

IN SEARCH OF MERCY

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Fame abruptly curtailed.

Eight years back, Dexter Bolzjak was a Pittsburgh high-school hockey phenom, a nerdy goalie with a talent for diverting the puck. But after failing spectacularly at the state championship, he was waylaid and tortured by four vengeful fans who left him with nightmares, shame and a dreary job sorting rotting produce. One day Lou Kashon, a grizzled old bum, asks a favor: Would Dexter find Mercy Carnahan? Last seen in 1958, Mercy starred in several iconic noir films of the '40s, then vanished. Back in the days when she was plain Agnes Zagbroski, Mercy was Lou's fiancée, but she dumped him for fame. Now, with cancer beckoning, Lou offers Dexter a bureau drawer full of hundreds to look for her. Now Dexter's recurring torture nightmares are usurped by dreams of the evocative, mysterious Mercy, which lead to confrontations with a creepy old-timer who secretly filmed her, a plastic surgeon who remodeled his daughters' faces to resemble hers and Lou's brother Eugene, who did his best to keep Mercy and Lou apart. Along the way, Dexter finds that his most horrendous experience can now be viewed online, and that he must endure one more taunt, this time from the devious Mercy, before he emerges from his eight-year abyss.

Ayoob, this year's winner of the PWA Best First Private Eye Novel competition, has a dark, despairing voice and a taste for the pornography of violence. Not for the squeamish, but the ultimate test of how hard-boiled you really are.