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A series of seemingly random murders along a fifty-mile stretch of the rugged northern California coast, committed by an unknown dubbed by the media the Coastline Killer. A young couple with marital problems, Shelby and Jay Macklin, who decide to spend the week between Christmas and New Year's at a friend's remote coastal cottage. Two couples in a neighboring home whose relationships are thick with festering menace. A fierce winter storm that leads to a night of unrelenting terror. These are the main ingredients in Bill Pronzini's chilling and twist-filled tale about the hidden nature of crime and its motives.

The Hidden Details

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From Reader Review The Hidden for online ebook

Susan says

The action in this seemed more like a short story would be... and I'm not fond of short stories. I knew what was coming, but it took forever to get there, and then was over quickly. Too much repetition of feelings, etc. Needed tighter editing.

Rita says

The book is short, just 110 pages. I really liked the quickness of this book until it gets to the climax. I was getting so twisted in the description of where Shelby was running. It might be my misunderstanding of the west coast? Heavily entwined wooded coastline with swampy marshes and paved driveway and open spongy field that have fence enclosed estates and outbuildings, residential housing. I just found myself using energy trying to envision the gamut of hard to soft and undeveloped to developed.

Just a lot of description I did not need.

I wish the climax was more dramatic or more believable. The characters are exhausted at this point of the story. I wish the story was punched up.

I liked the development of the characters and felt the dialogue was realistic. Thankfully.

I would read more from Mr. Pronzini. He has a great style.

Julie says

This was a very suspenseful story were the isolated setting was perfect and the encased great.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Jay and Shelby Macklin

SETTING: California coast

RATING: 2.75

Shelby and Jay Macklin's are experiencing marital problems, mostly because Jay is unable to share his inner self with his wife. His inability to communicate has led to a breakdown in their relationship. He experiences terrible nightmares that he won't discuss with his wife, and he never lets her in to his private world.

Although there has been no infidelity, Shelby has been fantasizing about another man. It is only a matter of time before there is a complete break between them.

In an effort to repair the damage, Jay makes arrangements to stay at a friend's remote coastal cottage during the Christmas holidays. He is determined to open up to his wife, most notably to let her know about a potentially serious medical issue that he is facing. The cottage is indeed isolated, and things go wrong almost from the start, with a horrendous storm hitting the area and news about a murderous killer on the loose. First the power goes out, and they venture to a neighbor's home where the atmosphere is decidedly unwelcoming.

Then a large tree falls down and traps them. Upon returning to the cottage, Jay has a medical emergency. Fortunately, Shelby is an EMT and is able to stabilize him. Unfortunately, she exhibits zero common sense afterwards and decides to go out in the storm to seek help. When she is gone for a while, Jay decides he needs to find her, which turns out to be another bad decision.

Pronzini is one of my very favorite authors, but I was extremely disappointed in *THE HIDDEN*. The book felt like it was written to a suspense formula. It is set in a remote and scary location; there is a fierce winter storm that keeps them trapped; and the few people that they do meet are odd and threatening. And let's not forget the killer on the loose. The only area where the formula was put aside was in how the Macklins' relationship evolved over the course of the book.

Sadly, I cannot recommend *THE HIDDEN* due to its lack of originality and adherence to a worn formula.

Greta says

What is hidden in *The Hidden*? What would seem to be a good idea for a getaway between Christmas and New Year's, turns ugly as the young married couple discovers problem after problem in the area chosen for their retreat. Bad timing abounds with the weather, Jay Macklin's heart, neighbors, and passers by. What doesn't kill them does makes them stronger, as Nietzsche's saying goes.

Angela says

Perhaps it was my mindset going into the story or perhaps I'm a bit desensitized, having read a bunch of suspenseful novels lately. But I had a hard time getting into this book.

My impressions before reading the book was that the story would be highly suspenseful. The situation is a vacationing couple stuck in the middle of a storm with a killer on the loose in the area. However, it seemed to take a while for the suspense to really get going, with much of the first half of the story focusing on the personal issues for the couple (marital issues and secrets kept) and their neighbors.

Overall, the story was good. I just wanted the suspense to start sooner than it did and spent much of the time reading this book wondering when things were going to pick up.

And things really picked up near the end!

John R Urry says

Another very good suspenseful story from Bill Pronzini . Good old fashion crime novel. Bravo

Sensitivemuse says

It certainly started off interesting. It had all the right elements of suspense and it got me reading further into it. Then it stops. The plot suddenly focuses mainly on the deteriorating relationship between Jay and Shelby and the killer suddenly disappears from the story. Huh? why? and the suspense was just getting along fine! However! I actually liked the spotlight on the two of them. It did provide character development despite the lack of suspense.

