



## Stone Hotel: Poems From Prison

*Raegan Butcher*

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A moving, spare collection of poetry on life behind bars. All encased in the usual lavish, beautiful CrimethInc production.

## Stone Hotel: Poems From Prison Details

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## From Reader Review Stone Hotel: Poems From Prison for online ebook

### Jason says

One of the best books of poetry I have ever had the pleasure of reading, it is such a shame only 2000 copies were produced, I would love to get my grubby mitts on a copy, it deserves wide spread release.

Butcher tells his life on these pages, from committing the crime, being captured, sentenced, doing the time and finally his release.

When you read this you can pick up easily on his feeling, you can sense his regret at what he has done and most of all you can feel the tedium he experiences being stuck in his cell.

My favourite has to be 96 hours and the judge not using Vaseline as he screwed him over.

I hope Butcher writes more and manages to keep out of jail.

\*August 2016. Second reading, I've got myself a paperback copy, book is still one of my favourites... now all I gotta do is get it signed.

\*December 2017. Third Reading, still loving this, always moved on Butch's release from prison.

Blog review is here <https://felcherman.wordpress.com/2017...>

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### Arlene Sanders says

STONE HOTEL is a collection of poems by a man who was sentenced to eight years in prison.

The first poem details the crime. Nowhere in the book did I find any attempt to excuse, minimize, or deny the crime. The poems simply tell us what happened, how he was apprehended--by dogs, "their nostrils full of my fear"--and what followed as he served his time:

I am surrounded  
by men who live  
in cages

and blink in the sun  
like psychotic moles

connoisseurs of  
hatred

disguised as racial pride

the tattooed husbands

of battered wives

who think  
love is a clenched fist

Disclaimer: As one who reads and writes fiction almost exclusively, I am not a sophisticated reader of poetry. I am a visual person who reacts to poetry in a way that unsophisticated listeners respond to music. That is, the words in poetry, or the notes in a musical composition, bring to mind a scene or a series of events that I can hear or see.

Certain passages in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," for example, summon vast, empty stretches of desert sweeping out to the horizon. Poe's "The Bells" tinkle silvery in a little Christmas shop I visited as a child. Wagner's "Tannhauser" is background music for elephants slowly marching in to perform in a circus.

The following are among the images that came to mind as I read the poems in Raegan Butcher's STONE HOTEL:

1. Attack scenes in JAWS
2. The plane crash in Nelson DeMille's MAYDAY
3. The chase in the opening scene of the James Bond film "Casino Royale"
4. WWII documentary film footage of the bombing of Hiroshima
5. "The Scream," a painting by Edvard Munch, National Gallery, Oslo, Norway

In STONE HOTEL, the poetry is understated. The scream lies beneath the words as the author finds himself "strangled by the hands of a clock" in a cage where "privacy is a thing of the past," and "even fear has gone stale with time."

In a poem titled "96 months" there is a rape scene, five lines long. One of the lines is only one word. The rape is described almost casually, a calm report slotted in among mundane images of rapists of another sort:

- a lawyer "bored and preoccupied/not even working for his money"
- a prosecutor "thundering doom/and calling for the max"
- and a judge "pinch-eyed and displeased/working on getting re-elected"

And then the rape--the real one--itself deceptively mundane. (You have to close your eyes to hear the scream. The scream lies below the words.)

Butcher tells us about the snitch, and how he was found:

hanging from  
the light fixture

a bedsheet  
around his neck

face purple

eyes filled with blood  
like bright red eggs

STONE HOTEL is not for the faint of heart. Raegan Butcher's writing is brilliant, raw and powerful. And as he writes, Butcher does my favorite thing for an artist to do--he never looks away. He confronts his subject with hard, cold objectivity and conveys it to us in the simplest way imaginable. This isn't poetry to make you smile or warm your soul. It isn't meant to entertain you--but then, neither is a plane crash or Edvard Munch's picture of a scream.

