

Ordinary Grace (Krueger)

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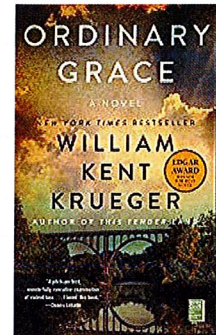
Ordinary Grace

William Kent Krueger, 2013

Atria Books

336 pp.

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Summary

That was it. That was all of it. A grace so ordinary there was no reason at all to remember it. Yet I have never across the forty years since it was spoken forgotten a single word.

New Bremen, Minnesota, 1961. The Twins were playing their debut season, ice-cold root beers were selling out at the soda counter of Halderson's Drugstore, and *Hot Stuff* comic books were a mainstay on every barbershop magazine rack. It was a time of innocence and hope for a country with a new, young president. But for thirteen-year-old Frank Drum it was a grim summer in which death visited frequently and assumed many forms. Accident. Nature. Suicide. Murder.

Frank begins the season preoccupied with the concerns of any teenage boy, but when tragedy unexpectedly strikes his family—which includes his Methodist minister father; his passionate, artistic mother; Juilliard-bound older sister; and wise-beyond-his-years kid brother—he finds himself thrust into an adult world full of secrets, lies, adultery, and betrayal, suddenly called upon to demonstrate a maturity and gumption beyond his years.

Told from Frank's perspective forty years after that fateful summer, *Ordinary Grace* is a brilliantly moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God. *(From the publisher.)*

Author Bio

- Birth—November 16, 1950
- Where—Torrington, Wyoming, USA
- Education—Stanford University (no degree)
- Awards—Anthony Award's Best Novel (twice); Anthony Award's Best First Novel; Barry Award for Best First Novel; Loft-McKnight Award

- Currently—lives in St. Paul, Minnesota

William Kent Krueger is an American author and crime writer, best known for the 13 novels of his Cork O'Connor series of books, ending with *Tamarack County* in 2013. The series is set mainly in Minnesota, USA. In 2005 and 2006, he won back-to-back Anthony Awards for best novel. Only one other author has done this since the award's inception in 1986.

Krueger has said that he wanted to be a writer from the third grade, when his story "The Walking Dictionary" was praised by his teacher and parents.

He attended Stanford University but his academic path was cut short when he came into conflict with the university's administration during student protests of spring 1970. Throughout his early life, he supported himself by logging timber, digging ditches, working in construction, and being published as a freelance journalist. He never stopped writing.

He wrote short stories and sketches for many years, but it was not until the age of 40 that he finished the manuscript of his first novel, *Iron Lake*. It won the Anthony Award for Best First Novel, the Barry Award for Best First Novel, the Minnesota Book Award, and the Loft-McKnight Fiction Award.

In 2013 he published his first stand-alone novel *Ordinary Grace*, referred to by *Publishers Weekly* as "elegiac, evocative....a resonant tale of fury, guilt, and redemption."

He lives with family in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Writing influences

Krueger has said his favorite book is *To Kill A Mockingbird*. He grew up reading Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James T. Farrell. Most influential among these was Hemingway. In an interview for *Shots* magazine, Krueger described his admiration for Hemingway's prose:

His prose is clean, his word choice perfect, his cadence precise and powerful. He wastes nothing. In Hemingway, what's not said is often the whole point of a story. I like that idea, leaving the heart off the page so that the words, the prose itself, is the first thing to pierce you. Then the meaning comes.

As a mystery genre writer, Krueger credits Tony Hillerman and James Lee Burke as his strongest influences.

Writing process

Krueger prefers to write early in the morning. Rising at 5.30 am, he goes to the nearby St Clair Broiler, where he drinks coffee and writes long-hand in wirebound notebooks.

He began going to the diner in his 30s when he had to make time for writing early in the morning before going to work at the University of Minnesota. He continues the habit, and today has his "own" booth there. In return for his loyalty, the restaurant has hosted book launches for Krueger. At one, the staff wore T-shirts emblazoned with "A nice place to visit. A great place to die."

