



A thriller for the beach or backyard

Book tells the tale of congressman's fixer

If you're seeking a classic beach read before summer gives out, consider "House Privilege."

This is Seattle-area writer Mike Lawson's latest edition in his Joe DeMarco series about a longtime fixer for a power player in the U.S. House of Representatives.

John Mahoney, a Massachusetts congressman, is in line to be elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, when he learns that his goddaughter has been orphaned in a plane crash that killed both of her parents.

Mahoney doesn't have a nurturing bone in his body, unless it's when nurturing his own career. He would send his wife, Mary Pat, a natural nurturer, but she is across the country caring for a friend dying of cancer.

Mahoney turns to his fixer, Joe DeMarco, to fly to Boston and look after whatever needs to be done until Mary Pat can return.

What does DeMarco know about nurturing? Not much.

When he gets to Boston he sees that Cassie Russell, the 15-year-old he's been tasked with looking after, is

already in the warm and watchful care of her family's longtime housekeepers. Erin Kelly, the lawyer who manages the Russell family trust fund, also appears to have things well in hand.

This frees DeMarco to take up another piece of business Mahoney asked him to attend to: a blackmail attempt by a former employee. This could jeopardize Mahoney's shot at cinching the speaker position so he has instructed DeMarco to "pry him off my back."

Boston may be a big city but it's a small town and people are connected in all sorts of ways. Soon after arriving, DeMarco learns that Kelly is the niece of Boston mob boss Mike Kelly and may not be as aboveboard as she initially seemed.

"House Privilege" is devoted to his investigation into her possible mismanagement.

While the author reveals the extent of Kelly's offenses to the reader, DeMarco has to do some old-fashioned gumshoe work to secure the evidence he needs against her. This involves providing personal protection for young Cassie, working with auditors and chasing after Kelly when she flees to a foreign locale that has no extradition treaty.

"House Privilege" has a clunky

beginning; teen-aged characters and genuine tragedy are not Lawson's strong suits. It's book-ended by an abrupt ending and contains a romance

This Week's Book

'House Privilege' by Mike Lawson

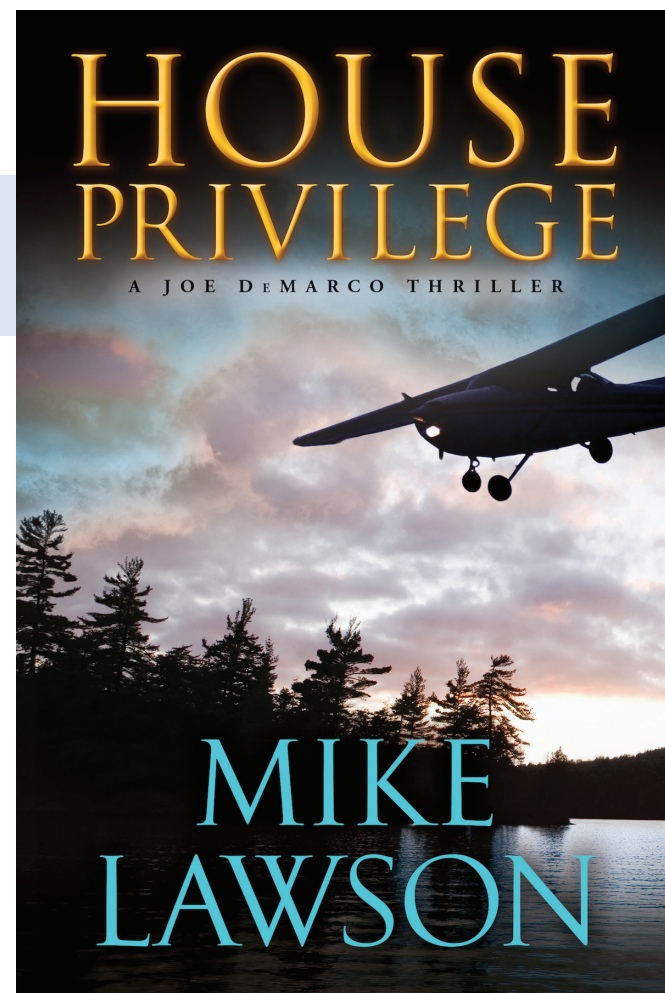
Atlantic Monthly Press — 320 pp — \$26

best described as perfunctory.

But the real meat of the story is terrific. The criminal activity and DeMarco's tracking of the perpetrators pick up steam after the first chapter. Lawson takes the readers into the minds and motivations of several interesting characters, through a gamut of transgressions, and across a satisfying array of landscapes and settings.

Your backyard may have to substitute for the beach during this coronavirus pandemic summer but "House Privilege" will help you feel like you've left home.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.





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