



## Just Like That

*Les Edgerton*

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## **Just Like That** Les Edgerton

Les Edgerton's buddy novel, **JUST LIKE THAT**, is based on an actual trip he took with an ex-prison cellmate under similar circumstances as protagonist Jake Mayes does in this narrative. The scenes in Pendleton are also based on true experiences he had while incarcerated. Approximately 85% of the novel is taken from real life.

Jake and his pal Bud's journey begins six months after he is released on parole and is occasioned when his girlfriend Donna dumps him and aborts their child. After an aborted suicide attempt where the Norelco shaver cord he used to hang himself broke, on an impulse-the source of the title; everything in Jake's life happens "just like that"-he calls up Bud, who lives by the same credo, and the two take off with no particular destination in mind. They're just going "south"--somewhere where it's warm. An hour before they leave, Jake on another impulse, holds up a convenience store to get some traveling money.

Ultimately, they end up in New Orleans and then Lake Charles, Louisiana and from there, back to Indiana.

Along the way are many "watercooler" moments, such as when an inmate sinks a meat cleaver into another inmate's blue-clad stomach, a physical encounter with two rednecks in Kentucky where Bud shoots one of the men, the bullet bouncing harmlessly off the man's thick skull, Jake's ongoing romance with Donna, the funeral of Jake's father which he attends with a whore, multiple burglaries, armed robberies, a brief affair with a black woman, and an adventure with a drunk Santa Claus. Near the end Jake takes another fall when he is caught burglarizing a bar back in Ft. Wayne, Indiana and gets shot in the leg and is returned to Pendleton where he kills the inmate he'd had a nasty encounter during his first stay in prison. In the process, Jake's philosophy of life undergoes a sea change and he comes up with this:

Portions of **JUST LIKE THAT** have previously appeared as short stories in the literary magazines High Plains Literary Review, Murdaland, and Flatmancrooked. The story that appeared in High Plains was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and was selected for inclusion in Houghton-Mifflin's "Best American Mystery Stories, 2001."

As a note of possible interest, Cathy Johns, the P.R. Director and Assistant Warden of The Farm (the infamous Louisiana state prison at Angola) read this novel and told Edgerton that he'd captured the true spirit of the criminal mind better than anything she'd ever read.

## **Just Like That Details**

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Author : Les Edgerton

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## From Reader Review Just Like That for online ebook

### Rick Bylina says

Les Edgerton's "Just Like That" opens the door to the mind of a felon who lives by a code of ethics authored by the hardscrabble life with a meandering family in the post-WW2 era and edited by the schizophrenic penal system of the 1960s where "...the best blacks and the worst whites got to be hacks...." The protagonist, Jake Mayes, is the embodiment of Les from his time in prison. I love the Elmore Leonard directness and in-your-face style of this story, but am mystified why this was touted as an on-the-road buddy story--more than half of it is set in prison. Still, it comes at you relentlessly with tight conversational writing and Jake's own brand of truths. Incidences in Les' life are strung together to give us a strong story of finding freedom and tranquility within oneself in the most restrictive of environments by being the baddest mother around. While it is easy to get caught up in the story and root for Jake on many levels, one has to be reminded that on the street, Jake would rob you, stomp you, and maybe even kill you, just like that, amigo.

For me, this story flows with just enough blood, guts, and spare writing to dribble into the five star bucket.

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### J.J. Toner says

I loved this book. The narrative bounces along with its own in-built energy, like the engine in a 1964 Mustang that refuses to stop even after you've switched it off and trousered the key. Les throws a lot of the writing book out the window in this one, followed by large parts of the grammar primer, and yet, the voice comes across as curiously educated. To take just two examples, he says "himself" everywhere when "hisself" might have been justified, "anything" in places where I would have expected "nuthin'" as in "nobody saw anything". The word "if" is noticeably absent all over the place, as in "You're smart, you try and become invisible." For anyone that needs to know what prison in the USA is really like, this book is Prison USA 101. A minor gripe I had with the book was a couple of passages where he repeated himself. The one serious gripe I had was the way the narrative was set aside every now and then to educate the reader on Tinseltown prison movie bullshit. I would have preferred to draw my own conclusions on that score.

