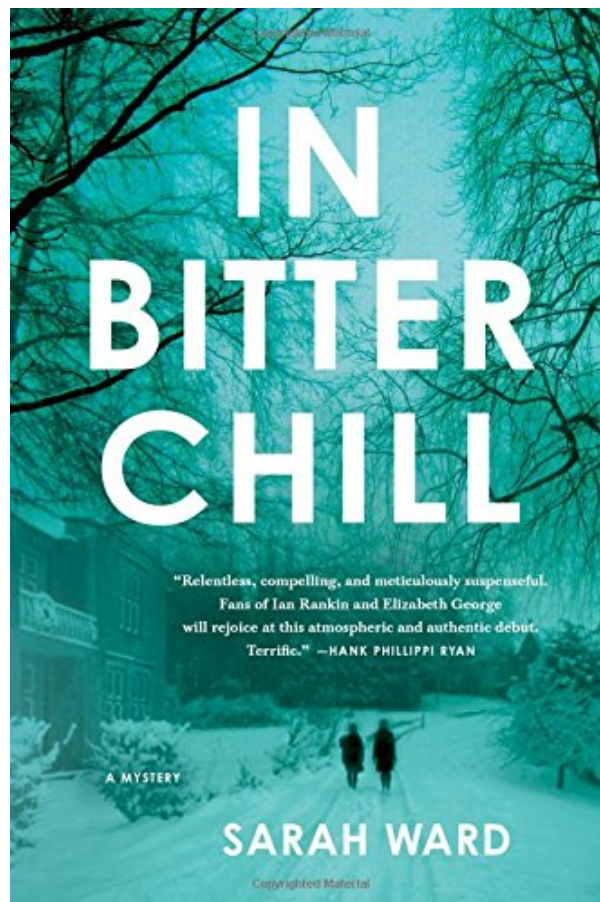
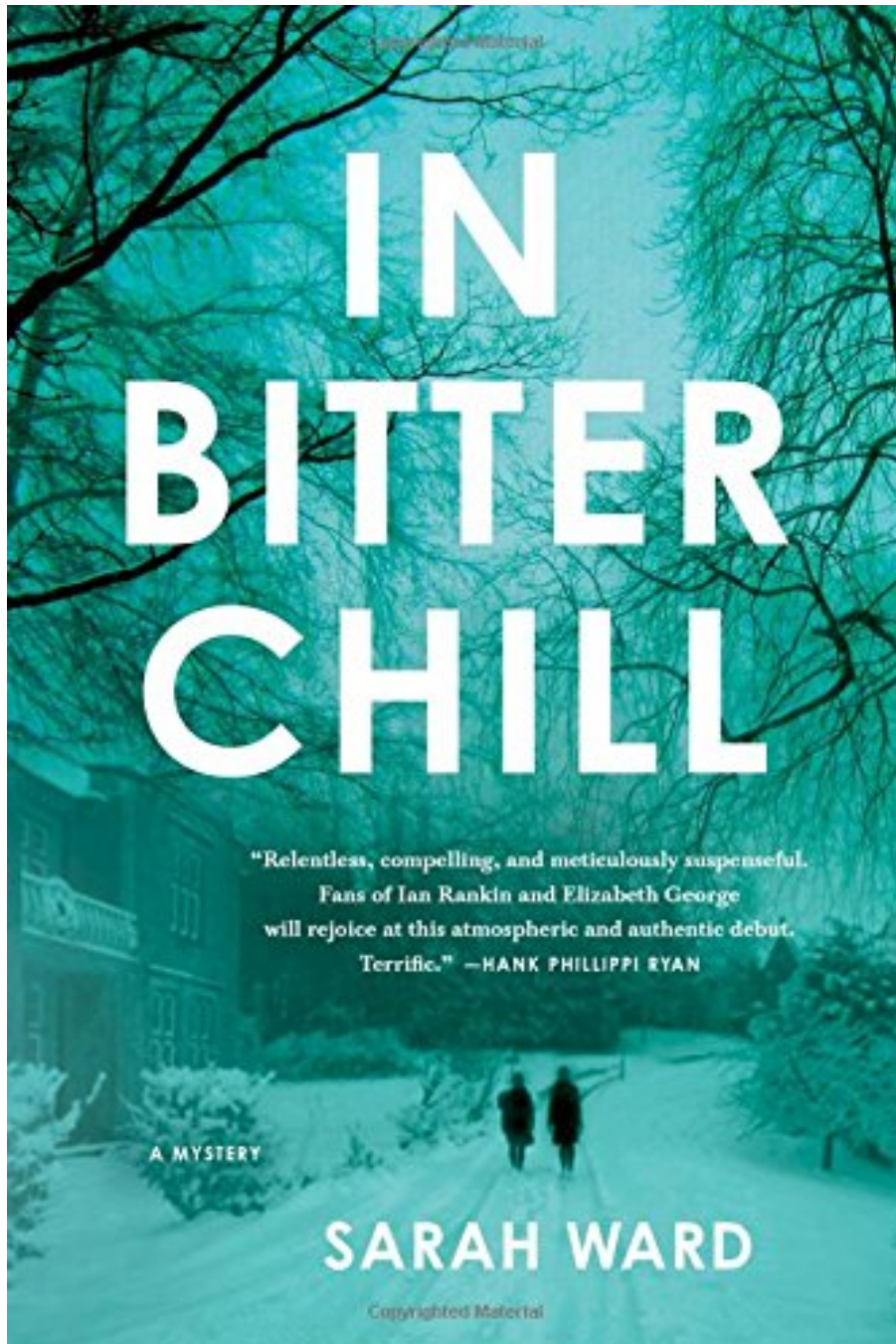


