

Book Reviews
Sweet Berry

By LESLEY MCALLISTER

STAIN OF THE BERRY by Anthony Bidulka (Insomniac), 287 pages, \$21.95 cloth.

Rating: NNN



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Life isn't looking so good for gay private detective Russell Quant. His close friend is still missing despite his best efforts to track her down, his favourite pants are getting tight in the waist, and his caseload is as dry as a Saskatoon summer.

But true to the promise of Anthony Bidulka's previous three Russell Quant mysteries, it's not long before things take off and Russell finds his gaydar tuned to the hunt for the boogeyman that's been harassing members of the Pink Gopher choir.

With two suspicious deaths so far one a suicide and the other a drowning our intrepid P.I. hits Saskatchewan's back roads to track down the remaining choir members. Soon he's on the receiving end of hangup calls, vandalism and notes saying "Boo!" It's enough to unnerve the usually down-to-earth detective.

Bidulka is no slouch when it comes to snappy dialogue and campy one-liners that more than tip the hat to classic noir, and his leading man is the kind of guy anyone would want for a best friend. He's like a big puppy dog sweet, brave, loving and loyal, but easily distracted by the toss of a bone.

Diverted from the boogeyman's trail by a mind-boggling development in his personal life, Russell finds himself on an Arctic escapade worthy of James Bond. It's a subplot that connects nicely with the last book, but it stretches believability like a pair of spandex briefs. Still, it brings Russell's feisty Ukrainian mother back into the picture and sets up the premise for the next Quant adventure.

Stain Of The Berry is an entertaining read, fast and funny and with lots of tender moments. And the enigmatic title? Well, it's all about beauty and the eye of the beholder.

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