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Catch and Keep

Ronald Weber
Write Way Publishing (April 2000)
Unknown $23.95 (255pp)
978-1-885173-25-6

Writers often need a distraction to alleviate writer's block, but most would settle for something less than a double murder.

That, however, is our hero's unchosen antidote in this sequel to Weber's Aluminum Hatch. After winning a lottery, Fitzgerald takes a leave of absence from the Detroit Free Press and moves to a small town in northern Michigan to write a novel. When an editor calls and asks him to check on a freelance writer in the area, Fitzgerald leaves his keyboard and drives out to the woman's home, only to find she's been shot in the back of the head. When his live-in girlfriend Mercy Virdon discovers the dead woman's husband murdered in the same fashion across town, they find themselves involuntarily drawn into the case.

Political groups, bootlegging and militia connections all combine with fly fishing, conservation and pine forests to create a mystery filled with local seasoning. Weber employs the geography and the feelings of the people who populate it to build a foundation for his story. A man from southern Michigan conflicts with his neighbors when he fences off his property: "People around town weren't used to that, running into wire when they were out picking morels or hunting" He shows it in Mercy's thought upon seeing an immaculate lawn: "This is the north woods. You got some obsession with grass, live down in the
"burbs."

His generalizations of some of the local people can be a reach sometimes. "Old Finns who lived back in the woods weren't inclined to do a lot of talking, especially if the talk had anything to do with the law. They were anarchists by nature…" His ability, however, to delve into his main characters' personalities overshadows these slight flaws. He takes a character that could easily have been left as a stereotype and shows that everyone has more to offer than originally seen. Bonnie Pym is one such character. On first notice she is the kind of woman who changes her clothes and primps her hair to retrieve the mail, who considers the relationship possibilities in every man she meets and who hangs out just a little too often at the hole-in-the-wall bar outside town. As the novel progresses, though, the reader is allowed to see deeper into her thoughtfulness, independence and values. Weber shows his strength as a writer when he moves his characters beyond the superficial.

Perhaps the truest test of a mystery novel is whether it keeps the reader guessing. This one does.
CHRISTINE CANFIELD (February 14, 2000)

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