IN BITTER CHILL: A MYSTERY (INSPECTOR FRANCIS SADLER) BY SARAH WARD



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Review

"Great new mystery set in the atmospheric Peak District of England. When a woman's suicide is found to be related to an unsolved case of a missing girl, the police must reinvestigate a long cold case. I hope this book will be the first in a new series!"?Pamela Wiggins, Wake County Public Libraries, Cary, NC, October 2015
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The deepest secrets are the ones we keep from ourselves in this richly atmospheric, compellingly written, and expertly constructed crime debut from an emerging talent.

Derbyshire, 1978: a small town in the idyllic English countryside is traumatized by the kidnapping of two young schoolgirls, Rachel Jones and Sophie Jenkins. Within hours, Rachel is found wandering alone near the roadside, unharmed yet unable to remember anything, except that her abductor was a woman. No trace of Sophie is ever discovered.

Present day: over thirty years later, Sophie's mother commits suicide. Detective inspector Francis Sadler and detective constable Connie Childs are assigned to look at the kidnapping again to see if modern police methods can discover something that the original team missed. Rachel, with the help of her formidable mother and grandmother, recovered from the kidnapping and has become a family genealogist. She wants nothing more than to continue living quietly beneath the radar, but the discovery of the strangled body of one of her former teachers days after the suicide brings the national media back to her doorstep. Desperate to stop a modern killer from striking again, Rachel and the police must unpick the clues to uncover what really happened all those years ago as the past threatens to engulf the present.

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16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

A cracking debut novel

By C Williams

I found this book to be a thoroughly absorbing book from start to finish, with quite a few clever plot twists throughout. The reader never quite knows which way the plot will unfold and exactly what happened to two abducted young schoolgirls in a historic 30 year old case and the story is revealed in cleverly crafted, sometimes hazy layers bit by bit.

Beautifully written and without any scenes of sickening gratuitous violence, in a style reminiscent of some of the classic crime writers with the focus on inhabitants of a small town, in this case one in Derbyshire.

The only survivor of the abduction Rachel, who has very limited recollections of the fateful day, makes a living as a genealogist, unravelling the mysteries of the family history of her clients and it is through her research experience that she begins to unravel the details of the case and discovers exactly what happened and who was responsible. Rachel isn't the only one though who methodically works through the clues and background details, there are others, including the detectives working on the case particularly Connie Childs, the young DC.

The denouement towards the end is both clever and chilling as the perpetrators are revealed and one of the characters faces danger.

