

It makes perfect sense that a mystery is difficult to write because the conclusion must be known before the beginning. That's what I thought, until I began this work. Then I found myself introducing characters and scattering clues like candy wrappers on Halloween night, hoping that somebody would come behind me and clean up the mess while I lay in my bed with a stomach ache. But in a solo work, that 'somebody' needed to be me and when I realized the obvious, I did something I've never done before— I made a timeline of events and a list of characters with their relationship to each other, hoping to keep everything and everyone straight. The timeline definitely helped and without it, I might have resorted to a metaphysical conclusion, in which the loose ends are left to the reader's imagination because there is no rational solution. But this story has a rational ending which is explained first in dialogue and then in the detective's notes. When the story concludes, there are over sixty named characters, which wasn't an attempt to obscure a tree in the forest. It just happened.

There are times when the dialogue drifts from the mystery and onto the young women who are interested in the detective, an educated college student whose humility cries out for assistance. In contrast, all the women are strong characters and as one of them puts it, he comes across as either a coconut or a marshmallow, in either case a gentle soul with a sweet personality. When focused on the mystery, he is resolute, but when focused on the women, he wavers like a barometer in a hurricane. And who can blame him. There are so many of them.

The pace of this story is another element that surprised me. It is much faster than I anticipated. Every day required three chapters to describe, which might lead the reader to think the storyline is plodding but it isn't. The detective solves the first part of his case before half of the book is read but then he stumbles when clues dry up and it appears the second part will remain a mystery.

Injected into the case is his need to understand Christian dogma. The missing person is a preacher who ascending into the sky with no strings attached and the witnesses are church members who are willing to accept a supernatural explanation. Yet he thinks God created everything and then left for parts unknown, so God can't be involved. One of the women tries to explain sin and salvation to the detective but he doesn't seem ready to hear it. After all, he is dubious Keel.



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