

Searching for Dali

Robert Lane

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Robert Lane's compelling literary detective novel *Searching for Dali* unravels the mystery of a missing painting.

Veronica is a multimillionaire whose memories are slipping away. She has “die” penciled into her phone calendar. Her husband, Nick, is missing—and so is her prized, pilfered Salvador Dali painting, *The Lost Body*. She hires Jake Travis, a veteran and an insurance investigator, to track down the art without getting the police involved so she can return it to Rollins College and hide the theft; she could not care less about finding Nick.

Set down the street from the Salvador Dali Museum in Saint Petersburg, Florida, the book starts from Veronica's perspective, capturing her dementia: she cannot remember names and puzzles over numbers. It soon becomes Jake's story as he tracks down the artwork, working through potential suspects as bodies pile up.

The writing is dramatic, punchy, and gripping, riffing with short sentences that sound like jazz. It has evocative phrases like “lived in a winter with no hope of spring” and vintage noir throwbacks like “when death is on the calendar.” It sprinkles in poetic language, as when describing a sunrise “sparkling the bay as if some Liberace god had rolled a pail of diamonds upon the water.” Though too polished to be realistic, the stylized dialogue is snappy and memorable. Clever back-and-forth banter is infused with wry humor, as with an exchange about mustard on Jake's shirt.

The book leads to a dramatic showdown when Jake confronts the culprit. Some order is restored, but not every loose end is tied up and justice is not served in full. Still, the ending is richer and more impactful as a result.

The literary crime novel *Searching for Dali* untangles an art theft mystery with panache and real artistry.

JOSEPH S. PETE (March / April 2024)

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