



The Proprietor's Song

Janet Goldberg

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A couple and a motel owner whose paths only cross once a year process their grief via alternating perspectives in Janet Goldberg's novel *The Proprietor's Song*.

Every spring, Grace and Elwood Fisher drive the same route to Death Valley, retracing their missing son's steps from his fateful spring break trip a few years before. They haunt the same lodgings every year, one of them being a grungy creekside motel owned by Stanley. They stay in the same room their son stayed in, going to any place he went in the hopes of learning more about his disappearance.

While the Fishers and Stanley pass by each other in a brief moment of time every year, their stories become connected. They all seek to find their footing in the aftermath of devastating loss. Stanley is no stranger to losing someone, having lost his sister Lorna the winter before. With an estranged wife, an adult son living his own life, and a father with dementia, Lorna was the closest family he had.

As Stanley and the Fishers move through their lives, they try to make sense of past events. They muse on how things come and go; Stanley calls such musings "The Proprietor's Song." Long and often winding, the prose is poetic in its wanderings, especially as people traverse the beautiful but desolate landscapes of Death Valley. Indeed, Stanley and Grace both form new relationships with hope at the very same place there, just hours apart.

Interwoven stories of grief and healing haunt the pages of the novel *The Proprietor's Song*.

LEAH WEBSTER (July / August 2023)

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