review The Devil She Knows for online ebook

Amy says

Review for Library Journal published 7/22/11 in Xpress Reviews online:

Maureen Coughlin is ready for a change. After almost a decade of cocktail waitressing in Staten Island, she acknowledges that her life has stalled. What happened to her plans for college? A career? Determined to change her trajectory, she sets off for her night shift with a new future in mind. Unfortunately, fate has other plans. After a night of heavy drinking and a few lines of coke, Maureen stumbles upon a scene that puts her in danger. After years of a misanthropic lifestyle, she realizes that she must reach out to others for aid.

Verdict: Loehfelm (Fresh Kills; Bloodroot) weaves a high-action tale of suspense and intrigue. A gutsy heroine who rings true, a corrupt politician, and the seedy underbelly of New York nightlife all combine for a pleasurable read. This character-driven novel with a strong sense of place will find mass appeal with fans of the suspense genre.

Jovdb says

Probably 3.5

I came across his author whilst reading a review of another book. I'm glad I took the time to take it out of the library as I found it interesting and somewhat compelling, especially the last few chapters.

Given that this was the first in the series, I was willing to give the author some leeway in repetition and wordiness as he was trying to establish characters.

The seediness of Maureen's world was well described: her nocturnal life working in a bar; her lack of friends attributed to that lifestyle, and the people she interacted with on a daily basis. It was no wonder she found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time!

After binging on alcohol and drugs while doing an overtime shift at the bar, The Narrows, she witnessed a co worker, Dennis, and a contender for the state senate, in a compromising position. She did not intend to do anything with this information. She was quite content to forget it all. But then Dennis was murdered and the political candidate, Sebastian, threatened her. He turned out to be a nasty piece of work who hounded Maureen and tried to intimidate her.

I will read the next book in the series to see how the author develops this character.

Emily Green says

On June 14, 2011, Bill Loehfelm, most recently the author of The Devil She Knows, came to Literati bookstore in Memphis, Tennessee. Loehfelm, despite his tattoos and earrings, had a deep, calm voice and relaxed presence. Because the audience consisted solely of myself and three other women, Loehfelm decided to leave the podium and take his coffee to sit with us and answer questions.

And answer questions he did, patiently describing his writing process, publication history, and his life in academia as well as in the restaurant biz. For over an hour he chatted and provided insight into how he came to be sitting on the other side of the table, signing the books.

Loehfelm told the story of how he submitted his first novel, *Fresh Kills*, to the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, and was the inaugural winner. He discussed the pleasures and frustrations of watching his novel be publicly discussed by readers during the selection process.

Currently, Loehfelm teaches at the University of New Orleans, with his wife AC Lambeth, who also teaches at UNO. Before he was a published writer and professor, he worked the restaurant scene, which he described as being a vicious cycle of working to earn money and then spending it and then working to earn more to make the rent until a year or years have gone by with nothing to show. Loehfelm said that he had encountered a particular kind of woman, intelligent and gutsy, who turned up often as a waitress or a bartender. This kind of woman tended to get stuck in the life not because of lack of ambition, but because of not having specific goals and following through with them.

Maureen, the main character of *The Devil She Knows* is just this kind of woman: intelligent, driven, but still unable to make it out of the repetitious restaurant life. In fact, as the novel begins, she is broke and trying to make rent, but in the midst of her efforts, she gets a little drunk and a little too high and accidentally stumbles into a liaison between a coworker and a would-be politician. As a result, Maureen finds herself fighting to stay one step ahead of the bad guys.

While having plenty of suspense, *The Devil She Knows* also manages to include literary elements such as character development. While Maureen might have begun as a type in Loehfelm's head, she develops into a complex and sympathetic character. John and Molly, friends by necessity of Maureen's, also take on lives of their own, as they choose to help her and stand up to forces that seem beyond their control.

In one particularly scene, before Molly has been convinced that she wants to help protect Maureen, she organizes a confrontation over a burger and fries split between them, but gains the authority in the meal by watching as Maureen eats and not touching her own food. Without being heavy-handed, the scene shows Molly's hesitation at helping another young, pretty woman and Maureen's own frustration and desperation. At the end of the confrontation, Maureen throws her money on the table and acknowledges, "Molly, fight's what I've got left." (110) Both women are established as individuals, not just stock characters.

