

In Search of Mercy

by Michael Ayoob

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Eight years ago Dexter Bolzjak was full of promise. He was the star goalie of his high school hockey team in Pittsburgh, but something went horribly wrong. In the final game of the season his prowess fails him. Then he is abducted and tortured. His plans for college never materialize and he is stuck in a dead end job sorting good from rotten vegetables in a warehouse.

Dexter stumbles across Lou Kashon a man he knew as a child, now an old terminally drunk man. Improbably, Lou has a substantial amount of cash hidden away in a drawer in his dirty, run down apartment. Lou wants to hire Dexter to find his long lost love, Mercy Carnahan, whose real name is Agnes Zagbroski. Lou presses some money into Dexter's hand and feels he has sealed the deal. Dexter is not so sure. He is wrestling some mighty demons in his mind as a result of his abduction and really doesn't feel up to the task.

However he has accepted the money and when he learns that Lou is dying from cancer and has only a few months at most to live he makes his decision to try and honor the old man's request.

Although this novel has billed Dexter Bolzjak as a private investigator and has won an award as the best private eye novel, Dexter is, in reality, a man haunted by memories of abuse at the hands of abductors when he was a teenager. The author delves into the psyche of a young man whose ability to function is destroyed first by his tragic loss of confidence as a hockey player, the one area of his life in which he seems to be succeeding and where he is accepted by his peers. When that aspect of

his life crumbles, all the other horrors that define his existence overwhelm him.

The novel also is intimately tied with the city of Pittsburgh. The city itself is, in essence, a character in the book. Those familiar with the city will recognize the neighborhoods, geography, and composition of its populace. The author gives his readers an insider's look at the city, recalling the changes in the landscape as new buildings rise on the land once occupied by familiar landmarks. Echoes of baseball games at Forbes Field now replaced by Phipps Hall are recalled.

Mr. Ayoob expects his readers to think. He moves from the real world to the surreal to the dream world with fluidity that demands the reader's attention. The author has something to say but he is not about to spoon feed his audience. They must follow his train of thought by using their own brains. While it is not an easy journey, the mental effort is worth the trip.

--Andy Plonka