Still a five star book with a strong, throbbing storyline and an angry voice telling it. I learned a lot about the criminal mind. Robbers rob for the adrenaline rush much more than the financial rewards - who knew? I also learned a few new words along the way. I gather "book" as a verb means to run, a "hack" is a prison officer, a "kielbasa" is a Polish sausage (or a euphemism). A few other words and phrases that I couldn't decipher I plan to ask Les to translate. As you'd expect from a master of the arts of noir writing, there were some wonderful turns of phrase, like "...his face as white as an Eskimo's ass" and "...you were going to go back and sit in your fucking cell and give names to your toes"

As I drew near the end of the book I was gutted, but consoled by the fact that I have another of his books on my kindle - The Perfect Crime. God only knows where he'll go with his forthcoming books, "The Bitch" and "The Rape"

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## **Natalie says**

### **Terrible**

I'm sorry I wasted my time on this book. The writing is bad and the end says 80% was fiction even though the beginning says it is claimed to be the closest to the real criminal mind.

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## **Carl R. says**

Since Les Edgerton is not only a mentor but a friend of mine, let there be no pretense of objectivity here. Writer Working regulars know that I usually link up to a bio the first time I mention a writer's name in one of these commentaries. Here, though, you have to read the book. That's the bio that matters. Just Like That is, he says, more than 80% autobiographical, though he gives only a peek at what is and isn't fiction in the intro.

What is real is a look into the criminal world. Not just a peep show, either.

Just Like That opens with a couple of ex-cons on a road trip. They travel from Indiana to Louisiana in a picaresque adventure, flexing their freedom, fighting and stealing as they go. Nothing serious, just to get along. Here's where we start to understand a little of what goes on between the ears of outlaws. Actually, we begin to realize that we don't understand at all. We get a brief look, like at a passing train. We don't understand because they don't either, and they don't spend much time reflecting about it. Early on, Jake goes into a convenience store for the same reason everyone else does--pick up a few supplies. A couple of fairly insignificant things happen, and he suddenly adjourns to his car, where he grabs his pistol, walks back in, robs the place. Even threatens to blow a little boy's kneecap if he doesn't obey his mother. Why? He doesn't know. He could use the cash, sure, but there's not much of that. He has no plan about before, after, or during. Just does it.

I'm reminded of the character Richie Nix in Elmore Leonard's Killshot (see Writer working, July 25) who shoots and robs on impulse. Something rang true to me about Richie. Les's Jake, drawn from his own experience, seems to confirm that truth. Most of these crimes are the product of unplanned, indiscriminate action. Look for plot, planning, goals, you're looking for something you won't find.

Just Like That doesn't stay on the road, though. It migrates to the most unpicaresque environment imaginable--the penitentiary. Jake has recidivist buds there, and they engage in a number of survivalist actions that, unlike most of their actions "on the bricks [outside], do take some planning and plotting. Enthralling reading. Lean and mean, unscented and unflowered prose.

The characters--especially Jake--do engage in some reflection here. He even reads and rereads Moby Dick. He delivers a couple very instructive rants about how much you can trust the veracity of Hollywood's version of prison life (Hint: Not at all.) [There are a couple of puzzling repetitions of these. Bad editing? Making sure the reader gets the point? Dunno.]

Jakes musings also include lots of contemplation of relationships--hetero-, homo-, undefinable-sexual.

Two of the points I hadn't thought about--a big reason for the dearth of true inside info--MSNBC's wall-to-

wall Lockup included--about prisons are, first, so many hard-core inmates are semi-literate that they couldn't write true accounts if they wanted to. Which they don't. Second, they're never going to tell a camera or a reporter what they tell their colleagues. They'll proclaim their innocence to the ends of the earth if you ask them. If their cellmate asks them? Fuckin' A I did it, and a lot more. and it was fun.

And so is Just Like That fun. And scary. To be able to run around the world with that kind of abandon. Even us regular citizens love the idea. If we had the guts. Or the idiocy. Or whatever it takes. Just Like That does have what it takes.

Kindle book. Amazon. Don't have a Kindle? You can download it to your PC or Mac. Les will tell you how on his [Lesedgertononwriting](#) blog. And/or he'll personally instruct you at your house. And bring the beer. Of course, as he reminds us, he does write fiction.

Writer Working signing off. You're on your own.

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### **Gareth Price says**

Les Edgerton takes incidents from his own early life and commits them to (electronic) paper with an honesty and integrity that you come across all too rarely. Just Like That starts as a buddy book & ends as a jailhouse book, the two sides weighted almost equally. It barely lets up with the action as Jake, Les' alter-ego, goes from one bad choice to another and ends up back in Pendleton jail for the failed robbery of a bar. A nasty, to put it mildly, encounter with another inmate colours the rest of the book from here as the daily grind and desperation of jail life unfolds and ends in murder.