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## Rupert Dreyfus says

This was a fantastic read which I have stumbled upon by chance. It moves like a 7 year sentence in prison with all its ups and downs. The anxiety; the boredom; the people; the personalities; the danger; the corrupt system; the worry; the reflections; the honesty; the lack of personal space; the expectations of release. It's all there.

I'm personally not big in to poetry so I think this has broader appeal. It was more like reading profound musings than poetry. You could probably return to it an endless amount of times and find a new favourite quote. The snippet that presently stands out to me:

"i had a life  
but you could hardly call it blessed  
i started out with nothing  
and i still have most of it left"

- what is left.

I'm glad to have picked this up.

EDIT: I've placed this in my top 10 books of all time. The more I reflect on it, the better it is. I'm hunting down a signed paperback copy...

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## Joe says

*I am being  
strangled*

*by the hands  
of a clock*

*choked by the curled  
fingers  
of a calendar*

*endless passive waiting  
in a numbered box*

...

*and I only touch women*

*in my dreams*

Raegan Butcher spent almost a decade in prison for armed robbery and this collection contains snippets of observations of prison life, other inmates, and some beautiful reflection. In the style of Charles Bukowski, the writing is sparse, gritty and packs a punch. The words stay with you. Butcher observes how the clock and the calendar are a convicts worst enemies. The days blur into months and months into years, sitting in your cell drinking instant coffee until you become jittery and watching mindless television, looking out at 'the same/chain-link/ and razor-wire'. The boredom of masturbation, the humiliation of strip-searches, aching for loved ones and dwelling on the past.

Often humorous - 'even though I don't like to fight/ I like getting/ fucked in the ass even less' - and describing a particularly brutal fight in the chow hall between two inmates involving a cup of boiling water and broken teeth, Butcher apathetically describes the rest of the men ambling back to their cells because, let's face it, 'it looked like/ lunch was/ over'.

Writing such concise, sparse poetry and still speaking a thousand words is a considerable, underrated, feat.

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## **Beauregard Shagnasty says**

Powerful stuff!

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## **Harry Whitewolf says**

I can't remember the last time I read a poetry book so quickly. I mean, sure, it's short, but that's not the point I'm making. I've just flown through Stone Hotel in half an hour of frenzied, captivated reading. Why had nobody told me about Raegan Butcher before? I feel like I've been let in on a great secret of a work (despite the author's well known presence to many others).

Stone Hotel: Poems From Prison simply tells it how it is. The short almost-beat like stanzas and simplicity of words are highly laboured in skill and precision. Make no mistake, this isn't a book trying to make a buck on telling the gaol routine through poetry- this is simply the work of a poet in prison- a great one at that, and he's tellin' in true.

Funny, wincing, self reflecting, society reflecting- and with it prison's mirror, humanity reflecting, sad, and with the gritty reality of fights, deaths, piss, the inhumanity of arse cheek spreading, stories- almost haikus- of fellow cell mates (the short ones which begin with a name are truly great), and tales of the heart. Butcher punches a beautiful beast of post-modern prose (which occasionally brought Billy Childish's writing to mind) like he's sliced open a cow to expose every stench and entrail of the interior. This is Johnny Cash's San Quentin album for the literary market, and a whole lot more.

Harry Whitewolf, author of Route Number 11 and New Beat Newbie.

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## Jackson says

Here is my review of *Stone Hotel* from *Verbicide* issue #9 (Fall 2003):

It should be obvious that everyone who works with *Verbicide* is a huge Raegan Butcher fan—from his prose to his poetry, the guy can write, and I'm really proud that some of the poems included in *Stone Hotel* were published in *Verbicide* issue #7. Among the most touching aspects of the poetry of Butcher — written during his recently-ended six-year stint in prison for armed robbery — is his lack of self-pity and prisoner rhetoric (overt misguided emotion, revenge themes, repentance, etc.). The poetry is simple in its raw honesty and beautiful in its mature-yet-accessible language and intensely personal insights.

