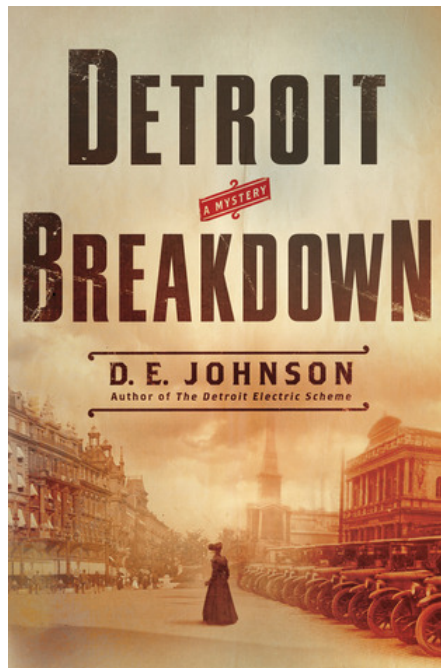




Detroit Breakdown

D.E. Johnson

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Will Anderson and Elizabeth Hume are called to the vast Eloise Insane Asylum outside of Detroit, where Elizabeth's cousin Robbie is a patient and now a murder suspect. The victim, like three others before him at the asylum in recent months, was killed with the infamous "Punjab lasso," the murder weapon of the Phantom of the Opera.

Certain of Robbie's innocence, they begin an investigation with the help of Detective Riordan. Will has himself committed to the asylum to investigate from the inside, and Elizabeth volunteers at Eloise and questions people outside the asylum. While Will endures horrific conditions in his search for the killer, Elizabeth and Riordan follow the trail of a murder suspect all the way to Kalamazoo, where they realize the killer might still be at Eloise, putting Will in extreme danger. They race back to Detroit, but will they arrive in time to save Will and bring the killer to justice?

Filled with Johnson's trademark roller-coaster plot, nuanced characters, and brilliant historical research, Detroit Breakdown is a compelling, dark mystery set in the once- flourishing Paris of the West.

Detroit Breakdown Details

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From Reader Review Detroit Breakdown for online ebook

Lori says

Another really good mystery. Learned a little about Detroit and something that I wasn't aware of from the history of that once great city.

Jadewik says

I was asked to read this book and review it on the paranormal blog I contribute stories to. You can find my review of this book here:

<http://4girlsandaghost.wordpress.com/...>

Suspense Magazine says

“Detroit Breakdown” is the third book in a mystery series set in Detroit in the 1910s. Johnson makes good use of period details, especially the little-known nuggets, like the popularity of electric cars at the time. Lead characters Will Anderson and his fiancée Elizabeth Hume each carry some baggage; sometimes the references to past events are interruptive, but overall their back stories drive them in compelling directions. The novel alternates between first-person narration from Will and Elizabeth, an effective technique giving insight to both, although there is some repetition early in the book. The format is most effective when the two are separated.

The title is a play on words, evocative of automotive breakdowns in the Motor City but really referring to mental breakdowns. As the novel opens, Elizabeth’s cousin Robert, a resident at the Eloise insane asylum, is accused of murder. Between terrible childhood memories of visiting the asylum and her mother developing dementia, Elizabeth is concerned about her own mental health. When the hospital’s doctors and police force seem happy to sweep the murder—which some claim is the latest in a series—under the rug,

Will feigns amnesia to get committed to the asylum and investigate what’s going on himself. He questions the patients, some of whom, of course, have a shaky sense of reality. Meanwhile, Elizabeth volunteers at Eloise under an assumed name.

False names, fake amnesia, real insanity, and a killer right out of “The Phantom of the Opera” blend together to keep the reader guessing. Johnson also makes great use of the asylum setting, exploiting the often atrocious treatment of the mentally ill in the time period, both through abuse and ill-conceived therapies, to ramp up the danger at Eloise. By the end, many of the characters have had to face their deepest fears, which get them through the current situation while also developing the characters across the larger story of the series.

Enjoyable on its own, but the close connections to continuing story arcs from the first two books would make it better when read in its proper order.

Reviewed by Scott Pearson, author of “Star Trek: Honor in the Night” for Suspense Magazine

Lynne says

Based on Eloise Sanatorium- while it is fiction much of the background is historical. However it seems that some of the details are not accurate for that time period. I know campus martius did not exist then however perhaps that area was referred to as that but I doubt it. Some of the writing seemed confusing at times but for the most part it was a good read. It was confusing as to the characters past that was referenced throughout the story. Perhaps there is a prequel.