Cork O'Connor series

When Krueger decided to set the series in northern Minnesota, he realized that a large percentage of the population was of mixed ancestry. In college, Krueger had wanted to be a cultural anthropologist; he became intrigued by researching the Ojibwe culture and weaving the information into his books. Krueger's books are set in and around Native American reservations. The main character, Cork O'Connor is part Ojibwe, part Irish.

History was a study in futility. Because people never learned. Century after century, they committed the same atrocities against one another or against the earth, and the only thing that changed was the magnitude of the slaughter... Conscience was a devil that plagued the individual. Collectively, a people squashed it as easily as stepping on a daisy.

Krueger has read the first Ojibwe historian, William Whipple Warren, as well as Francis Densmore, Gerald Vizenor and Basil Johnston. He has also read novels by Louise Erdrich and Jim Northrup. Krueger began to meet and get to know the Ojibwe people and remains fascinated by their culture.

His descriptions are meant to express his characters' feelings about the settings. Krueger believes that the sense of place is made resonant by the actions and emotions of the characters within it. He describes it as "a dynamic bond that has the potential to heighten the drama of every scene." (*From Wikipedia.*)

Book Reviews

Once in a blue moon a book drops down on your desk that demands to be read. You pick it up and read the first page, and then the second, and you are hooked. Such a book is *Ordinary Grace*...This is a book that makes the reader feel better just by having been exposed to the delights of the story. It will stay with you for quite some time and you will always remember it with a smile.

Huffington Post

[E]legiac, evocative.... The summer of 1961 finds thirteen-year-old Frank Drum living in small-town New Bremen, Minn. He and his younger brother, Jake, idolize their older sister, Ariel.... The Drums' peaceful existence is shattered, however, when Ariel fails to return from a late-night party. In the aftermath of her disappearance...dark secrets about New Bremen come to light....for what becomes a resonant tale of fury, guilt, and redemption.

Publishers Weekly

For fans of Wiley Cash's *A Land More Kind Than Home* or Krueger's other works, this is a touching read, with just enough intrigue to keep the story moving along. —Robin Nesbitt, Columbus Metropolitan Lib., OH
Library Journal

A thoughtful literary mystery that is wholly compelling and will appeal to fans of Dennis Lehane and Tom Franklin.... Don't take the title too literally, for Krueger has produced something that is anything but ordinary.

BookPage

One cannot read *Ordinary Grace* without feeling as if it is destined to be hailed as a classic work of literature. *Ordinary Grace* is one of those very rare books in which one regrets reaching its end, knowing that the experience of having read it for the first time will never be repeated. Krueger, who is incapable of writing badly, arguably has given us his masterpiece.

Bookreporter.com

(*Starred review.*) A respected mystery writer turns his attention to the biggest mystery of all: God.... Krueger aims higher and hits harder with a stand-alone novel that shares much with his other work.... [A] series of...deaths shake the world of Frank Drum, the 13-year-old narrator.... One of the novel's pivotal mysteries concerns the gaps among what Frank experiences (as a participant and an eavesdropper), what he knows and what he thinks he knows.... Yet, ultimately, the world of this novel is one of redemptive grace and mercy, as well as unidentified corpses and unexplainable tragedy. A novel that transforms narrator and reader alike.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

Use our LitLovers Book Club Resources; they can help with discussions for any book:

- **How to Discuss a Book** (helpful discussion tips)
- **Generic Discussion Questions—Fiction and Nonfiction**
- **Read-Think-Talk** (a guided reading chart)

SPOILER ALERT

1. Talk about the characters, starting with Ruth and Nathan Drum, the narrator's mother and father. How would you describe them and, especially, their marriage?
 2. What do you think of Emil Brandt and his sister?
 3. How would you describe Gus? What is the bond between Gus and Nathan based
-

on? What do you think was the event during the war that the two refer to obliquely as they sit together in the darkened church.

4. Discuss, in particular, Nathan's sermon after Ariel's death? What are its theological implications? Does Nathan answer the question of theodicy: if God is loving and all powerful, why do bad things happen to good people?

5. What prompts Frank, after his father's sermon, to go to Jake and tell him, "You're my best friend in the whole world. You always have been and you always will be"?

6. Why is Ruth so angry with Nathan after Ariel disappears? How would you respond to such a horrific loss: would you respond as Ruth does, in anger? Or would you be more like Nathan?

