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Mystery

A Brewski for the Old Man: A Sherri Travis Mystery
Phyllis Smallman
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Most everyone faces this dilemma at some point: feeling compelled to help someone in desperate need, but knowing that the cost of doing so is high. And when the person in trouble is a child, the difficulty intensifies. This is the conundrum explored in *A Brewski for the Old Man*, author Phyllis Smallman's latest Sherri Travis mystery.

In this installment, restaurant owner Sherri Travis hopes to survive until tourist season. The drama in her life seems to have settled down, and she has found a wonderful man. Once business picks up, she might just catch a break. Everything changes, however, when Ray John, the man who molested and almost raped her when she was thirteen, shows up. When Sherri learns he lives with a single mom and her teenage daughter, she resolves to protect the girl, convince her mother of the truth, and stop the abuser. And it won't be easy, Sherri realizes, for "our dance of fear had just begun. It wouldn't end until one of us was dead or in prison." But someone gets to Ray John first, with a gun, leaving Sherri the prime suspect.

Sherri thought she had enough problems keeping her business afloat and searching the Florida swamps for the arsonists who burned a family friend's junk yard. Now she must find Ray John's real killer. Clues pull her into the hidden secrets of a gated community. As Sherri says, "There had to be someone else, someone from Ray John's past, someone with a long memory and a reason to get even."

Author Phyllis Smallman, winner of the Unhanged Arthur Ellis Award, wrote two previous Sherri Travis novels, *Margarita Nights* and *Sex in a Sidecar*. Her writing remains sharp, offering a compelling plot punctuated with suspenseful moments. Several main characters prove fascinating and well-developed, although other key figures read like caricatures. Ultimately, Sherri is a strong lead. Readers never quite know what she might do. Despite a degree of street sense, she almost stumbles into solutions and lacks a certain sharpness for putting together clues that one craves. Even so, she connects with readers who will want to join

her for the ride.

Smallman's novel makes an enjoyable read for mystery lovers. It isn't for those interested in hard core detective stories or thriller mysteries. But for aficionados of female-led, contemporary mystery, it offers a welcome diversion.

Diane Gardner