Will and Elizabeth, who have a tenuous past, that is referenced but not fully explained although as the story goes bits and pieces are integrated. Elizabeth's cousin/brother is at Eloise for 20 years and has recently been accused of murder. The story unfolds and Elizabeth and Will become detectives to uncover the mystery.

J.R. says

I am a huge fan of D.E. Johnson and as such I have high expectations. And Johnson delivered with another great historical mystery, Detroit Breakdown (also received a starred review from Publisher's Weekly). Johnson added Elizabeth's point of view for this, the third book in the series, to great effect. The suspense ratchets up when Will has himself committed to an asylum to figure out who has been murdering patients and clear Elizabeth's cousin Robert who is being accused. Vivid description with a unique setting, great characters, and a mystery that will keep you guessing until the end make Detroit Breakdown an exciting read. Loved it! Looking forward to more from one of my new favorite authors.

Jack says

"Detroit Breakdown" is the third novel starring Will Anderson, son of the owner of the Detroit Electric Car Company, and his fiancé/girlfriend Elizabeth and takes place in 1912 Detroit.

Elizabeth's cousin Robert is a patient in the notorious Eloise Insane Asylum located outside of Detroit. He is now a murder suspect and Will and Elizabeth are determined to prove his innocence.

Will's plan is to go undercover and investigate from the inside of Eloise. Bad move, Will. You didn't figure on sadistic guards and doctors whose techniques to 'cure' his amnesia would do the Spanish Inquisition proud.

Five stars for the historical research that went into this novel. You really get a sense of what Detroit was like those years just before WWI. The description of the cars of that era, both electric and gasoline, is wonderful. Eloise was a real hospital and D.E. Johnson based many of the conditions there on an 1887 book by Nellie Bly, "Ten Days in a Madhouse".

Everything about Eloise just made my skin crawl - to me that's a sign of good writing.

The novel itself is divided into two narratives – Will's and Elizabeth's. There'll be a short section from Will's perspective followed by Elizabeth's and they alternate throughout the book. I found this a good way to cover everything that was going on.

Again after three books I still have not warmed up to Will. Maybe Johnson is just doing an outstanding job of making him seem like an impetuous young man going off half-cocked all the time, but there are times I just want to reach out and shake him, maybe slap him a few times, and say, “What were you thinking – or maybe you weren’t!”

The mystery itself is a good one with lots of surprises twists and turns.

Sam Sattler says

Detroit Breakdown is the third book in D.E. Johnson’s Will Anderson/Elizabeth Hume series. The book (following *The Detroit Electric Scheme* and *Motor City Shakedown*) is set in 1912 Detroit, and focuses on fictional events inside the real-life Eloise Insane Asylum located just outside the city.

Elizabeth is shocked to learn that her cousin, a patient in the asylum, is being accused of the murders of several of his fellow patients. Each of the victims has been strangled by a “Punjab lasso,” the weapon-of-choice of the Phantom of the Opera, himself – and Robert has been found leaning over the body of the latest to suffer that fate. Elizabeth is certain that her cousin is not a murderer, and she is determined to prove his innocence. And Will, wanting desperately to prove his love for Elizabeth, decides to investigate the murders from the inside – by having himself committed to the asylum as a mental patient.

Elizabeth, with the help of Detroit Police Detective Riordan, also plays a key role in the investigation. Not only does she penetrate the walls of the asylum as a volunteer worker, she and the detective follow all leads pointing outside Eloise. But when Will’s scheme is exposed, and he finds himself at the mercy of a doctor who has everything to lose if exposed, the dual investigations become a race against the clock.

Author Dan Johnson, a native of northern Michigan, is both an amateur historian and the grandson of a former Vice President of Checker Motors. He combines his love of history and his keen appreciation for early automotive pioneers to create a noirish setting for 1912 Detroit. The city’s streets are filled with competing horse-drawn buggies, electric cars, and gasoline-powered vehicles – while its alleys are often filled with huge, stinking mounds of horse manure and garbage. Street crime is rampant, cops are as crooked as those they chase, and insane asylums are places where the inmates are often no crazier than the guards who abuse them on a regular basis.

One might be tempted to say that not all that much has changed in Detroit in the past 100 years, that today’s problems are very much like those of 1912 Detroit. What Johnson makes clear, however, is that it was much more difficult to be poor in 1912 Detroit than it is in the Detroit of today. Then, the wealthy lived a spectacular lifestyle while everyone else, the vast majority of the city’s population, struggled just to keep their families fed and clothed. Those were heady days for those who had the money to enjoy the beautiful restaurants, theaters, parks, and other luxuries the city offered. Johnson vividly captures both lifestyles in *Detroit Breakdown* and shows what might happen when those two worlds even briefly intersected.

