



House of the Rising Sun: A Novel (A Holland Family Novel)

By James Lee Burke

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New York Times bestseller James Lee Burke returns with his latest masterpiece, the story of a father and son separated by war and circumstance—and whose encounter with the legendary Holy Grail will change their lives forever.

From its opening scene in revolutionary Mexico to the Battle of the Marne in 1918, and on to the bordellos and saloons of San Antonio during the reign of the Hole in the Wall Gang, *House of the Rising Sun* is an epic tale of love, loss, betrayal, vengeance, and retribution that follows Texas Ranger Hackberry Holland on his journey to reunite with his estranged son, Ishmael, a captain in the United States Army.

After a violent encounter that leaves four Mexican soldiers dead, Hackberry escapes the country in possession of a stolen artifact, earning the ire of a bloodthirsty Austrian arms dealer who then places Hack's son Ishmael squarely in the cross hairs of a plot to recapture his prize, believed to be the mythic cup of Christ.

Along the way, we meet three extraordinary women: Ruby Dansen, the Danish immigrant who is Ishmael's mother and Hackberry's one true love; Beatrice DeMolay, a brothel madam descended from the crusader knight who brought the shroud of Turin back from the Holy Land; and Maggie Bassett, one-time lover of the Sundance Kid, whose wiles rival those of Lady Macbeth. In her own way, each woman will aid Hackberry in his quest to reconcile with Ishmael, to vanquish their enemies, and to return the Grail to its rightful place.

House of the Rising Sun is James Lee Burke's finest novel to date, and a thrilling entry into the Holland family saga that continued most recently with *Wayfaring Stranger*, which *The New York Times Book Review* described as "saturated with the romance of the past while mournfully attuned to the unholy menace of the present."

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Editorial Review

Review

"The well-paced action features the usual men at play with fists and guns, but Burke also offers three strong women with pivotal roles, one of whom could be a match for any of the tough guys. Burke [has a] sure hand for crisp dialogue and a compelling story..." (*Kirkus*)

"Two-time Edgar winner Burke sets Texas Ranger Hackberry Holland the task of protecting a precious artifact (is it the Holy Grail?) from a string of villains, including an Austrian arms dealer who sets his sights on Holland's son Ishmael, who serves in the US Army; Burke does not disappoint." (*Boston Globe*)

"Readers of best-selling Burke's novels about the Holland family (*Wayfaring Stranger*) will gravitate to this prequel featuring the well-known and notoriously cantankerous Hackberry Holland. The large cast features complex and compelling characters, and the action deftly builds to a roaring boil." (*Library Journal*)

"Stunning... Crisp dialogue highlights this tale of redemption and the bonds of family, and the breathtaking conclusion is one that readers won't soon forget." (*Publishers Weekly (starred)*)

"Burke wins us over yet again with another fusillade of lyrical, deeply moving prose that makes us feel the beating hearts of all his characters, demon-wracked though they may be." (*Booklist (starred)*)

"James Lee Burke's finest literary work to date, cementing his reputation as one of America's all-time masters." (*New York Journal of Books*)

"Mr. Burke has crafted another epic tale in an unforgettable landscape about an imperfect man's search for redemption. Once again, every member of the sprawling cast of characters, minor to major, makes an impression, and rings true...Mr. Burke's novels always offer a compelling story. But, the reader is rewarded with a multitude of haunting themes that run deep and wide. Pick and choose the ones you wish to explore. They are skillfully and non-intrusively woven into the narrative. But these layers are what always elevate a James Lee Burke novel above any genre tale."

– **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

About the Author

James Lee Burke, a rare winner of two Edgar Awards, and named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America, is the author of more than thirty previous novels and two collections of short stories, including such *New York Times* bestsellers as *Light of the World*, *Creole Belle*, *Swan Peak*, *The Tin Roof Blowdown*, and *Feast Day of Fools*. He lives in Missoula, Montana.

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House of the Rising Sun



THE SUN HAD just crested on the horizon like a misplaced planet, swollen and molten and red, lighting a landscape that seemed sculpted out of clay and soft stone and marked by the fossilized tracks of animals with no names, when a tall barefoot man wearing little more than rags dropped his horse's reins and eased himself off the horse's back and worked his way down an embankment into a riverbed chained with pools of water

that glimmered as brightly as blood in the sunrise. The sand was the color of cinnamon and spiked with green grass and felt cool on his feet, even though they were bruised and threaded with lesions that were probably infected. He got to his knees and wiped the bugs off the water and cupped it to his mouth with both hands, then washed his face in it and pushed his long hair out of his eyes. His skin was striped with dirt, his trousers streaked with salt from the dried sweat of the horse. For an instant he thought he saw his reflection in the surface of the pool. No, that was not he, he told himself. The narrow face and the shoulder-length hair and the eyes that were like cups of darkness belonged on a tray or perhaps to a crusader knight left to the mercies of Saracens.