As Loehfelm discussed his novel, he explained that he chose a female character because he wanted to explore issues of power. A woman, and Maureen is a petite woman at that, does not have the same physical strength as a large, body-building man, which Sebastian, the antagonist, is. In addition, as a waitress, Maureen has lower social stature than the business owner and potential politician. By exploring the issues of power, Loehfelm manages to create a complex plot with psychological depth.

Meeting Loehfelm was a treat and reading *The Devil She Knows* was an even bigger treat. I highly recommend buying the book and reading it. In addition, hearing him discuss the difficulties of getting into an MFA program, publishing, and getting a professorship, it was a comfort to a fellow writer that was much appreciated. His strongest advice to those who are working to establish themselves is to keep writing. And thank you, Bill Loehfelm, I will.

Elizabeth A. says

Twenty-nine year old Maureen is slogging her way through life working never-ending shifts as a waitress at The Narrows, a wannabe upscale bar located in a rough part of Staten Island. She knows if she doesn't do something to make a major change in her life soon she's gonna end up a "lifer" on the bar scene, a fate she's desperate to avoid.

She soon has more to worry about than long hours and bad tips, however, when leaving the bar in the wee hours of the morning she inadvertently stumbles upon the bar manager, Dennis, giving oral sex to local hot-shot and candidate for Senate Frank Sebastian. Quickly understanding that what she's seen puts her in an awkward position – and one Sebastian may find to be a threat – Maureen assures both men she has no intention of breathing a word of it to anyone.

And she wouldn't have, until she learns the next day that Dennis has been found dead on the railroad tracks not too far from The Narrows. Though the police are inclined to chalk it up as either an accident or suicide, Maureen can't help but wonder if something more sinister happened. When she returns home to find her apartment has been broken into Maureen becomes convinced Sebastian killed Dennis to keep him quiet, and that she's next.

The Devil She Knows is one of the most viscerally intense reads you will ever experience, and I can already say without a doubt this book will be on my "Best Of 2011" list come the end of the year. Every aspect of this book is tight, seamless, smart, and above all else, believable. If you've ever doubted the ability of male authors to write convincing female leads, please, read this book and let Bill Loehfelm blow all your preconceived notions right the hell out of the water. Maureen Coughlin is an amazingly well crafted creation. As a small, hot tempered female myself, I can tell you that the conflicting feelings of blood-boiling anger and spine-chilling vulnerability Maureen have in the face of the threat of confrontation with a large male are spot-on. And when push finally comes to shove, she behaves as neither a shrinking violet nor a feminized Rambo, but as a person pushed into a corner they are willing to do whatever they have to to fight their way out of.

Of course your hero can only be as heroic as your villain is evil, and Frank Sebastian is one truly evil son of a bitch. But a smooth one. Well connected, Sebastian is a former police officer who uses his relationships in the department to his advantage causing Maureen to question who, if anyone, in law enforcement she can trust. His celebrity as the leading senatorial candidate also works in his favor, as his polished looks and well practiced glad-handing have virtually everyone convinced he's one small step from sainthood. Which make the glimpses behind his public mask Maureen sees all the more chilling as she comes to understand he is an incredibly warped man who will stop at nothing to get what he wants...her dead.

The Devil She Knows is a tour de force tale of power: the lengths to which people will go to obtain and keep it, as well as the lengths people with nothing left to lose will go to fight it. If you've never heard of Bill Loehfelm before, do yourself a favor and pick up this book. I guarantee you will be hearing a lot more from him in the future.

Chris says

Well written, edgy crime fiction with a good plot and an engaging, complex protagonist. I look forward to

catching up with this series and other books by this author.

Wendy says

The Devil She Knows

This is a book that I had been wanting to read for a long while and I'm so glad that I finally took the time to pick it up. I love reading novels written by New Orleans authors and Bill Loehfelm is definitely one of the better ones. I know that this series is going to be amazing especially if this book is any indication of what the rest of the series is going to be like. Maureen Coughlin is a likeable and believable character and I can't wait to see how she ends up in New Orleans.