I am routinely unimpressed by CrimethInc.'s bullshit propaganda, but they have done a huge service to the literary world by printing this book. 'Nuff said. Buy this book. Butcher's poetry is must-read.

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## J.A. Carter-Winward says

### A Look Inside the Inside

After finishing Raegan Butcher's poetry collection *Rusty String Quartet*, I was eager to read his other book, a gift at Christmas, *Stone Hotel: Poems from Prison*. The only comparison I'll make is it took me a long time to read RSQ because there was so...much. So much depth. I read *Stone Hotel* in one sitting because there was so much...well, depth. But in a totally different way.

*Stone Hotel* is much more of a story to me. It took me not only to a foreign place, that place being the other side of the law, but to a place I don't want to visit. But to peek inside that place? Fascinating, rich, surprising, funny, predictable at times (but not in a bad way), disheartening, cold, frightening and despairing. The style of poetry is the same: stark and honest. He hits you between the eyes with lines like:

*tattooed husbands/ of battered wives/ who think/ love is a clenched fist.*

Some of my favorite poems are when he pulls back a little from the realism and gives us something that is universal, open-ended and almost lyrical even, like in "dimestore Dillinger" and "a walk among the tombstones"—

*i look out of my window and see / burning flowers and starving armies / but when i look up into the night sky / i see the souls of dead heroes.*

A lot of the poems are very funny, in the 'tears of a clown' sort of way, my favorite kind of humor, poems like "the devil's dandruff" (the funniest indictment of cocaine I've ever read) and "jeremiah," simple, understated and deadpan funny.

Other favorites are poems about specific inmates, and usually the title of the poem is the guy's name. Those were all fascinating and chilling, with the exception of "smoky," which was a poignant piece about the prison barber with a poet's soul who died of cancer behind bars.

This is another collection that you must have if you enjoy the post-modern poetry style dipped in starkness and bold truth. Butcher is skilled at taking you there and bringing you back, and making you crave another ride. I hope someday he takes up his poet's pen and gives us more.

## Kent Winward says

Stone Hotel fits nicely in the prison memoir genre, recounting the tales of prison life from crime to release. Butcher, always the moral convict, recounts the acute morality of our criminal class in short, direct prose placed in poetic format. After years of criminal defense work, I had to stop because the power of the State to crush the will of a human far surpasses most criminals ability to harm the public and it is a painful thing to watch. Butcher's poems are an ode to human resiliency and redemption.

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## Meg Tuite says

I heard about this collection from a goodreads recommendation! HOLY SHITE!!! This is a collection for anyone who is all about life/death no subterfuge, full-on vulnerability in a place where that must be hidden to survive: prison?? yes, but LIFE? yes. Butcher absolutely takes us into the cell, but he also reminds us that what we consider a safe and comfortable life in a house with a lock, is just as much a cell!!! Marriage: another cell. Safe job, pension? Really? This is not to be missed. This is also not for those who want to escape and pretend there is no iron between them and the outside persona. So now a few quotes, but all of it is essential, stark, and solitary!

"i used to sit  
and cry  
and hold a loaded  
gun up  
to my head  
but  
i chose a  
slower way  
of being dead"

an easygoing guy

"highly religious  
overwhelmingly friendly  
neat in appearance  
meticulous in his habits  
worked the same job for 30 years  
paid his bills on time  
loved his wife  
kept his garbage can lids on tight  
and murdered over 49 women"

Nothing hidden. Straight up and zeroed in on humanity, with or without a past. Get a copy!!!

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## HeavyReader says

Here's the review that I wrote for this book that appeared in *Slingshot* #82 and a variety of other places.

I encounter a lot of trite crap posing as poetry. Often I read or hear poems that are so bad I squirm in embarrassment on behalf of the author. Having been subjected to many poorly contrived pieces, I was surprised and exhilarated when I began reading Stone Hotel: Poems From Prison by Reagan Butcher. I was sucked in, immediately hooked by the dramatic pictures painted by Butcher--often in few words, but always in vivid detail.