7. How would you define grace? What, specifically, does "ordinary grace" refer to in the story, and what is the larger religious significance of the term "ordinary grace"? Why is the grace spoken by Jake so extraordinary...and how does it affect members of his family?

8. Whom did you first suspect...and when did you begin to suspect the real killer? What "red herrings" (false clues) does the author put in the way to lead readers down the wrong path?

9. Much of the book has to do with young Frank's attempt to separate what he thinks he knows from what might (or might not) be the ultimate truth. Have you even been in a position of "knowing" something with certainty...and then learning that your judgment was wrong? How can we guard ourselves against false accusations?

10. What does Warren Redstone mean when he says to Frank, "You've just killed me, white boy"? Why does Frank let Redstone escape? Even Jake tells us...

How could I possibly explain my silence, my complicity in his escape, things I didn't really understand myself? My heart had simply directed me in a way my head couldn't wrap its thinking around....

Was Jake wrong to let Redstone get away? Should he have kept silent?

11. Talk about Karl Brandt and how he dies—an accident...or intentional?

12. What do you think happened to Bobby Cole? Why might the author have left that mystery unresolved?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

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William Kent Krueger

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About this Person

Born: November 16, 1950 in Torrington, Wyoming, United States
Nationality: American
Occupation: Novelist
Updated: Aug. 28, 2015

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born November 16, 1950, in Torrington, WY; son of a high school English teacher (father) and a musician (mother); married; wife's name Diane (an attorney); children: Seneca, Adam. **Education:** Attended Stanford University. **Addresses:** Home: St. Paul, MN. **E-mail:** wkkrueger@prodigy.net.

CAREER:

Writer. Has worked variously as a journalist, logger, construction worker, and child development researcher.

AWARDS:

Bush Artist Fellowship, 1988; Anthony Award for best novel, 2005, for *Blood Hollow*, and 2006, for *Mercy Falls*; Loft-McKnight Fiction Award, Anthony Award for best first novel, and Barry Award, all for *Iron Lake*; Minnesota Book Award for Genre Fiction, 2007; Dilys Award, Independent Mystery Booksellers Association, Lovey Award, Love Is Murder Conference, and Minnesota Book Award, all 2008, all for *Thunder Bay*; Northeastern Minnesota Book Award, 2008; Midwest Booksellers Choice Award, 2013, for *Ordinary Grace*; Edgar Award, Mystery Writers of America, 2013, for *Ordinary Grace*.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

- *The Devil's Bed* (novel), Atria (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Ordinary Grace* (novel), Atria Books (New York, NY), 2013.

"CORK O'CONNOR" MYSTERY SERIES

- *Iron Lake*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Boundary Waters*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Purgatory Ridge*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 2001.

- *Blood Hollow*, Atria (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Mercy Falls*, Atria (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Copper River*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Thunder Bay*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Red Knife*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Heaven's Keep*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Vermilion Drift*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Northwest Angle*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Trickster's Point*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Tamarack County*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2014.
- *Windigo Island*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2014.

Also contributor to mystery anthology *Resort to Murder: Thirteen Tales of Mystery by Minnesota's Premier Writers*, Nodin Press, 2007.

MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:

All of the author's books have been adapted for audio.

Sidelights

William Kent Krueger is a Minnesota mystery novelist best known for his series featuring Cork O'Connor. *Iron Lake*, the first book in the series, is named for one of Minnesota's fabled ten thousand lakes and the Indian reservation surrounding it. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote that Krueger "has a sense of place he's plainly honed firsthand in below-zero prairie. His characters, too, sport charm and dimension." Part Irish, part Anishinaabe/Ojibwe, Cork O'Connor is a Chicago policeman who returns to his hometown of Aurora with his lawyer wife, Jo, and their three children to take a job as sheriff. He loses an election after a dispute between local Native Americans and whites over fishing rights and then turns to running a small restaurant and gift shop. After their marriage fails, Jo becomes an advocate for tribal rights. The story opens with Cork having a relationship with a waitress but hoping to get back together with Jo, whose lover is a senator and the son of a former judge who has committed suicide. At the same time, a Native American newsboy disappears, and when Cork attempts to locate him, he finds enemies in the senator, the new sheriff, and tribal leaders who are profiting from gambling concessions. An elderly medicine man tells Cork that a creature called a Windigo is behind these events, and Cork explores the connection between the spirit and the actual criminal.