As the story progressed, I found myself losing interest. New characters were introduced so the reader is provided with some potential suspects. I didn't think much of any of them though. They seemed strange, and little out of place and for a minute I thought perhaps it was going to take a turn for the creepy and give the plot a more sinister feel. Unfortunately, I was wrong and it felt as if the characters were placed there out of convenience without any real thought to them.

Towards the end of the novel I just wanted this to be over with, and when the killer was revealed I wasn't interested in the story anymore. Honestly, I was wondering more about the outcome of Shelby and Jay's future instead of the mystery. Their marital situation just seemed much more interesting than the mystery itself. It had a lot of potential in the beginning, yet it fell short of its mark. I nearly didn't finish the book but as it's only about 200 pages I decided to get it over with anyway. I don't think I can recommend this to anyone, as there's plenty of better suspense novels out there.

Crystal says

Set on the Northern California coast, near Ft. Bragg, the Coastline Killer is assassinating people right and left. A couple from Cupertino (too funny) stay the New Year weekend in a borrowed get-away house. They're trying to get away from their marital problems, but of course those follow them and intensify. Pronzini introduces the reader to the murderer right away and we know his motive: these people are destroying the beauty of the area. Frankly, this is a killer I can sympathize with. I've read all of Mr. Pronzini's wife's Sharon McCone mysteries, but not too many of Pronzini's. This one was a nice read with some interesting aspects, not too many twists. Well, none.

Blake Farrell says

Well written with clean and effective prose. The story fell apart toward the end but I couldn't put it down as the main characters were engaging and the setting fully realized.

Barbara says

Loved reading this book! Did not like the ending....but that's just me. I will read more books by this author and hope for better endings!

Amy Curtiss says

Very quick read, the problem marriage at the center of the book was so believable, the characters' struggle was just very stark and real UNTIL the reveal at the end about the husband's dream. It was unexpected and maybe unneeded to tie that end up so neatly, and I really didn't believe it would immediately change the way he dealt with life as a married person. But maybe that's not the author's intent, it seems like there will still be problems, but at least some hope for the marriage. I did of course enjoy the wife's toughness and soul searching, it's cool to encounter a many-faceted female that's not a coroner or detective, just a chick trying to make her life livable, questioning past choices and hoping for a bright future.

The biggest problem I had with the plot was the stereotypical PTSD ex-soldier as the mass murderer. I just feel like that's been done to death and I would have believed that kind of violence from maybe an environmentalist that had had a psychotic break, not from a young soldier.

I will seek out other stuff from this author, though! So prolific, and this is the first book I've read by him.

Graham says

An easy book to read, no heavy slogging through filler chapters. I was close to giving 4 stars and would have done had it been the authors first novel but was surprised to read at the end he had written seventy other books. If that sounds odd I'll explain. Apart from Jay and Shelby, the characters were quite poor. The neighbours sniping at each other on first meeting didn't ring true at all. The police were very one dimensional. Even the revelation of the killer was a let down. But I enjoyed Jay and Shelby immensely and hadn't come across that twist before (I won't spoil it).

Enjoyed the setting and the backdrop and worth a read.

Ed says

Christmas story a la Hitchcock packs enough punch and suspense. The female protagonist is an EMT (my favorite character), and her husband is an out-of-work restaurant owner. Marriage on the rocks, they drive out to stay at a friend's seaside cottage in northern CA for some R&R. Of course things go awry. I remain a big fan of Mr. Pronzini's novels, the Nameless series and the stand alones. This title delivered another diverting read over a couple of cold Christmas week nights.

Emily says

Let's start off with the very beginning, where our unknown killer shoots two kids for littering on the beach, one man for taunting seals with trash, and another man because he's cut down trees just to get a good view. Our unknown killer then pretty much disappears, except for a short chapter where he's driving around being semi-introspective, but confusing "really liking the environment" with "homicidal". He will be called the "Coastline Killer", but mostly is an afterthought. Meanwhile . . .

enter Shelby and Jay, who are just trying to have a nice vacation before Jay tells Shelby some big secret and Shelby tells Jay she's sick of him. But there's a big storm, the power goes out, and because Shelby is afraid of the dark, they need matches to light a fire. (I forget if I ever learn why Shelby is afraid of the dark, but I do

learn the word 'nyctophobe'. Call it even.) So they travel and find . . .

Claire, Brian, Gene, and Paula, who are having a dinner party. None of them like each other despite the fact that they're married and are friends. There is lots of tension. Jay and Shelby leave, but because they're married and Shelby is unsure if she likes Jay, there's more tension there.

In between tensions, there's random bits of accusation that the Coastline Killer is some weird cop that keeps showing up, Jay, and/or Brian. Mostly in a circular process, Jay laments the many ways he is a failure, Shelby gets annoyed by Jay, and I get annoyed by all of the characters. Also, Paula leaves town, (view spoiler)

Another storm happens but for various reasons everyone needs to be outside running around in the night. And then, just when you totally forgot about him, the Coastline Killer shows up. (view spoiler)

The end.
