

Hotel California: An Anthology of New Mystery Short Stories

Don Bruns, Editor

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Detectives, assassins, and occasional innocents caught in circumstances beyond their comprehension dominate the mystery tales collected in Hotel California.

Murder—justified and otherwise—is on the minds of the unscrupulous characters in Don Bruns’s mystery collection *Hotel California*.

In this collection: A hit man breaks his own rules when he begins to question his latest mission. A senator’s dark past comes back to haunt him in the form of his brother, a convicted murderer who’s just out of prison. A tour of a haunted New Orleans cemetery takes a gruesome turn. The motives behind each killing differ, but each one forces its survivors and perpetrators to start watching their backs, lest they become the next victim.

The collection begins with “New Kid in Town,” in which Jack Reacher hitches a ride with a man who is not what he seems to be. It ends with “Hotel California,” which uses the classic Eagles song as a framework to trace the rise and fall of an ill-fated TikTok starlet. These bookending tales are tense and exciting in their own ways. The power of “Hotel California” rests in its tragic inevitability: the ending is clear from the start, so watching the main character choose the path that she does is both frustrating and painful. Another story utilizes shocking twists to turn reality on its ear at the last possible moment. “Pretty Maids All in a Row” has an excellent setup but loses momentum, with most of the detective work taking place off page, leaving the heroine little to do. “Life in the Fast Lane” uses a phrase that is offensive to Native Americans.

These are tales of detectives, assassins, and occasional innocents caught in circumstances beyond their comprehension. Several stories focus on hard, jaded men who are forced to confront their own mistakes and rough edges. Others are about ordinary people who have little hope of understanding what is happening to them or why. Small, closed-off communities keep deadly secrets, making it even more difficult for people to target their quarries or to hide from those with evil intentions. The friendlier the community, the greater the danger, as a person in “Try and Love Again” discovers while they’re investigating a cold case in idyllic Put-in-Bay, Ohio. More than one story blurs the definition of justice, encouraging deeper reflection on the distinction between heroes and villains—and whether such terms apply at all.

With its edge-of-your-seat scenarios, shady personalities, and occasional touch of the supernatural, *Hotel California* delivers a gripping series of adventures with a mix of hopeful and horrifying outcomes.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September 2, 2022)

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