Booklist contributor John Rowen wrote that "this is a mystery as allegory--the Windigo is alive and well in America, in stalkers, stupid spouses, and ruthless politicians." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor commented that Krueger "makes Cork a real person beneath his genre garments." The reviewer went on to that "the author's deft eye for the details of everyday life brings the town and its peculiar problems to vivid life." A *Library Journal* contributor wrote that *Iron Lake* is "filled with Native American legend and lore and edge-of-your-seat plot twists."

Boundary Waters, the next book in the series, is set in the Quetico-Superior Wilderness, two million acres of forest, white-water rapids, and islands on the American-Canadian border. Cork explores the vast expanse in search of Shiloh, a musician who witnessed the murder of her mother before disappearing. She is the daughter of Cork's friend, Aurora native and country singer William Raye. Before Cork can set out, though, FBI agents and a Las Vegas gangster arrive, all of whom want to find Shiloh, but no one will disclose why. They all go together--Cork, William, the newcomers, and an Anishinaabe father and son--on an adventure that provides insights into the horrors Shiloh is facing. A

Publishers Weekly contributor observed that "Krueger's writing, strong and bold yet with the mature mark of restraint, pulls this exciting search-and-rescue mission through with a hard yank."

In an interview with Lynn Kaczmarek for the *Mystery News* Web site, Krueger admitted that he invented the setting for his third novel, *Purgatory Ridge*. "It's based on real rock formations that exist," Krueger told her. "I named two ... and then I added a third that fit my needs. I tamper with geography." Kaczmarek wrote: "It's fiction, after all. It's magic," and added that "there is something magic about Kent Krueger's writing, something that wraps around the stories and the people and the place."

As *Purgatory Ridge* opens, an explosion at Karl Lindstrom's lumber mill kills Charlie Warren, an Ojibwe elder. Karl is planning to cut down Our Grandfathers, a 300-year-old grove of sacred pines, a move opposed by Native Americans and conservationists. Responsibility for the bombing is claimed by someone calling himself the Eco-Warrior, soldier of the Army of the Earth. Cork and Jo have reunited, and she works to defend Native Americans who are suspected of having a part in the act. The number of suspects grows to include Brent Hamilton, whose mother was crippled in a similar bombing; publisher Helm Hanover, who was responsible for Cork losing his sheriff's job and is suspected of leading a secret militant group; and John LePere, the only survivor when the freighter *Alfred M. Teasdale* sank on Lake Superior six years earlier--an accident that claimed his brother, whose body has never been recovered. Grace Fitzgerald, a novelist and the daughter of the owner of the freighter, kidnaps Cork's wife and son and Lindstrom's wife and demands a two-million-dollar ransom for their return.

Larry Gandle, writing for the *Mysteries* Web site, noted that John's "private agony" provides the second story line, and added that Krueger "ties the two story lines together into one of the most compelling and well written thrillers of the year. Characterization is an exceptional strength of this work." George Needham, writing in *Booklist*, commented that Krueger, who is a former logger, "understands ... the complexities of the struggle between environmentalists and developers." Harriet Klausner, writing for the *BookBrowser* Web site, found the novel to be "an exciting ecological thriller that keeps the suspense and action at high levels throughout the tale. When the story concentrates on the central theme of conservation vs. development, the plot is as good as it gets."

Krueger leaves Cork behind for his next novel, the stand-alone *The Devil's Bed*. This thriller focuses on the wife of the president of the United States, Kathleen Jorenson Dixon, and on Bo Thorsen, a Secret Service agent who has fallen for the first lady. As for Dixon, she has become so disillusioned with her husband's succumbing to the political trappings of Washington, DC, that she is sleeping alone in the Lincoln Bedroom. When her father dies from a strange accident in Minnesota, Thorsen suspects foul play and thinks that someone might be trying to get Dixon to Minnesota so she can be murdered. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor wrote: "Nonstop action, abundant romantic complications and a wealth of mayhem keep Krueger's plot speeding toward its suspenseful, bloodsoaked climax."