Will Anderson and Elizabeth Hume (even Detective Riordan, for that matter) already share a lot of history by the time *Detroit Breakdown* begins. Although Johnson makes a valiant effort to bring new readers up to speed, I suspect that those having read the first two books in the series will have a much better appreciation

of characters and motivations than readers jumping in at book-three as I did. That is not to say that Detroit Breakdown does not work well as a standalone novel, because it does – only that the experience is likely to be a much richer one for readers more intimately familiar with the events of The Detroit Electric Scheme and Motor City Shakedown.

Chelsea Gordon says

Amazing read

I loved the history of Detroit in the book. I love not too far from what's left of this asylum. I can imagine every detail in perfection.

Paul Pessolano says

“Detroit Breakdown” by D. E. Johnson, published by Minotaur Books.

Category – Mystery/Thriller

D.E. Johnson has three books out and all take place in the 1900’s in Detroit, Michigan. It is best to read them in order but one can enjoy them in any order. This is the time of the automobile boom and the books contain many historical facts and places of the time. One such place is Eloise Hospital that was an institution that contained 10,000 patients and inmates and 78 buildings on 900 acres.

Elizabeth Hume has been called to the hospital because her brother who is mentally ill is accused of murdering another patient. Her friend Will Anderson, who will do anything for her, has agreed to be admitted to the hospital, in search of the real murderer.

The “Phantom” murders seem to have some connected to the best selling novel “The Phantom of the Opera”. Will and Elizabeth find that one of the Doctors at the hospital has a deranged son who may be the “Phantom”.

The story does expose some of the cruel methods of treatment that were used at the time and becomes very real for Will when he is scheduled for treatment.

A noir novel that not only gives a historical snapshot of Detroit and is told in the style of writing of the time. A very interesting and well told story that will keep the reader guessing until the end.

Wendy Hines says

I've read other accounts of how patients were treated back in the day at asylums and it's horrific. Johnson doesn't shy away from the subject in Detroit Breakdown, and will, in fact, have readers frantically turning the page in this thrilling suspenseful installment.

Elizabeth is shocked when she finds out her cousin Robert has been accused of killing another patient. Robbie being a patient at Eloise Insane Asylum for most of his life. She is sure he is innocent and sets out to prove it. She asks her friend Will to help her and he fakes amnesia, getting himself admitted to the hospital.

What Will doesn't take it account, though, is the brutal way he is treated. He wants that inside position so he can find out who the real killer is and prove Robert's innocence, but he didn't sign up for this! Elizabeth, Robert, the detective on the case and others lead the reader on a quest to find the real killer, who is killing patients, but along the way, we are presented with enthralling details of history. Johnson is a superbly talented author whom's writing will keep you riveted. Highly recommend!

Lisa says

This is the third I've read in the series and my favorite so far. Two things contributed to that: the setting of Eloise, a former mental institution that fascinated me as a child whenever we drove by it; and the narration by Elizabeth for half of the book. She has become a more important character, Will's equal in sleuthing, so that we needed to hear from her what she was experiencing while Will was doing his thing.

I'd give this 4.5 stars, really, and the only reason I'm not giving it 5 is that I guessed who the culprit was very early on. However, it **was** only a guess, so it was still interesting to see how it all played out.

I'm also wondering if Robert and Francis were not actually on the autism spectrum, something pretty much unheard of in 1912.

Mack says

Detroit, Michigan, 1912. A vibrant, active city, the trolleys are packed no matter the time. The automobile industry is booming with the electric vs internal combustion engine supremacy still to be determined. The suffragette movement is going strong.

A late night anonymous call takes Elizabeth Hume and Will Anderson to Eloise, the insane asylum outside of Detroit. Her cousin, Robert Clarke, a long-time resident there, is accused of strangling another patient. But Robert says it was the Phantom. Francis Beckwith, son of the hospital administrator and himself a schizophrenic, agrees. Francis is obsessed with The Phantom of the Opera, and says the murder was committed with a Punjab lasso, just as in the book. Furthermore, there have been three other murders committed in the same manner.

Elizabeth wants to clear her cousin but there is something fishy going on at Eloise. The Asylum is a small town with its own police force and gates have slammed shut against outsiders. Frantic for information —Elizabeth can't even find out where Robert is being held —Elizabeth agrees to let William get himself committed so that he can continue the investigation from the inside. For her part, Elizabeth forms a plan to become a volunteer at the hospital. With the plans in effect, Detroit Breakdown shifts into thriller mode with plenty of action to bring the story to a perilous and satisfying conclusion.

Detroit Breakdown was an unexpected treat. I don't often read historicals but I accepted Detroit Breakdown as a review copy and I was quite pleased with the reading experience.