Bonnie Brody says

Physically, 29 year-old Maureen Coughlin is a wisp of a woman, 5' 4" tall and 100 pounds. Emotionally, she's a powerhouse, a person with acumen, tenacity, and a wild streak just this side of the Serengeti. She works as a waitress, the same job for the last 10 years and she's just sick of it. It's a nowhere job and she's going nowhere. She lives and works on Staten Island in a faux chic bar with the emphasis on `faux'. She's started college and dropped out more than once but she knows that waitressing is not where she wants to find herself down the pike. She lives alone and has no one special in her life except her mother who gives her more trouble than solace.

She's not averse to starting her shifts with a drink and a bit of cocaine to get her going. For a while she had a pretty bad cocaine problem but she's kicked that. Now, her use is just recreational. Her alcohol consumption, however, is pretty heavy. As *The Devil She Knows: A Novel* opens, Maureen is just coming off her shift. It's near morning and she's strung out and in a black-out, not even realizing where she is. She finds herself in Dennis's, her boss's, office. As she leaves the office she sees Dennis and Sebastian in a compromised position. She pretends she's seen nothing and leaves hoping that will be the end of it. Maureen is discreet and knows when to keep a secret. However, the next morning Dennis is found dead, ostensibly a suicide on the railroad tracks. Maureen believes it's not a suicide because just before she was leaving the bar, Dennis told her he wanted to talk to her. Also, she knows Dennis is not the type to take his life. Now she's in a real quandary.

She approaches John, her ex-boss at the bar she used to work at. He encourages her to call the cops and gives her the name of one that he trusts as honest and good. It just so happens though that Waters, the cop, has a history with Sebastian. They used to work together in Brooklyn. Something happened that caused Sebastian to retire as a hero and Waters to be transferred to Staten Island. Waters is old and tired. Maureen thinks of him as a lumbering great bear. Maureen confides in him and tells him what happened between Dennis and Sebastian. Waters promises to work on it. He takes her allegations and suspicions very seriously.

What Maureen hadn't anticipated, however, is just how bad a guy Sebastian is. He is really bad, no shades of gray here. He is running for State Senate and has a lot of power. He has killed before and he has killed many people. Maureen finds her apartment broken into, her television smashed, and warning cards laid carefully under her mattress. Sebastian is not a light-weight and Maureen knows she's in deep trouble. Waters advises her to lay low and stay at her mother's house. Maureen doesn't like taking advice or orders. She likes to take

things into her own hands and her brain is telling her to find Sebastian and face off.

The book's plot is pretty basic in its David and Goliath theme - little woman against big and powerful man. However, it's well-written, has great quips and kept up my interest throughout. Maureen is a wonderful character. The reader feels like they really know her, along with the others who surround her. The author, Bill Loehfelm, is great with building a character from scratch. We get a real sense of everyone in the book and the characters are all there for a purpose - no loose ends and no rabbit trails.

When the confrontation comes, and we know it will come, we're all rooting for Maureen. Bill Loehfelm started his career as the first Amazon Breakthrough writer, winning their award for his novel *Fresh Kills*. It appears that *The Devil She Knows: A Novel* is the first in a series starring Maureen. I look forward to the subsequent books.

judy says

I've read the other books in this series but not in order. Wish I had because this one is close to a 5. His description of Maureen as a waitress is magnificent. I found it completely believable--especially the times Maureen was in serious doubt about what to do. A very human book.

Seluca says

Poor, poor Maureen. For most of this book she made some questionable choices. Mostly for the right reasons.

I should not have been as surprised as I was to find out *The Devil She Knows* is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux—the same publishers of Michael Cunningham and Marilynne Robinson. Quality writing, but not exactly quality writing of thrillers. Loehfelm can turn a phrase and he has created one of my favorite characters in the flawed Maureen Coughlin, but so very little happens in this book. I kept waiting for some sort of action sequence, but alas.

While this may not be an action-packed thrill-ride, *The Devil She Knows* is a damned clever character study in how what we do daily do make up our lives, and the years pass quickly even as the days pass slowly. Maureen is a mess if there ever was one but she's a three-dimensional, motivated mess and I fell in love with her within the first few chapters. Nat, Amber, Molly, and John don't get as much development but they are still drawn with care and I felt like each had their own voice and agenda. I hope they all show up in the rest of the series but I am not optimistic with the move from Staten Island to New Orleans. However, the setting change should give Maureen more choices in all aspects of her life.

