

Personal Reasons

Michael Botz

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*In the small-town mystery novel **Personal Reasons**, a suddenly famous detective returns home to solve a cold case—his mother's murder.*

In Michael Botz's mystery novel *Personal Reasons*, a detective on a lifelong quest to solve his mother's murder is caught in a shifting web of local crimes.

After helping to solve the latest notable crime in San Diego, John becomes the city's new heartthrob; his experienced partner, Leonard, avoids the spotlight. A call from his estranged sister takes Leonard back to Mojave Creek, where, years earlier, his family's lives were torn apart after his mother's brutal killing. Leonard hopes to reconnect, but also to solve his mother's murder.

Mojave Creek would be a mundane location if not for its new string of disturbing murders: a family is killed before Leonard arrives, and more killings follow. In this tight-knit community, people's stories are linked together, and the list of suspects is short.

Still, despite its upsetting circumstances, this is an action-light story; much of the investigating happens after the fact. Victims are discovered, and Leonard looks into the cases; he even finds out about his sister's alleged crimes from others. Other than the events that propelled Leonard and his partner to fame, a scuffle at a bar, and a few confrontations, little happens in the moment.

There's a lightness to the tale, too. Leonard's impatience and agitation over John's inexperience results in humor, while John's newfound fame, political naïveté, and absurd ideas are poked fun at as Leonard works to solve the murders. A former Hollywood star in Mojave Creek clings to his brief glory days, throwing entertaining parties at his ranch; Leonard's sister is blissful and funny, despite her shocking track record in the town. A town bully, a suspicious bartender, and a family friend round out the cast, while Leonard's dog proves to be an endearing, faithful companion through his misadventures.

Clues are shared to move the book toward its revelatory end, which includes ample explanations and clarity around how the people in the novel are tied together. Though tidy, the conclusion is satisfyingly shocking. But the most compelling part of the story is how Leonard's perceptions of his decision to dedicate his life to his work change. Though he's always been resolute about righting wrongs and effecting justice, being back in Mojave Creek prompts him to consider expanding his life.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (December 16, 2021)

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