What stood out for me was the writing style - it's written in a conversational first person tone that really draws you in and keeps you reading even though some of the events described are really grim. Must be the years behind the barbers chair that have honed that kind of storytelling style. Obvious comparisons here to the work of Eddie Bunker as they both cover similar terrain but Mr Edgerton throws in a welcome sense of black humour without smoothing the edges too much.

Will be checking out the rest of Mr Edgerton's output (he has at least 3 more novels & a short story collection out soon) as this one hit the spot. Enjoy

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### **Benoit Lelièvre says**

If JUST LIKE THAT would have been a short story collection, it would have been called something along the lines of 'Felon Stories' but since it's a novel, JUST LIKE THAT works fine as a title. But is it really a novel or is it an hybrid, novelish-memoir-true-crime-prison-book? It's all that. Edgerton warns us that about 80% of JUST LIKE THAT is based on his own life, which adds a layer of flavor to an already soulful story

of sin, redemption and friendship in the unlikeliest places.

You will learn a lot about how the underworld works, in JUST LIKE THAT. About how the people you read about and watch on television really think, feel and want. Sure it has a bizarre, tortuous structure. It doesn't really have a beginning or an end. But it's not meant to be that. It's not meant to give you a self-affirming life lesson. Some books just let you observe the fascinating, bewildering narrative fabric they're made of.

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## **Keith Nixon says**

Jake Mayes, ex-con and tough guy, decides to take a road trip with Bud, a cell mate from the worst prison in the US. First he needs some money so Mayes robs a garage, then takes off. Through bar fights, hookers and more robberies Mayes makes a living.

However, before long Mayes gets caught and is back inside where he experiences more of the tough side of life.

This weekend I stand accused of being a bad father, and it's all Les Edgerton's fault. You see in a typical week I am away for at least four days, so when home it's family time.

Then I received Just Like That and trouble flared because I just read and ignored everyone.

One aspect to note up front. The author states in the opening chapter that the book is 80 to 85% autobiographical. It's not clear what's fiction and what isn't. But I don't think this affects the overall read, it adds to it.

The book opens with the author in prison and we receive a brief glimpse of life inside. Once he makes parole Jake Mayes impulsively decides to go on a road trip with a fellow ex-inmate, Bud. The first half of Just Like That comprises the trip, then in the second half he's back in prison for another robbery (and in the process got shot).

Just Like That is not your average criminal recounting his experiences, far from it. This is a fascinating, enthralling tale. What differentiates it is the author makes absolutely no attempt to hide several aspects. For one, quite early Mayes / Edgerton admits his fear at living in a prison, how you have to adapt to a new set of behaviours and the implications if you fail are by turns revealing and chilling. This is a tough guy, who had a difficult upbringing and spent several years inside what was named as the worst prison in the US. Afraid? Surely not!

Secondly Mayes / Edgerton makes no attempt to justify his actions, no statements of 'it was my childhood' etc. It is what it is and I liked the refreshing no nonsense honesty. Here's an example from early on in the text to illustrate. The author is in a garage, and is considering (on a whim) robbing it, but sees a child acting up for his mother:

'Kid,' I said, crooking my finger at him and bending over. 'Kid, you get the cranberry juice like your mama told you. I got a gun in here and if you don't I'm going to shoot you in the leg.' He stood there a minute and I was half out the door when he came screaming up to his mom.

This is very typical of the straight talking Mayes / Edgerton narrative.

Third, Mayes / Edgerton recounts some events that are particularly shocking and very personal to him that frankly nobody should have to experience. Again there's no justification for it, it's part of life. If you let your guard down at all the jackals bite. It's scary. Then the rest of the book covers how Mayes / Edgerton deals with overcoming this personal challenge. Other events in the book include a riot and several murders. Strong stuff.

Another thread running through the novel is Mayes' / Edgerton's relationship with an ex, a hooker called Donna. She's nuts but the author cannot get her out of his head. Early on Mayes / Edgerton briefly states he attempted suicide, again it's simply a matter of fact. Towards the end it's revealed why through the recounting of past events. It's well done and adds another layer.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Just Like That*. It's fascinating, challenging, difficult, funny, human and inhuman peppered with moments that are sometimes times hard to take, but delivered without pomp, fanfare or a desire for sympathy or tears.

\*\*Originally reviewed for Books & Pals blog. May have received free review copy.\*\*

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### **Paul says**

3.5\*

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### **Darren Sant says**

Being a Brit the toughest thing about reading *Just Like That* was understanding some of the slang used in the novel. However, it wasn't a major hurdle and once I'd gotten used to it things flowed a little faster for me. *Just Like That* is a pretty straightforward novel and comes across more like a biography. As Les points out in his forward 80% of it is based on fact so that is perhaps unsurprising. It's exceptionally well written and whilst you understand that it's at least part autobiographical you are entertained by the fiction of it too.