The author returns to his hero Cork in *Blood Hollow*. This time Cork is on the case of Charlotte Kane, the teenage daughter of Dr. Fletcher Kane. Charlotte disappeared during a snowmobile ride, but her body does not turn up until the spring thaw. When the coroner examines the corpse, signs point to murder, with the evidence indicating that the perpetrator is Charlotte's Ojibwe reservation boyfriend, Winter Moon. Cork, however, thinks Winter Moon is innocent, and his investigation turns up Kane family secrets as well as another body that also appears to be Charlotte's. "Krueger skillfully crafts enough plot twists to keep everybody guessing through the bloody climax to the thrilling end," wrote a *Publishers Weekly* contributor. David Pitt, writing in *Booklist*, commented that the author tells the tale by "layering on the details ..., parceling out information a piece at a time." In a review in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Oline H. Cogdill asserted that "Krueger knows how to skillfully plunge readers deeper and deeper into Cork's world."

In *Mercy Falls*, Cork is on the case of a dead Chicago businessman who was making a deal to establish an Indian casino on the Ojibwa reservation. The body is found on the shores of Mercy Falls, and the general suspicion is that someone on the reservation killed him. The case is made more

complicated for Cork by a female FBI agent who comes to investigate and by the arrival of the victim's half-brother, who once had a romantic relationship with Cork's wife, Jo. *Booklist* contributor Pitt wrote: "Not just for fans of the series, the novel is a smart and satisfying mystery on its own."

Cork makes his sixth appearance in *Copper River*, which opens with him wounded in the leg and on the run from contract killers. He winds up in the town of Bodine, where his cousin Jewell treats his wound. When Charlie, a girl who is a friend of Jewell's son, runs away after being accused of beating her abusive father to death, the ensuing events lead Cork to the discovery of a gruesome conspiracy that preys on vulnerable runaways. While a *Publishers Weekly* contributor felt that *Copper River* lacked the intensity of the series' previous novel, *Booklist* contributor Pitt observed that the Cork O'Connor series "gets darker and more elegantly written with every book."

Thunder Bay finds Cork in Canada, where he has been summoned by his old friend and mentor, Henry Meloux, who divulges a secret: seventy-three years earlier, Meloux fathered a son whom he has seen only in visions. He asks Cork to find this son--though the detective is unsure the man actually exists. A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* considered this novel less moralistic and more satisfyingly narrated than Krueger's previous books.

In *Red Knife*, the eighth installment in the "Cork O'Connor" mystery series, the series protagonist straddles both sides of an ethnic gang war. Set in Tamarack County, Minnesota, the story opens with the death of the daughter of a local businessman. The death is related to the girl's methamphetamine addiction, but this does not stop her father, Buck Reinhardt, from seeking revenge for his daughter's demise. Buck goes after the Red Boyz, the gang responsible for selling his daughter the drugs that killed her. The gang leader's wife is soon killed, and the gang strikes back at the town. The Red Boyz are Ojibwe Indians, and the townspeople are white, so the racial tension increases the intensity of the situation. Since Cork is half white and half Native American, both sides in the conflict trust him to resolve the situation. Thus, Cork attempts to prove that the Red Boyz were not responsible for the death of Buck's daughter, and he also attempts to prove that Buck was not responsible for executing the gang leader's wife.

Critics applauded *Red Knife* as another welcome addition to the series, although there were some dissenting voices. For instance, Eileen Zimmerman Nicol, writing for *BookReporter.com*, noted: "Many of the same qualities that impressed me in *Thunder Bay* are present in the current work: careful, accessible descriptions of people and places, thoughtful and sensitive characterization, and good pacing." Yet Nicol also called the story's conclusion "predictable and unbelievable." She added: "Krueger has tackled a big subject here." In a mixed assessment in *Kirkus Reviews*, a contributor praised the "colorful characters [and] spot-on sense of place" but stated that "the attempts to prettify vigilantism will leave some readers cold." In a more positive review in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, Kathe Connair commented that "for those who've followed Krueger's stories about the former sheriff of Tamarack County, this is a welcome visit with an old friend who's grown wiser ... over the years." Connair also stated that "Krueger keeps readers guessing in this page-turner, and it's a joy to read his easy prose and loving descriptions of northern Minnesota." Pitt, again writing in *Booklist*, was also impressed with the novel. Pitt found that the series is known for its "rich characterizations and their complex stories with deep moral and emotional cores." He added that *Red Knife* "is no exception." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor presented yet another positive assessment, declaring that the book is "simply and elegantly told," and added that "this sad story of loyalty and honor ... hauntingly carves utterly convincing characters."

