



Photofinish

Cheryl Kerr

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Cheryl Kerr masterfully and simultaneously lets the uninitiated into the equine realm as it canters through multiple perspectives.

Cheryl Kerr's second novel, *Photofinish*, blends mystery and suspense while drawing readers into the intricate world of horse training. After a blow to the head strikes down the elderly Rory Kind, his granddaughter and namesake, Rory Kind, Jr., feels compelled to learn the truth of his demise. Jumping back and forth between present and past, the author tells an artful tale of memory, love, mystery, and salvation.

Kerr masterfully and simultaneously lets the uninitiated into the equine realm with evocative descriptions. Of her grandfather's relationship to feelings, Rory says, "[He] put emotions away from him like a cooling blanket stripped from a horse." "Papa," as the protagonist calls him, is only introduced through flashbacks, but it becomes clear that this horse trainer has deep affection for the girl he ends up raising. He does, however, struggle to express this love. Although his murder occurs at the beginning of the novel, Rory Senior remains alive throughout the novel because of his granddaughter's poignant memories.

In another bold move, the author opts to tell the story occasionally from the murderer's point of view using third-person limited omniscient narration. This unique choice allows access to the culprit as a three-dimensional human being instead of a cardboard killer. Kerr keeps an air of mystery about the murderer, maintaining suspense concerning who he works for and why he has become a hit man.

Some animals in the story are well-rounded characters, including a race horse named Mochaman and Rory's pet pig, Nirvana. Both creatures are portrayed as flesh-and-blood beings with thoughts and emotions. The police procedural parts of the book flow along nicely. Kerr uses a detective to explain police work to Rory but also manages to make the officer a developed and sympathetic character.

As the novel's title implies, Kerr deftly combines the world of photography and racing to up the ante. When it becomes apparent that catching the killer will involve exposing photos to the world that may put Rory in danger, one can feel the terror she experiences knowing her image will be slapped across the front of magazines for everyone to see.

Despite the tight writing and plotting, the book's target audience remains relatively small as it helps to know a lot about horse racing and training. Although she does an admirable job of bringing novices into the horse world with her use of figurative language, it would help if the author explained some of the horse-specific vocabulary, such as "tack" and what it means to "extend a horse" when someone races the animal. Such a misstep must be forgiven, though, when faced with all the stellar features of *Photofinish*.

JILL ALLEN (November 1, 2013)

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