

The Palisades

Gail Lynn Hanson

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A glitz-obsessed caregiver is mired in yesteryear Hollyweird in Gail Lynn Hanson's dynamic thriller *The Palisades*. Told through the prism of outdated formalities, the superficiality of social stature, and the triviality of manners and appearance, this is a grim story about inner demons, past transgressions, and the duality of the glamour of midcentury Los Angeles, where those on the outside looking in faced harsh realities.

In the mid-1990s, Ruth lives near Pacific Palisades, an affluent Los Angeles neighborhood. She works with elderly clients who are enjoying the sunsets of their charmed lives. She is hired by Dorothy, a wealthy socialite whose existence has been self-defined by her fringe association with old movie stars, her affinity for all that's expensive and exotic, and her marriage to well-heeled Eugene. Through a series of abstract meditations that blur the lines between real and unreal, and between surreal and surreptitious, Ruth and Dorothy's relationship blooms in fits and starts. Their pasts and present are tossed and turned as though in search of the glimmer of fine jewelry.

A deep and introspective novel, *The Palisades* allows Ruth to make sense of the world through vague, fragmented thoughts that center on comforts meant to calm and define her. She is an obvious victim of trauma, and her longing for the colors, flavors, and guilty pleasures of sloth anchor her substratum of cunning: she manipulates her clients and those around them. She hopes to be soothed by the riches around her—to fill the void where common trust and family love aren't. Dorothy, on the other hand, tries to make sense of her golden years as a childless widow, enumerating often harsh criticisms of Ruth's life choices in public and embracing her as close to family in private.

The prose is often claustrophobic and staccato—like voices slithering in and out of one's consciousness, willing people to move, believe, and understand what's happening right in front of them on the fly. With a dizzying menagerie of connections, scandals, and misremembered histories that become clearer as the book progresses, *The Palisades* is a dark tale about the follies of lifelong pity and the perils of memory, loss, and regret. And with its cameos by celebrities including Angela Lansbury, Judy Garland, Carole Landis, and Elvis Presley, it reveals the aesthetics of yesteryear Hollywood glitz as a bright cloak hiding dark secrets.

The Palisades is a hypnotic page-turner that provokes uneasiness and bouts of remorse for deeds undone. It is a book that is painstaking about detailing the minutiae of consumerism, ownership, and superficiality. A psych-horror undercurrent ripples through the story, twisting sentence fragments into moments of profound insight, only to scupper the self-reflection by drowning it beneath a multiverse of internal psychoses. It's a brilliant peek at the bejeweled ghosts of Hollywood who always keep their secrets hidden.

RYAN PRADO (September 8, 2023)

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