“¡Venga!” he said to the horse. “You have to be instructed to drink? It is no compliment to me that the only horse I could steal is probably the dumbest in Pancho Villa’s army, a horse that didn’t even have the courtesy to wear a saddle.”

The horse made no reply.

“Or is stupidity not the problem?” the man said. “Do you simply consider me an ogre to be feared and avoided? Either way, my sensibilities are fragile right now, and I’d appreciate it if you would get your sorry ass down here.”

When the horse came down the embankment and began to drink, the man, whose name was Hackberry Holland, sat on a rock and placed his feet in a pool, shutting his eyes, breathing through his nose in the silence. It was a strange place indeed, one the Creator had shaped and beveled and backdropped with mountains that resembled sharks’ teeth, then had put away for purposes he did not disclose. There was no birdsong, no willow trees swelling with wind, no tinkle of cowbells, no windmill clanking to life, the spout drumming water into a galvanized tank. This was a feral land, its energies as raw and ravenous as a giant predator that ingested the naive and incautious, a place closer to hell than to heaven.

He longed for a firearm and a canteen sloshing with water and a tall-crown hat and a pair of boots and soft socks and a clean shirt. It was not a lot to ask. Death was bad only when it was degrading, when it caught you sick and alone and lying on sheets soiled with your smell, your fears assembling around you like specters in the darkness.

“You see those two strings of smoke up on that mountain?” he said to the horse. “I suspect those are cook fires built by your former owners. Or by banditos that got no use for gringos from Texas. That means we’re going to have to cross those mountains north of us, and other than the grass growing in this sand, there’s probably not a cupful of feed between here and the Rio Grande. You think you’re up to that?”

He rested his palms on his knees. “That’s what I thought,” he said. “So I guess the big question is: What are we going to do? The answer is: I got no idea.”

He stared at the water rippling across the tops of his feet. A great weariness seemed to seep through his body, not unlike a pernicious opiate that told him it was time to rest and not quarrel with his fate. But death was not supposed to come like this, he told himself again. His fingernails were rimmed with dirt, his belt taken from him by his captors, his toes blackened with blood where they had been systematically stomped. He looked up at the sky. “They’re already circling,” he said. “They’ll take me first, then they’ll get to you, poor horse, whether you’re breathing or not. I’m sorry it’s worked out this way. You didn’t do nothing wrong.”

The horse lifted his head, ears forward, skin wrinkling from a blowfly that had lit on his rump.

“What is it?” Hackberry said.

Then he turned his face to a breeze blowing down a slope not more than a hundred yards away. No, it wasn’t simply a breeze. It smelled of mist and trees, perhaps pines, and thunderheads forming a lid above canyon walls. It smelled of cave air and fresh water and flowers that bloomed only at night; it smelled of paradise in a mountain desert. “You reckon we found Valhalla? It’s either that or I’m losing my mind, because I hear music. You think you can make the climb up there, old pal?”

This time Hackberry didn’t wait for a response. He picked up the horse’s reins and led him up the embankment on the far side of the riverbed, convinced that his deliverance was at hand.

HE WORKED THE horse up the incline through the entrance of the canyon and followed a trail around a bend scattered with fallen stone. A paintless one-story Victorian house, with a wide veranda and cupolas on the corners and fruit trees and two cisterns in back, was perched on a grassy bench with the voice of Enrico Caruso coming from a gramophone inside. The incongruity of the scene did not end there. A hearse, outfitted with brass carriage lamps and scrolled with paintings of white and green lilies and drawn by four white horses, was parked in front. There were red sores the size of quarters under the animals’ harnesses.

At least a dozen horses were tethered to a rail, and others were picketed in the side yard. Some of the horses wore United States Army saddles. Beer and tequila bottles had been broken on the rocks along the trail that led to the yard. Just as the wind picked up, Hackberry’s horse spooked sideways, walleyed, pitching his head against the reins.

“It’s all right, boy,” Hackberry said. “We’ve probably ridden into a straddle house, although I must admit that hearse is a little out of the ordinary.”

The horse’s nostrils were dilated, ears back. Hackberry dismounted and walked him up the grade, trying to see inside the hearse. Someone had restarted the recording. He could see no one through the windows. Directly above, the clouds had turned a shade of yellow that was almost sulfurous. The wind was cooler and blowing harder, creating a sound in the trees like water rushing through a riverbed. He seemed to have wandered into a magical place that had nothing to do with its surroundings. But he knew, just as the horse did, that sentiments of this kind about Mexico had no credibility and served no purpose. The campesinos were kept poor and uneducated; the police were corrupt; and the aristocracy was possessed of the same arrogance and cruelty that had given the world the Inquisition. Anyone who believed otherwise invited the black arts of both the savage and the imperialist into his life.