I hope to read more from this author. For a debut novel, this one is a cracker and was very hard to put down

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Why does this book work so well?

By Daniel P

Why does this book work so well?

I have a couple of theories. One is the sense of place: small town Derbyshire, England, mid-winter; I grew up in neighbouring Nottinghamshire so I'm familiar with the Peak District and can attest to what a great job the author did rendering the location this well while animating it with a strong sense of community.

The second reason why this book works so well is, I think, its enquiry into ancestry. Central character Rachel Jones is the surviving one of two schoolgirls kidnapped in 1978; now she makes her living as a genealogist, helping clients map their family trees.

The author's skill lies in deepening the first strength with the second, showing the interconnectedness of a community across the generations. I really don't want to give spoilers, but let's just say that the denouement is as surprising as it is inevitable, which is everything you hope for (but often don't get) with such novels.

It will be interesting to see what the author does next. Let's hope that it involves more of Detective Inspector Sadler and DC Connie Childs.

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Absorbing and disturbing - great debut mystery

By Craig M Sisterson

There is a lot to like about this novel, which creeps up on you in its storytelling. Ward does a terrific job evoking the environment and daily life of the ruggedly beautiful Peak District, as well as creating a beguiling cast of characters who manage to seem fresh even if on the surface they conform to classic crime fiction tropes.

DC Connie Childs is an ambitious young cop on the rise, itching for action and advancement in a quieter corner of Britain. DI Frank Sadler is her more reserved superior. Superintendent Llewellyn was a fresh-faced constable on the 1978 kidnapping case, and is troubled by Yvonne Jenkins' suicide. He asks Sadler and his team to take another look at the original crime, to see if modern police methods can help shed new light on the oh-so-cold case. The spirited Childs is pleased for the chance to shine while her colleague-rival junior detective is distracted by the stresses of his upcoming nuptials.

Meanwhile, Rachel Jones finds her own past brought painfully back to light: she was the girl that was found. It's an incident that's affected her in a myriad of ways ever since, even though she claims to have no memory of the events. She recovered from the kidnapping thanks to her strong-willed mother and grandmother, and is now a genealogist who specialises in the matriarchal lines of family histories. While Rachel fears the media frenzy once the press links the suicide to the old tragedy, when one of her former teachers is strangled a few days later, she realises that Pandora's Box has been opened, dark secrets are seeping out, and she'll have to take steps to protect herself while trying to work out what really happened.

Jones and Childs/Sadler investigate the past and present in separate and inter-linked ways, building to a thrilling conclusion as the disturbing truth is uncovered, and the guilty parties are backed into a corner.

This is a very female centric mystery novel. Two girls are kidnapped, by a woman. The case is resurrected due to the suicide of one woman, then the murder of another. The two main leads are female: a policewoman battling for her place in a still male-dominated world, and a middle-aged history-buff who was raised by a woman with a deep suspicion of men, and now researches and shares the forgotten stories of women in her genealogy clients' family histories. But as a male crime fiction reader, I really liked it.

Ward does a great job of evoking many issues faced by woman, historic and contemporary, without painting the male characters as caricatures (which I've seen in other such novels) or paper-thin pieces just there to

play antagonist or make a political or social point. The rivalry and collegiality between Childs and her fellow DC feels authentic and multi-layered. The relationships between Childs and Sadler and Llewellyn, or Jones and other characters, likewise feel very real. Ward inserts little touches and complexities that mirror real-life into all the working, personal, and other relationships, giving them a fuller feel.

A strong theme of family history, and questions about how best to deal with troubling situations from the past, runs throughout IN BITTER CHILL. Thematically, Ward nicely balances provoking questions in the readers' mind while not getting up on a soapbox or delivering clear-cut answers. Accordingly many of those issues and questions enjoyably linger after the storyline itself is wrapped up in the final pages.

Overall, I was very impressed with this first effort from Sarah Ward. IN BITTER CHILL is like a modern take on the classic British village mystery, evoking those Golden Age trends of puzzling plots in picturesque countryside settings, delving into dark issues and secrets without being gritty or graphically violent.

I look forward to more from DC Childs, DI Sadler, and this talented author.

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