

Body on the Bayou: A Cajun Country Mystery

Ellen Byron

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Southern charm and humor permeate Ellen Byron's *Body on the Bayou*, a Louisiana murder mystery rife with suspenseful twists, relationship drama, and delectable cooking.

Maggie Crozat has the arduous task of being Vanessa Fleer's maid of honor, but when a murder occurs on the property of the Crozat B&B, she is forced to add "amateur detective" to her position requirements. Enlisting the aid of her semisecret boyfriend and homicide detective, Bo Durand, Maggie must piece together clues to pin the murder of Vanessa's cousin, Ginger Fleer-Starke, on someone, potentially a wedding guest or even the bride herself. All the while, she wrestles with her feelings for Bo and the status of his relationship with his ex-wife. False accusations and cold trails litter her path to a final showdown with the true murderer, a scene that includes an unlikely rescuer.

Although the central plot is the mystery, there are small breaks taken for humanizing scenes, most notably with Bo's autistic son, Xander. Maggie often connects with him through painting lessons, even though Xander proves himself to be something of a prodigy. Heartwarming moments involving a litter of stray puppies and kittens the Crozats find on their property also lend some breathing space to the frenetic pace of the murder mystery. And once all the loose ends have been tied, recipes for the dishes referenced throughout the story appear alongside some intriguing historical background for further reading.

Aside from the backdrop, the characters are the most compelling aspect of the novel, as even minor players possess unique and memorable personalities. Vanessa, her mother, and her husband-to-be, Rufus, are delightfully aggravating. Maggie shines as a lovely and competent protagonist who is not without her flaws.

Body on the Bayou successfully conjures its southern-Louisiana packaging for its murder mystery, inviting those fond of the genre to sit back with some jambalaya and bananas Foster coffee cake and visit the bayou.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (Fall 2016)

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