In *Heaven's Keep*, published in 2009, Cork rushes off to a remote area of the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming after the crash of a plane on which his wife, Jo, is flying. Cork and his thirteen-year-old son, Stephen, join the search and rescue effort in a place called Heaven's Keep. Cork's friend Henry Meloux, an Ojibwe Mide, has had a vision that may lead Cork and his son to the crash site. Stephen has also had a recurring vision over the years of his mother behind a white door. As Cork and his son search for Jo, Cork comes to find that the crash may have had something to do with the plane's other

passengers, a group of Indians from various tribes who are part of a committee that is to make up recommendations for overseeing Indian gaming casinos.

"Throughout, the magnificent countryside comes alive in the author's words," wrote a contributor to the *Spinetingler* Web site, adding: "As the book approaches its denouement I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding, as Cork, and the reader, must put all emotions on hold for a moment, or three, till all becomes clear." *Reviewer's Bookwatch* contributor Gloria Feit remarked: "The writing is absolutely elegant, and frequently poignant, with understated emotion; the novel is no less heart-tugging for that."

Vermilion Drift finds Cork working as a security consultant for a mine owner. His job is to find out who is sending threatening notes to the official and to find the man's missing sister. Meanwhile, protests have broken out in Tamarack County, Minnesota, over the Department of Energy's decision to name the old, open-pit iron mine as a potential repository for nuclear waste. When Cork goes down into the mine, he discovers a secret shaft containing six murder victims. One of the victims is Lauren Cavanaugh, the mine owner's sister. The other five appear to be victims of "The Vanishing," when a series of women from a nearby Ojibwe reservation disappeared in 1964, the same time that Cork's father was sheriff in Tamarack County. Furthermore, evidence indicates that Cork's father may have killed two of the women.

In *Vermilion Drift*, "rock-solid prose combines with effective characterizations and a logical ... plot for a thrilling read," wrote a *Publishers Weekly* contributor. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Marilyn Stasio remarked: "For someone who writes such muscular prose, Krueger has a light touch that humanizes his characters."

In an effort to heal the pain of his wife's death and to reunite his family, Cork, in *Northwest Angle*, organizes a houseboat vacation on the Lake of the Woods along the border between Minnesota and Ontario, Canada. Disaster strikes, though, in the form of a fierce windstorm that separates Cork and his daughter, Jenny, from the rest of the O'Connor family, casting them up on a seemingly uninhabited island. In a small cabin on the island, Jenny discovers the body of an Indian woman, Lily Smalldog, who has been bound, tortured, and shot. Nearby, under a tangle of brush, is her wailing infant, still alive. As Jenny, much to her own surprise, cares for the motherless infant, Cork turns his attention to the mystery surrounding the murder of the mother. Tension builds as he and Jenny are stalked by brutal killers, possibly bent on covering up the murder, or perhaps trying to locate the baby. The two seek a safe haven, but they get little help from the local inhabitants, although local authorities identify one of the stalkers as Noah Smalldog, the victim's sister. Malevolent forces pursue Jenny, Cork, and the baby to Northwest Angle, a small nugget of U.S. territory cut off from the mainland by the Lake of the Woods, where Cork unravels the mystery.

Like the earlier books in the series, *Northwest Angle* with greeted with positive reviews, although a contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* was troubled that the O'Connor family is depicted as "a shade too exemplary." Joe Hartlaub, writing on *Bookreporter.com*, praised the novel for its "excruciatingly high level of suspense and tension," while a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, calling the novel "superb," praised it for its "solid storytelling and intriguing characterizations." For Connie Fletcher, writing in *Booklist*, the novel was "part adventure, part mystery, and all knockout thriller." Jerry P. Miller, in *Library Journal*, agreed, calling the novel a "fascinating adventure" and commending the author for his ability to "develop his characters and plotlines creatively and thoughtfully."