Butcher uses his words to tell the stories of his life, starting with the armed robbery he was convicted for in 1996. He takes his audience through his arrest, the suicide watch he's placed on, the mental ward he's confined to, his conviction, and his transfer to prison. The last line of "Prisonbound" reads, "i had 2,555 days to go." In addition to details of those 2,555 days, the book's next 86 pages are filled with Butcher's hopes, dreams, fears, and desires.

I particularly appreciate Butcher's straight-up honesty. He manages to write about his love for his young daughter and of romance lost without seeming sappy or fake. Whether writing about strip searches ('designed to humiliate/ dehumanize/ demoralize and intimidate') or self-gratification ('masturbate/ 3 times/ in 20 minutes/ the last/ orgasm/ just a dry/ spasm/ in a cramped hand'), he doesn't sugarcoat or pretend.

My favorite pieces are his brief and pointed descriptions of inmates he encounters. These poems are as short as eleven words, but they speak volumes nonetheless. Butcher makes each word count.

This book illuminates a skill and talent that goes beyond sharing the details of life in prison, although (according to my friends behind bars) Butcher does that well. The greatest beauty here is that Butcher puts words together in ways that shock and delight. Consider the final words of the final poem in Stone Hotel: 'i've walked thru hell/ wearing gasoline shoes.' That's a whole world of meaning in ten little syllables.

According to

[<http://crimethinc.com/blog/2006/09/13...>],

In August of 2006, the last copies from the first limited and numbered printing of Stone Hotel were sold. While a reprinting in the future remains a possibility, we've decided to make this PDF of the book freely available in the meantime to keep the text in circulation and help promote Raegan's writing and new book, Rusty String Quartet. We'd like to remind everyone that we think a book of poetry like this one is the best example of why reading books on a computer screen is the worst format possible—it truly cannot be compared with the experience of reading such a finely tailored book in the real world. But alas, Stone Hotel is no longer in print, and this PDF will have to do; we can only hope that after enjoying these poems you will consider getting your hands on Raegan's finely printed second book, filled with 264 poems in 340 pages, still in its first printing of 2,000 copies.

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## **Damion says**

Awesome collection of poems. Straight to the point and raw. more like prose. Some of the most honest accounts of prison life read. No bravado or bullshit. Makes me want to read more from this underrated author.

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## **icedcheddar says**

its the jeet kune do of poetry. that is the best way to describe. brutally honest with himself and the rest of the world. excellent.

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## Janie C. says

An intrepid and honest book of poetry by a man who did the crime and then did the time. Plainly spoken and unsparing, these poems guide us through the experiences of armed robbery, consequent arrest and eight years behind bars. What I found interesting in this poetic narrative was the author's trepidation to re-enter the outside world. In his words:

"i am so afraid  
i'll have to go back  
to the same

shitty jobs  
the same failed relationships

endless nights  
filled with loneliness  
and frustration"

While life behind bars is challenging and monotonous, the outside world can be just as ruthless. But I have much hope for the narrator, who accepts that "that's just the way it is." I am looking forward to reading many more of his books.

Thank you to my friend Jason, who recommended this fine collection to me.

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## Alan says

Something happens to poetry when it is written from a hard undeniable life, a hell or some bitter tangle, when written by blade in the the flesh of the poet something happens to poetry, It becomes readable.

"

SNITCH

the cops found  
him  
hanging from  
the light fixture  
a bedsheet  
around his neck  
face purple  
eyes filled with blood  
like bright red eggs  
piss & shit  
dripping down his legs  
and no one  
could figure  
out  
how he managed  
to tie

both of his  
hands  
together  
behind his  
back  
"

"same old story  
everyone has a name  
no one has a father"

The book is amazing. Underedited, and better for it. Poems were smuggled out of prison in the soles of his shoes, it says.

Out of Print: Available here in PDF: [www.crimethinc.com/fighting](http://www.crimethinc.com/fighting)

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