



# Book of the Week

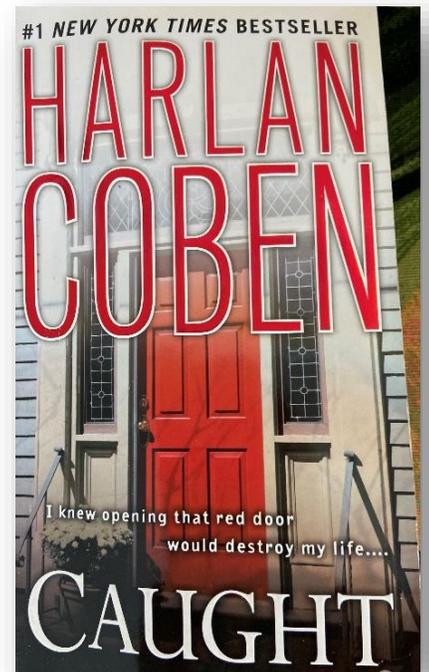
***Caught* by Harlan Coben**

**Book Review by Sue Minchew**

If you've ever read Harlan Coben, you know that rarely are things as they seem. You also know that you are in for a complicated plot with unexpected twists and turns. That is certainly the case with his novel *Caught*, one that I picked up from the free table at the library recently. If you like mysteries, you can't go wrong with this book. But hold on tight. It's quite a ride! The novel has two story lines that eventually coalesce; one related to a teenage girl's disappearance, the other to an alleged pedophile.

The book's main character, Wendy Tynes is a TV reporter who specializes in exposing pedophiles through stings, which she airs on her TV show. In the Prologue Dan Mercer, who works at a community center for troubled kids, gets a desperate sounding call from teenager Chynna to meet her at a house with a red door. When Dan opens that door, his life spins out of control because "Chynna" is really Wendy with her TV crew. The show airs a few days later, and Dan's life is ruined. When the sting fails to incriminate Dan, Wendy goes to his house looking for evidence. She does find child pornography on his laptop, but her efforts backfire when her boss fires her for crossing the line. Dan Mercer keeps insisting that he is innocent, that he has been set up. Determined investigative reporter that she is, Wendy keeps digging into Dan's life, partly because she fears that she may have been wrong about his guilt. When Dan disappears and blood evidence in his trailer suggests that he may have been murdered, the prime suspect is Ed Grayson, whose teenage son claimed that he had been molested by Dan Mercer. Wendy begins to wonder if her TV show led to Dan's murder.

Shifting to the other narrative, Marcia and Ted McWaid wake up one morning to discover that their daughter Haley, a high school senior, is missing. Suspecting that the teenager is a runaway, the police give the case to near retirement (and somewhat lazy) cop Frank Tremont. After three months on the case, he has gotten nowhere. Still searching for answers about Dan Mercer, partly to assuage her guilt that she may have caused an innocent man's death, Wendy meets and collaborates with Frank Tremont and Sheriff Walker, the lead investigator on Dan's murder. When Haley's pink cell phone is discovered



under the bed in a motel room that Dan had rented, Wendy and the authorities conclude that Dan was responsible for Haley's disappearance and perhaps even her death. After texts on the phone reveal a wooded area, where Haley planned to meet someone, a massive search of the area is conducted, turning up Haley's badly decomposed body. Is Dan a murderer as well as a pedophile?

Wendy's investigation leads her to Dan's ex wife Jenna, who has remarried but is still friends with Dan. She believes that Dan is innocent, telling Wendy, however, that "something" happened to him at Princeton. In addition, she mentions that when they were married, he secretly went somewhere every other Saturday. When Jenna followed him one Saturday, she discovered that he was visiting a house at Princeton. The uber curious Wendy, of course, visits the house and is very surprised at what she finds. Still hoping to find answers, she begins to search the internet and Facebook for Dan's Princeton roommate and suitemates. She discovers that each had become successful in various occupations only recently to be discredited with a barrage of accusations (even embezzlement) on various online sites. Delving further into the friends' backgrounds, Wendy finds that, while students at Princeton, they had been involved in a prank that had gone horribly wrong.

The themes of Harlan Coben's *Caught* center around alcohol abuse, online character assassination, revenge, and ultimately forgiveness. Some of the reviews I read called the book "far-fetched." That is probably true, but I found it very enjoyable, keeping me interested until the last page. In fact, it had so many surprises that just when I thought that I had finished it, I realized that I had one more chapter to read. Well, guess what? I got another "surprise." A really big one!

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