



Mermaid of Venice

Jincey Lumpkin

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Mermaid of Venice is an entertaining mystery novel in which a not-so-mythical being contends with secrets, greed, and murder.

Everything is not what it seems to be in Jincey Lumpkin's fantastical novel *Mermaid of Venice*.

Gia is a businesswoman who owns casinos and clubs in Buenos Aires and London. She's been strategic about her romantic liaisons, using men for pleasure and companionship before getting rid of them when she tires of them. Gia also prizes her secrets. She has to, because if her biggest secret were to be revealed—that she is a nearly fifty-year-old mermaid—it would endanger not only her, but her immediate and extended family as well.

When Gia's famous lover, Nico, refuses to let go of the idea of showing Gia off to the paparazzi, she does what she has always done: she kills him, burying his body deep beneath the surface of the floating city of Venice. She does not expect a historic high tide, an acqua altissima, to flood the city and release Nico from his underwater bedchamber. The discovery of his waterlogged body sets off a chain of events for which not even Gia is prepared.

In this story about mermaids, water is an essential unit. The unexplored depths of the seas and oceans provide the perfect mysterious backdrop from which to imagine the existence, but not discovery, of mermaids. Here, mermaids are not helpless creatures, incapable of surviving on land; they have the ability to shift between having a tail when submerged and having legs when dry. Flashbacks provide insight into Gia's family history, though these detract from the main narrative. The mermaid mechanics end up being the most fanciful element of this otherwise familiar thriller.

Characters' motivations are explained in a plain, straightforward nature, though most of the characters come to seem like disparate composites of personality traits. Many of their voices blend together. Further, though menace lurks at the edges of scenes, it does not build in a way that maintains tension. With the mystery of who killed Nico and why already known to the audience, learning whether Gia will be found out does not feel urgent.

Gia is a femme fatale, using her body to take pleasure from her lovers as a distraction and a weapon, leading to steamy scenes that end in bed just as often as they end in blood. She's also smart, with a head for numbers, but at the same time is naïve: she assumes her power will keep her safe. Even in taking steps to ensure that her secrets remain secret, she brings about her own ruin. Cameron, Gia's new lover, also has a fatal flaw. He presents as a confident, self-assured business man, but acts whiny and insecure.

That Gia is, in the end, unchanged as a result of her predicament is no barrier to the escapism the novel provides. It makes for compulsive reading, carried along on by the dangling question of what new issue will arise, and how will Gia address it.

Mermaid of Venice is an entertaining novel in which a mermaid contends with secrets, greed, and murder.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (March 26, 2021)

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