It was enlightening and depressing for me to discover how brutal the American penal system used to be and perhaps still is. Les gives us insight into the criminal mind and was brutally frank about the fears and problems inmates face on a daily basis. It's clear that society's problems run deeper than we all understand and no slick talking politician's tough stance on crime will ever provide an all encompassing solution.

I don't know if I should use the word "enjoy" in the context of the subject matter of this novel but the author's openness and ever present humour made the tough subject matter much easier to swallow. I've been lucky enough to chat to the author and I can tell you he's as open and candid as this book suggests. His humour is as disarming as it is in the novel. An excellent read that will remain with me every time I see a prison film. I'll be thinking It's NOT *Just Like That*.

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### **Anne Gallagher says**

This is a man's book. No doubt about it. A semi-autobiographical tale written in fiction form of his life and

travels as a criminal. I couldn't put it down. I never thought I would root for a protagonist that was on the lowest edge of society, but I couldn't help feel for Jake. His antics with his friends, in and out of the pokey, were some of the best fun I've read in a long time. Edgerton's writing is raw, plain and simple, and if you can't look at the seedier side of life, pass this book by. However, what I found in reading is that even the lowliest of people have feelings. The emotional integrity with which Edgerton shows us that Jake is a PERSON, a son, a friend, a lover, bring two lessons that are easily defined. Most people are not who they appear to be, and everyone deserves a second chance. Les Edgerton has come a long way from his past and with this book, only Blue Skies are sure to be ahead of him.

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### **Ian Ayris says**

JUST LIKE THAT begins with a lengthy foreword in which we learn the prison stories/road movie book we are about to read is '80-85%' true. With the brilliant edginess of Edgerton's writing - even in the foreword - I was left in no doubt I would be in for quite a ride. And not all of it comfortable.

JLT begins with the central character, Jake Mayes, in prison. Eating beans:

We were having beans this meal. That's not news - when we don't have beans, that's news. My main concern was not biting down on a rock. There are rocks all the time in the beans. If I looked around, I would see everyone else eating the same way I was. Carefully, so as not to bit down on a rock. As if I cared.

This single paragraph is a brilliant example of Les Edgerton's writing. The attention to detail - details that can only come from someone who knows - an atmosphere created through these details, and the character of Jake Mayes laid out before us like a corpse. The fact Edgerton does all this within the first paragraph indicates a writer that knows exactly what he is doing.

As we follow Jake through parole and onto the streets, we have a hope he will turn his life around, make something of it. But Jake, Jake is a man with a broken heart that is falling to pieces and hardening by the day. Next thing we know, Jake is phoning up his pal Bud, and a nihilistic road trip ensues in which the two men lurch from one town to the next, beer and women, and enough money for both, their only object. Eventually, Jake and Bud go their separate ways, and Jake ends up back in 'the joint'.

Indeed, JLT is much more of a prison story than a road trip.

But therein lies its strength.

The prison sections are astounding in their detail, their atmosphere. And, in places, truly frightening. There are two particular scenes in the book that I read with my eyes popping out.

As Jake settles down to a life of prison, writing years of his life off, preferring the company of the friends he is banged up with to a life on the outside, I became genuinely saddened, such is the power of Edgerton's prose. But through the cold-hearted violence and the bravado and the dripping tension of prison life, I kept remembering that broken heart. And through it all, it kept on beating.

They say there is nothing more dangerous than a man with nothing to lose. If you can imagine Mark Twain pumped with amphetamines, brandishing a straight razor and a big grin - you sort of get close to Les

Edgerton.

JUST LIKE THAT is an astonishing book.

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### **M.L. Rigdon says**

I started this book and couldn't stop. Edgerton's ability to haul the reader into the story and minds of his characters, in this case, the criminal mentality, left me helpless to set the book down and fiercely invested in this work of fiction that feels like fact. The odd thing was that I didn't have much sympathy with the character but felt mesmerized by the train wreck about to happen. With no experience of incarceration, I can't comment on that, but do know about surviving stressful, traumatic environments on a daily basis. There comes a point where emotions must be kept at a distance in order to function. Edgerton shows what it's like to be forced into institutionalized stress 24/7, the eventual moral nonchalance, and resultant urge/addiction to do something or anything to feel again. An exciting, scary read and window into recidivism.