Krueger's stand-alone novel *Ordinary Grace* was the recipient of the 2013 Edgar Award, a prestigious prize given by the Mystery Writers of American in recognition for the best novel published during each year. The product of three years of labor, the novel is partly a mystery and partly a meditation on the mysterious ways that grace can manifest itself in times of suffering or tribulation. The novel's narrator, Frank Drum, writes as a middle-age man looking back on and examining the summer of 1961 in his small-town home of New Bremen, Minnesota. As Frank looks back, he ruminates on the string of deaths that shook his family and his tight-knit community in the Minnesota River valley. He

contemplates the death of his friend Bobby Cole, who may have leapt in front of an oncoming train to kill himself, and he recalls the disappearance of his older sister Ariel. A gifted church organist and kindhearted young woman, Ariel failed to return from a late-night party one evening. The subsequent investigation into her disappearance succeeded only in tearing apart the Drum family and dredging up dark secrets about New Bremen and dragging them into the light. A mystery layered over a poignant coming-of-age novel, *Ordinary Grace* aims to capture the confused emotions of a boy growing into manhood who is confronted by tragedy and forced to discover the enduring, if inscrutable, nature of God's grace.

Reviewers were, for the most part, impressed by Krueger's *Ordinary Grace*, though a few suggested the author should have employed a more varied tone throughout the novel, leavening its prevailingly elegiac and meditative tone with more varied moods and sensations. If Krueger's solemn approach did not enchant reviewers universally, most commended him for producing a thoughtful literary mystery. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor commended Krueger for representing his setting in such a realistic manner, writing: "The small-town milieu is rendered in picturesque detail, accurate down to period-appropriate TV programs." Carole E. Barrowman, whose review of *Ordinary Grace* appeared in Minneapolis's *Star Tribune* declared: "Although Krueger's plot rises to a predictable conclusion, there's such a quiet beauty in his prose and such depth to his characters that I was completely captivated by this book's ordinary grace." Barrowman, like most reviewers, appreciated Krueger's reflective turn, even if she thought *Ordinary Grace* lacked the vitality of some of the author's previous offerings.

In his 2014 mystery, *Windigo Island*, Krueger returns to following the investigations of the much-beloved former sheriff turned private investigator and burger shop owner, Cork O'Connor. In *Windigo Island*, Cork is contracted to investigate the disappearance of a teenage girl victimized by monstrous predators--though it is initially unclear if they are prosaic human monsters or figures of myth and nightmare. *Windigo Island* opens with the body of a teenage Ojibwe girl being discovered on the beach of a shunned island reputedly haunted by a cannibalistic, slaving creature from the legends of the Algonquian peoples of the Great Lakes region. While locals whisper darkly that the girl could be a modern-day victim of the mythical Windigo, Cork is suspicious and thinks a more prosaic--though no less terrifying--force could have caused the girl's death. He eventually learns that the girl's friend, Mariah Arceneaux, disappeared a year earlier under suspicious circumstances. Cork is contracted by Mariah's family to find their daughter. As he attempts to discover the identities of the predators who captured Mariah and her friend he starts to unearth a shadowy and inhuman industry hidden in plain sight: human sex trafficking. He finds that the poverty, child abuse, and alcoholism endemic on Native American reservations produces an annual crop of desperate runaways who are easy prey for sex traffickers. Though *Windigo Island* is a mystery, the novel is also a work of impassioned investigative journalism and an indictment of societal apathy.

Reviewers felt that *Windigo Island* was an unqualified success and that Krueger adroitly put his social and political concerns at the service of an engaging mystery narrative. Connie Fletcher, writing for *Booklist*, declared that "Krueger has written an investigative novel as blistering and crucial in its indictments of contemporary evil as [Upton Sinclair's] *The Jungle*." Similarly, a *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted that *Windigo Island* "reminds us of the evil of men all too willing to exploit the innocent."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

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