The sum-up: Excellent characters that make the weaker aspects of the story less noticeable. I will definitely continue with the series.

linda says

I come from Staten Island spent 51 years there I lived on the North Shore where the Narrows was and the South Shore where amber lived I've been to the place the black Garter was set, that area always gave me a creepy feeling my guess it gave the author the same feeling. It was like taking a visit. The story was entertaining I loved Det. Waters felt sorry for Amber and rooted for Maureen, it had a slow start then picked up to a nice pace.

Carol says

This story needed some heavy editing. It was exhaustingly repetitive and frequently suffered from unnecessary descriptive efforts. I almost made it to the end but could not endure any more.

George Lichman says

The Devil could be the darkness inside the characters in this book. Maureen, a late twenties waitress. Amber, her mother, never moved on from being abandoned by her husband eighteen years earlier. Nat Waters, a broken down New York City Detective, who buried his regrets in his job and never looked back. Dennis, Tanya, Vic...owned by something they can no longer control. All of them broken, exhausted, tired of a life that they felt they couldn't change because of choices made long ago.

Or the Devil could be Francis Jordan Sebastian. The man that owned them all, in different ways and for different reasons, but owned them not the less.

There area lot of devils to choose from in The Devil She Knows.

This book was wonderfully balanced with descriptive writing, deep and complicated characters, good dialogue, and a plot that was not particularly complicated but sufficiently gritty to satisfy readers.

What I enjoyed the most was protagonist Maureen Coughlin. She was merely surviving, defining success as scraping by waiting tables while leading an empty life surrounded by empty people. Because she saw something she shouldn't have, something that she gladly would've forgotten, she became the focus of an evil, homicidal, man. But she took control of her life, her destiny; she decided she would no longer settle for the emptiness of just getting by.

James Thane says

Maureen Coughlin has essentially spent her first twenty-nine years on the planet going nowhere. Now she's waitressing at the Narrows, a Staten Island bar, and her only long-term objective is to have a night good enough to pay some pressing bills. Maureen drinks too much, smokes way too much and does coke at inappropriate times.

On the evening in question, Frank Sebastian, an ex-cop and aspiring politician, is having a banquet upstairs at the Narrows. Maureen has too much to drink, piles some coke on top of that, and winds up passed out in the office. She finally wakes up long after closing time and steps out of the office to find Sebastian in a compromising situation with one of Maureen's co-workers, a guy named Dennis.

She assures both Dennis and Sebastian that she has no interest in what she's seen and that she's certainly not going to tell anyone. But hours later, Dennis is dead, an apparent suicide, and someone has broken into Maureen's apartment, leaving a very clear message behind.

Maureen does not know where to turn or who to trust, and it's clear that Frank Sebastian is not an enemy that anyone would want to make. Even as Maureen attempts to go into hiding, he seems to be dogging her at every turn, and the chances that she will emerge unscathed are dimming fast.

This is a well-written book with a number of fully fleshed out characters. Sebastian, in particular, is a very creepy and scary villain. My only problem with it was that I really had trouble finding much sympathy for Maureen. She's a person basically drifting through life, making any number of bad choices, and even though she now finds herself in terrible straits, I couldn't find enough empathy for her to really root for her. In the end, I found myself hoping that she would survive Sebastian's campaign against her more because he was such a repellant character and less because I really cared for her.

Alafair Burke says

What I said: "The Devil in Her Way has it all: rapid-fire pacing, dialogue that crackles, an artful depiction of the streets of New Orleans, and—in Maureen Coughlin—an utterly authentic, memorable protagonist. Bill Loehfelm is a terrific writer."

Joyce Peacock says

The book was ok as the 2 stars imply. The protagonist, Maureen Coughlin, was edgy, but dumb. She was dumb in the way horror film characters are. "I don't see what the problem is agreeing to break in to a recently MURDERED person's place..." Geesh. I was barely able to contain my dislike of her, let alone care what happens to her. The only reason I finished the story was because I felt sorry for her.
