

Past Twilight

Richard C. Hemingway

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978-1-4565-6083-6

In *Past Twilight*, author Richard C. Hemingway offers a fast-paced tale of obsession, greed, and murder in a small town on the Jersey shore. In it, Jack Turner, a washed-up, drunken 59-year-old ex-hospital security officer who's just been diagnosed with terminal kidney cancer gets a chance to live a fateful part of his life over again. A meeting with a stranger gives Turner a chance to turn his life around, solve a mystery, and save the life of the gifted young woman with whom he had been obsessed many years earlier. In the process, he confronts an evil family dynasty and uncovers secrets of the woman's birth and heritage that rock the community of Ocean Beach.

Time travel has long been a popular device in fiction—almost everyone can relate to the longing to go back and repair their past mistakes, but, unless one is writing pure science fiction, it can be difficult to find a convincing and relevant way to access the past. Hemingway has chosen to use an alien in human form who says to Turner, “Go back and you will live longer. No death, only what lies past twilight, everything you ever wanted if you can summon the courage to believe in yourself.” Aware of everything that went on during the pivotal events in Ocean Beach and able to read Turner's mind, the alien equips him with meaningful, though cryptic, clues, a lottery win, and enough of a memory for the events that had led up to the murders that he is able to make better choices the second time around. But even though the alien's more ample perspective allows for some interesting metaphysical discussion, he, unlike the human characters in the tale, is not convincing. Aside from providing the protagonist with a pass to his past and making a few cameo appearances throughout the story, the character is not a meaningful addition to the plot.

While Hemingway's main characters exhibit the full range of human emotions, his secondary characters are less well developed, and reveal a rather one-sided devotion to self-interest, greed, deception, and lust, making it easy for the reader to hope for their downfall. However, the well-paced and gripping plot holds readers' attention, as Turner fights to end the evil Martin family's grip on the lives of Ocean Beach's residents, against a timeline that includes an impending hurricane.

Past Twilight will appeal to those who enjoy their mystery and suspense laced with a hint of science fiction, especially if they are not deterred by portrayals of physical and emotional violence and the attitudes and behaviors common to people who spend a good deal of their time in bars. Fortunately, the author balances the all-too-human negative traits of his characters with forays into ethics, honor, and self-respect.

Hemingway is a gifted storyteller. He brings to his work the observational and investigative skills and ability to read subtle body language that he learned during his nearly twenty years of experience as a New York State Peacekeeper. Such skills allow him to convey much with little and move his story forward with a character's gesture or glance.

KRISTINE MORRIS (April 1, 2011)

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