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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ MYSTERY

A Passion for Prying

Nancy Mangano
AuthorHouse (September 2010)
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In Nancy Mangano's debut novel, *A Passion for Prying*, private investigator Natalie North is bored by the task of merely catching cheaters. The sexy Los Angeleno longs to solve more dastardly crimes. So when a murder happens nearby, Natalie takes it upon herself to do a little snooping. Meanwhile, she continues to contend with her devoted boyfriend, a smoldering hot actor, her lovelorn father, and a few other wily friends. Although Natalie is the main character, Mangano constructs the novel so that readers learn the minor players' points of view as well. With her yen for comedy and a degree in criminal justice, the author offers up a fizzy, funny mystery.

All of Mangano's characters are fully fleshed out. Natalie is likeable and intelligent, even as she has ditzy and materialistic tendencies. Her father is an overprotective sad-sack still pining for his dead wife. The actor is simultaneously arrogant and insecure. Not surprisingly, Natalie's boyfriend is jealous of her perceived relationship with the actor and remains protective of her while he tries to avoid getting ensnared in his boss's sleazy schemes.

When discussing her characters, Mangano often writes about excess flesh, obsession with dieting, uncontrollable eating, and other stereotypes of fat people, and some readers may find these characterizations of heavy-set people offensive. Additionally, while most of the comedy is funny, sometimes one wonders how the characters can accomplish anything with their constant misadventures. Furthermore, the love triangle between Natalie, the actor, and her boyfriend offers disappointingly little pay-off, which is odd, considering how jealous the boyfriend is of the actor, how much Natalie moons over the movie star, and how much readers get inside the movie star's head. Indeed, the secondary characters are so well-developed that companion novels from their points of view would be fascinating.

Unfortunately, grammar errors are noticeable enough to annoy. Compound nouns often lack the required hyphens, and comma splices also appear. In terms of diction, the author tends to veer toward redundancy. Moreover, Mangano often uses words in slightly the wrong context. On the plus side, ingenious alliteration and luscious description pop up everywhere. In the end, the humor and multi-faceted characters keep readers prying to see what happens next in this generally solid, silly debut novel.

JILL ALLEN (November 21, 2012)

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