This is the third in a series featuring Elizabeth Hume and Will Anderson. As such, there is a lot of backstory. The author doesn't do a data dump of everything that happened previously but integrates references to prior events into the story as the characters experience feelings of self-doubt or guilt. What is soon obvious is that the Elizabeth and Will are tortured souls—emotionally, psychologically, and, in Will's case physically. The story can be enjoyed without knowing the entire backstory but I'm going to follow up by reading the first two books: The Detroit Electric Scheme and Motor City Shakedown.

If you are looking for a book with a strong, independent female protagonist then this book should satisfy. Elizabeth comes across as the stronger, more adept of the two characters. She is an active suffragette, preparing for the vote to ratify the 19th amendment. She owns two guns and shows herself capable of using them. She has vulnerabilities and insecurities but is a determined, proactive woman. I quite like her. Both she and Will appear to be prone to drug abuse but have overcome that by the events here. Will's role is to take the physical brunt. Here and in the previous books, he suffers horrific physical trauma. Both Elizabeth and Will are complex characters with backgrounds they have to suppress to solve the mystery.

I visited Detroit several years ago and it is fascinating to read about a time when it was thriving. This being Detroit, the competing automobile industries are part of the story. Will's father owns Detroit Electric which began as Anderson Electric Car Company. I hadn't thought much about early electric cars before reading this book but it sent me off to Wikipedia where I learned that Detroit Electric was an actual company started by someone named Anderson. Elizabeth drives an electric which allows the author to work in the logistics of owning an electric automobile. Interesting stuff particularly with the battery powered car making a comeback with the hybrids and the Tesla.

The main focus of the story, Eloise, was an actual psychiatric hospital. As in the story, it was self sufficient in many ways with its own train stop, police force, fire station, pig farm. It even had the tunnel that figures into the story. The Tales of Eloise web site is an interesting read and it was fun to compare the map included in Detroit Breakdown with the map of the actual institution. Johnson graphically illustrates the state of psychiatric care at the turn of the century. Have amnesia, don't speak English, the police found it convenient to warehouse problems in the mental hospital. Psychiatric therapy was just emerging when the story is set so we see alternate approaches to treatment that we would consider horrific today.

Detroit Breakdown is a good read particularly if you enjoy a well written historical story. Johnson works the culture, fashion, lifestyle, and technology of the day into the story naturally without leaving readers feeling that they have happened upon entries from an encyclopedia. I like the characters, enough to want to read the first two books in the series. They're flawed human beings which makes them more interesting, even likable. You'd want them on your side in a fight.

Diane S ? says

3.5 Eloise asylum in Detroit, 1912. a murderer is operating within the asylum and so we readers get to follow Will as he has himself committed so that he can find the murderer. Love the characters, the relationships between the characters, family secrets exposed and of course fiction that is based on a real place. Very atmospheric as to time and place and this asylum did really exist and remained open until the 1980's. During its heyday it was totally self sufficient and housed the unwanted, the poor, as well as a sanitarium that took in those with tuberculosis. Once again a book that makes me happy I was not born back then, their idea of treatment for the mentally ill was horrific and so many charged with the care of these unfortunates were

down right cruel. This was the third in this series and am looking forward to the fourth.

Carol says

Well, I guess I shouldn't have started this trilogy with the 3rd book, but author did a good job of giving background on the main characters along the way making for a good, if somewhat predictable read. Having grown up in a suburb of Detroit, as a teen, I was well aware of the Eloise Insane Asylum, and rumors of the horrors inflicted there, but that was just kids scaring kids. (I thought). Detroit Breakdown is an entertaining crime-mystery that colors a very descriptive picture of the time, and one pretty scary "*procedure*" performed there that we actually use today. (in a more humane manner, of course). Enjoyed it.

Michelle McGill-Vargas says

Detroit Breakdown is a slight detour from experiencing the infant auto industry in early 20th-century Detroit. This time, his hero, Will Anderson, gets himself committed to an insane asylum to clear the name Elizabeth Hume's cousin. Everything we know about Will, all of his flaws and temptations culminate in this book, taking the reader on a wild ride to find out how on earth he'll get out of this one.

While the reader can expect Johnson's vivid details, riveting historical information and humor, he does something completely off-the mark: half of the story is told from Elizabeth's point of view (POV). I think this was successfully accomplished. What we know about Elizabeth's character is evident in her POV. It is not hard to discern between the voices of the two main characters, though Johnson helps us along with identifying the POV at specific scene breaks. If anything, adding this element to this third installment of the Will Anderson series will garner a greater readership.