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### **Mike Monson says**

Now, Just Like That struck me in a way I'm not used to when I read, even when I'm reading something great. It brought me into a world that I was always curious about, fascinated about, but could never really see; never really know – as an outsider. Just Like That is the daily life of the Outlaw, the Criminal, the Hustler, and the Convict: the people who look at most of the rest of us a straights or civilians.

I've been on the periphery of such people and such a life off and on through various associations via siblings, parents, jobs, co-workers, friends, friends of friends, wives, girlfriends, and, you know, just travelling around a bit and being a fuck-up. I've caught a glimpse of the life of the outlaw, but was never a part of it of course, never wanted to be a part of it, but was always fascinated and curious. Which is why, I bet, I like crime and noir fiction and movies so much. Duh.

Edgerton is an ex-con. He is also a former criminal. He lived that life for a long time and Just Like That is a detailed, fictional account of what it is like to live that life. The story isn't romantic, or cool. There are no heroes, there are no good guys and there is no nobility anywhere – except, maybe, in the fierce loyalty that can occur between partners or pards, but, that, sadly, doesn't always last.

Horrible things happen constantly. Prison guards are cruel, convicts rape other convicts, and the police are dumb and unfeeling and everyone is a racist to some degree. Parents and spouses are abusive both physically and sexually in this world – just like all over the straight world of course – but it seems more accepted, more normal in the world of Just Like That.

So what is it like to get out of prison, know that you are a criminal, and still be very young and full of aggression and desire and anger and lacking almost completely in impulse control? What do you do? What is your daily life like? Just Like That answers that question. Edgerton's main character is just that sort of person and what he does is follow his impulses and wander all over the Midwest and the south, sometimes working, sometimes robbing, almost always drunk, and almost always getting into fights and dangerous situations and getting in and out of bed with a huge variety of women met along the way.

So, you might ask – isn't that just like all the other crime novels you just mentioned? It's just another novel about criminals, right? How is Just Like That any different? Okay, jeez, I'll tell you. Just Like That isn't a crime novel. That is right. It is a novel, and there is a lot of crime and a lot of criminals, but, no, it isn't a crime novel.

Crime novels are plot driven; they are stories about heists, getaways, revenge, etc. Right? Just Like That (while again, it includes heists and getaways and a LOT of revenge) is an episodic, fictionalized autobiography. It is a guy telling the reader what it was like to be him for a distinct period of time. It is very conversational and, often, instructive. It is the guy who has freaking been there telling us how it really was. See what I mean? Edgerton will be telling a story and then stop for page after fascinating page to explain to the reader some basic truth, some way or another the media or Hollywood gets it all wrong about prison, the police, or the outlaw life. Novels rarely do that. (Note: I just finished The Bitch, also by Edgerton and that is a crime novel and it is one dark, fucked up crime novel. I mean, just the worst things happen. It's so great.)

I don't want to keep this up and give too much away. Just read this book. If you do you will see real life depicted with great language and no bullshit, ever. Okay?

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### **Ed says**

Les Edgerton's masterful **JUST LIKE THAT** is the same rich vein as the noir-miester Chester Himes' prison novel **YESTERDAY WILL MAKE YOU CRY**. Both authors drew upon their life experience as convicts to craft their visceral, powerful, and, most of all, honest narratives. The protagonist Jake Mayes' portrayal is based eighty percent on actual events. He's a complex man, hardboiled but racked with searing pain, especially over his femme fatale/lover Donna. I liked reading his colorful trip taken to New Orleans with his friend Bud where a strong bond is forged between the men. Hollywood and TV have gotten it all wrong about the modern U.S. prison culture. Read **JUST LIKE THAT** to get the real skinny. Mr. Edgerton doesn't pull any punches at debunking Tinsel Town's myths. The gritty details emerging in the inmates' daily existence behind bars will surprise you, page after page. This essential writing makes for a captivating crime fiction read.

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### **Luca says**

'Just Like That' is a novel from Les Edgerton. A writer with a chequered past, he has a wealth of stories to tell, and 'Just Like That' is based primarily on a road trip he actually took with another ex-con. And it's a great tale from start to finish.

Edgerton is highly adept at storytelling, and that is what 'Just Like That' is. It's a story, told to the reader, taking them on a journey throughout. What makes this novel stand out however, is the way in which the story is written. Reading 'Just Like That' was an incredibly visceral experience. I've not read anything with as much heart or reality in a long time.

The characters are excellently well-rounded. As a reader, just as you start to feel empathy for one, they will commit an act so rash, and with emotion it'll have you questioning your own ability to read people. But you'll stick with it, because the characters are so interesting, you'll be right there with them to the end.