He gave up on the hearse. The trees in the rear of the house had thick, dark green, waxy leaves and were shadowed by the canyon’s walls. But something was wrong with the image, something that didn’t fit with the ambiance that Gauguin would have tried to catch with his oils. Hackberry closed and opened and wiped his eyes to make sure his hunger and dysentery had not impaired his vision or released images that he kept walled away in his mind. No, there was no mistaking what had transpired in the canyon lidded by yellow clouds that seemed to billow like thick curds from a chemical factory. Four black men in army uniforms, two of them with their trousers pulled to their ankles, all of them in their socks, their hands bound behind them, had been hanged from the tree limbs, each dying on a separate tree, as though someone had used their death as part of an ornamental display.

Hackberry turned the horse in a circle and began leading it back down the slope.

“Hey, hombre! ¿A dónde vas?” a man’s voice said.

A Mexican soldier in a khaki uniform had stepped out on the porch. He was thin and sun-brown and wore a stiff cap with a black bill and a gun belt he had cinched tightly into the flaps of his jacket. He had a narrow face and pits in his skin and teeth that were long and wide-set and the color of decayed wood. "You look like a gringo, man," the soldier said. "¿No hablas español?"

Hackberry gazed idly around the yard. "I cain't even habla inglés," he said. "At least not too good."

"You are a funny man."

"Not really." Hackberry paused and squinted innocuously at the sky. "What is this place?"

"You don't know a casa de citas when you see one? How do you like what has been hung in the trees back there?"

"I mind my own business and don't study on other people's grief."

"You know you got a Mexican brand on your horse?"

"I found him out in the desert. If you know the owner, maybe I can give him back. Can you tell me where I am?"

"You want to know where you are? You are in a big pile of shit."

"I don't know why. I don't see myself as much of a threat to nobody."

"I saw you looking at the hearse. You bothered by corpses, man?"

"Coffins and the like make me uneasy."

"You're a big liar, man."

"Those are hurtful words, unkind and unfair, particularly to a man in my circumstances. I'd feel better if you would put that gun back in its holster."

"You want to hold my gun, man?"

"No, cain't say as I do."

"Maybe I'll give you the chance. Maybe you might beg to hold my gun. You get what I'm saying, gringo?" The officer's mouth had become lascivious.

Hackberry stared at the figures suspended in the trees up the slope, at the way the limbs creaked and the figures swayed like shadows when the wind gusted. "What'd those colored soldiers do?"

"What did they do? They cried like children. What you think, man? What would you do?"

"Probably the same. Tell you what. I cain't pay for food, but I'll chop wood for it. I'd like to feed my horse, too. Then I'd like to be on my way and forget anything I saw here."

The Mexican officer took a toothpick from his shirt pocket and put it in his mouth. His hair was black and thick and shiny and bunched out from under his hat. "Some Texas Rangers attacked one of our trains and killed a lot of our people. You heard about that?"

Hackberry glanced up at the clouds that were roiling like smoke. He rubbed the back of his neck as though he had a crick in it, his pale blue eyes empty. "What would provoke them to do such a thing?"

"I'd tell you to ask them. But they're all dead. Except one. He got away. A tall man. Like you."

"I still cain't figure why you hung those colored soldiers. Y'all don't let them use your cathouses?"

"You ever seen dead people tied on car fenders? Tied on like deer full of holes? Americans did that in the village I come from. I saw it, gringo." The Mexican soldier drew down the skin below his right eye to emphasize the authenticity of his statement.

"Never heard of that one."

"You're a tall gringo, even without boots. If we hang you up, you're gonna barely touch the ground. You're gonna take a long time dying."

"I guess that's my bad luck. Before you do that to me, maybe you can he'p me out on something. Those soldiers back there were members of the Tenth or Eleventh Cavalry. There's a white captain with the Tenth I've been looking for. You seen a young captain, not quite as tall as me, but with the same features?"

The Mexican removed the toothpick from his mouth and shook it playfully at Hackberry. "You're lots of fun, man. But now we're going inside and meet General Lupa. Don't talk shit to him. This is one guy you never talk shit to, you hear me?"

"You're saying he's not quite mature, even though he's a general in your army?"

"That's one way to put it, if you want to get your head blown off. The Texas Rangers I was talking about? They killed his son when they attacked the train."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clyde Welch:

Reading a book tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that will give you benefit in your life. Using book everyone in this world can share their idea. Publications can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire all their reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the books. But also they write about advantage about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some analysis before they write with their book. One of them is this House of the Rising Sun: A Novel (A Holland Family Novel).

Jean Cunningham:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity that is look different you can read the book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent all day long to reading a guide. The book House of the Rising Sun: A Novel (A Holland Family Novel) it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book features high quality.

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