



The Hotel Eden: Stories

By Ron Carlson

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The Hotel Eden: Stories By Ron Carlson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A wrestler gets an erection and the crowd turns viciously against him. A young, beautiful prostitute thinks better of her latest client, a baseball player who has already killed 11 spectators with his foul shots, than she does of married men "playing the dark game that some men did, putting themselves closer and closer to the edge of their lives, until something went over." A warrior justifies a major tactical mistake (not leaving enough time for the cauldron of oil to heat) in a gung-ho bureaucratic report: "The problems of the day were not attributable to inappropriate deportment. My staff was good. It was when the Visigoths had approached close enough that we could see their cruel eyes and we could read the savage and misspelled tattoos that I realized our error."

Hotel Eden offers two hilarious stories, the boiling oil project and a complex variation on a suburban myth. A young couple necking in an isolated spot hears scratching on one side of the car, speeds off, and discovers the local psychopath's prosthetic hook on the door handle. In Ron Carlson's telling, the item belongs to an innocent mental-asylum watchman. And Mr. Howard Lugdrum is more than a little upset that everyone's sympathy is going to the kids! "I was lucky I was wearing my simple hook and the straps broke; if I'd been wearing my regular armature, those two little criminals would have dragged me to death." This is a seriously funny collection, but it is also serious. In several pieces, notably the title story, "Oxygen," and "Nightcap," the characters are led astray and into disappointment or unwanted knowledge. The college student delivering medical oxygen one summer vacation realizes, "I was young those nights, but I was getting over it." Carlson is also a poet of precarious lives, humiliation, and loss.

From Library Journal

In *News of the World* (Norton, 1987), Carlson wryly observed the public's fascination with the weirdness of tabloid journalism by giving us a straightforward accounts of Bigfoot, our most popular urban legend. The strongest stories in his uneven new collection have this same sort of quirky sensibility. In "The Chromium Hook," we find out the real story behind that deranged mental hospital escapee who has terrorized generations of teenage couples, and "What We Wanted to Do" is a hilarious account of medieval warfare gone haywire, told in a way that could pass as a modern-day, excuse-ridden statement to the press. "The Hotel Eden" and "Oxygen" are truly engrossing and pack an emotional wallop, but most of the other stories here have a somewhat generic feel and fail to transcend the conventional, man-has-difficulty-relating-to-women plotline. For larger fiction collections.?Christine DeZelar-Tiedman, Univ. of Idaho Lib., Moscow

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From Kirkus Reviews

A distractingly uneven compendium of 12 stories from the generally unpredictable author of two previous collections (*The News of the World*, 1987; *Plan B for the Middle Class*, 1992). Carlson's tales are narrated in a flat emotionless voice that's often deliberately at variance with their unusual, not to say outrageous, premises. For example, there's the major-league ballplayer whose line drives have accidentally killed 11 people, and whose personality is drastically altered by his frustrating celebrity status ("Zanduce at Second"). Or the convict whose incarceration stimulates his inventive skills ("A Note on the Type"), or the military leader who debates to himself the pros and cons of dumping boiling oil on invading Visigoths ("What We Wanted to Do"). Several pieces, including "The House Goes Up," simply fail to develop their conceits in fruitful ways. And many are dominated by attention-getting specifics that are at best incidental to the story's main thrust--like the glorious funny- sleazy description of a wrestling show ("Mack's Mat Matches") in "Dr. Smile," or the amusing account of a seduction in "Nightcap," which doesn't fit very well with the maudlin,

underdeveloped story of unrequited love that contains it. Conversely, Carlson reinvents with deadpan panache the hoary old horror chestnut about the escaped maniac who barely misses slaughtering teenaged lovers parking ("The Chromium Hook"). "Oxygen" plumbs level after level of emotion and understanding in the richly imagined tale of a college kid whose summer job delivering oxygen to medical patients teaches him more than he wants to know about sex, death, and the baffling permutations of simple human need. And "The Prisoner of Bluestone" portrays with deeply moving simplicity the confusion and passion of an autoworker desperate for communication with the wife and daughter who he feels have moved beyond him. An overall disappointment, but those last two terrific stories make it clear that we'd better keep reading Carlson. (First serial to Esquire) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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