The fierce and affecting memoir of a convicted murderer, whose growing self-awareness enables him to understand his crime and achieve redemption. In 1980, Kenneth Hartman murdered a homeless man in a Los Angeles park after a drug-fueled binge. Sentenced to life without parole by the state of California, Hartman was soon considered a potent force by the system’s most brutal convicts. To the hellish chaos of a maximum-security prison he brought his own limitless propensity for violence—he often spent months at a time in solitary confinement, “the Hole.” After years in the cold embrace of the state prison system, Hartman discovered a vocation for writing; he also met, through a chance phone call, the woman he would marry and have a child by. With poignancy and self-awareness, Hartman chronicles the anarchy and brutish moral code that rules in some of the world’s most infamous prisons, where physical punishment is the only form of control. Over time, Hartman evolves into a sentient being; follows his newly discovered spiritual and literary inclinations; and learns to deal with his demanding responsibilities as a family man. The final chapter describes his development of the Honor Program, which helps motivated prisoners escape the ravages of incarceration. Mother California is the story of a man who did not succumb to the darkness of the only world left to him. It offers definite proof that there is no such thing as a life beyond redemption.

My Personal Review:
I work in a prison, and I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about a dark part of life that most people in the public know little about. The book is more than just a story of one man's life behind bars; it speaks to the unfortunate circumstances in which the State of California finds itself. Kenneth Hartman gives a very balanced view of the prison environment. He does not apologize for his life circumstances, yet he leaves the reader with a richer understanding of what it is like behind
bars. There is a deep sadness that comes across in his writing, along with a message for reform of our current system of punishment. By delving into this fine read, one can readily see the need for prevention and reformation, and the difficulties of achieving redemption within the California prison system.

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