

Suspense novel or love story? You decide

“The Sister Pact” by Cami Checketts (Bonneville Books, 2009, \$15.99)

CACHE VALLEY writer Cami Checketts has written what the cover claims to be a suspense novel, and even though there is an attempted murder, an unsolved attack and a handsome detective involved, for this reader the love story takes front and center.

Savanna Compton’s older sister, Ally, is happily married with a young child when a casual acquaintance with evil intent begins to stalk her. On an evening when her husband is out of town, Wes makes his move and Ally ends up at the foot of her stairs in a pool of blood while her 2-year-old child screams for his mommy from his crib. Savannah becomes alarmed when she can’t reach Ally on the phone and finally decides to go to her sister’s home, where she finds Ally.

Enter drop-dead gorgeous detective Noah Shumway of the Cache County Sheriff’s



Office, who immediately pegs Savannah as his prime — and only — suspect. There’s just one small problem: In spite of the precarious condition of the sister, Savannah and Noah are immediately attracted to each other and for the next 229 pages sparks fly as they both fight to resist the attraction.

Against his better judgment, Noah agrees to keep his suspicions of Savannah from her family and shadows her 24/7, while still trying to find even one shred of evidence that she isn’t the one who attacked Ally. In a scene where Noah

Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi



has finally decided the jig is up and it’s time to haul Savannah off to jail, she pleads, “Please believe me. Someone’s setting me up. ... You’ve got to believe me, so we can protect her.” Noah’s reaction to her plea makes her feel “like a parasite. She took her hand back and clutched both of her hands together to keep them from

shaking. ... He didn’t look at her as he flipped on his blinker and turned south. ‘Where are you going?’ ... ‘Where do you think I’m going?’ He released a pent-up breath. ‘Hope you have a good lawyer.’”

There is suspense as Noah and his sidekick, Jason, try to figure out who has put Ally in the hospital in a coma and who is slipping a drug in Ally’s IV to keep her comatose. Savannah, in the meantime, has a penchant for keeping secrets that continue to point to her as the culprit when they are uncovered. The reader is in on the “who” and “how” from the beginning, and that is probably why the suspense isn’t as strong as it could be. Most suspenseful moments come when Wes finally shows his colors and kidnaps Savannah. Some of the best chapters in the book come near the end when Noah and the police department are closing in on the suspect.

This is the second of Checketts’ books I’ve received for review. Both have the same problem of the first few chap-

ters being over-written. I didn’t finish the first book, putting it down after the first couple of chapters and checking it off to amateur writing. This time around, the first several chapters are full of so much hand-wringing on Savannah’s part that I was about to do the same with this one. I’m glad I didn’t — I discovered that the writing really takes off after chapter eight, and I found myself unable to put the book down. It took me a week to read the first seven chapters, and an afternoon to read the final 12. She writes powerful love scenes and builds suspense in the final chapters that pull the reader forward on every page.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master’s in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit www.charlenehirschi.com.

Biography tracks rise, fame of glam rocker David Bowie

By The Associated Press

Review

DAVID BOWIE knows what he’s singing about when he performs “Changes.” After making a big splash in the early 1970s as Ziggy Stardust, he went on to become the Thin White Duke, an artsy Berlin angst rocker, the “straight” Bowie of “Let’s Dance” and more recently the distinguished rock elder who goes to fashion events with his model wife, Iman.

The career full of characters obscures the less fantastic, but very interesting, back story of David Jones, a British teen in the ’60s who desper-

ately wanted to make it big. He joins some R&B bands, dabbles in acting and mime, changes his last name to Bowie and records a painful-to-listen-to-now single titled “The Laughing Gnome” that seems to channel Alvin and the Chipmunks.

Nothing in particular sticks until he records the 1969 single “Space Oddity.” Bowie later goes all-in with his pioneering glam character Ziggy, the one with the screwed up eyes and snow-white tan. Bowie never looks back, never

stops changing.

Spitz, a music journalist, does a decent job of tracking Bowie’s evolution through copious research and interviews with dozens of people who knew him.

Spitz clearly gets Bowie, and this is an unapologetic fan-boy biography. He is good at analyzing what Bowie accomplished, why it matters and what was likely influencing him at the time. He has insightful things to say about landmark Bowie songs “Life on Mars?” and “Heroes.”

But be warned: Unlike a lot of top-rate biographers, Spitz is not big on narrative and crafting



scenes. Events are recounted, at length, through gushy quotes from Bowie’s old chums.

And sometimes Spitz doesn’t know when to turn the spigot

off on himself. The book is littered with superfluous pop culture references (example: Bowie was in a band called the King Bees, and Spitz informs readers not only that it was named after the blues classic “(I’m a) King Bee,” but that John Belushi sang it years later on “Saturday Night Live” dressed like a bee).

Worse, Spitz has the self-indulgent habit of interrupting Bowie’s story with vignettes about HIS story of being a Bowie fan. Who cares?

The result is a book at turns interesting and irritating that reads like a very long music magazine article.