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Clarion Review

General

Murder at Stacy's Cove Marina
Capt. Marti Brown
Cruising Companion Publications
978-0-9715640-3-9
Two Stars (out of Five)

While many people dream of shaking off the dust of the earth by living on their own boat Megan Smith realizes that the “liveaboard” life is not one of continuous sunsets and gently lapping waves.

The mystery begins with the discovery of a body floating in Stacy’s Cove Marina where Megan lives aboard her boat Little Bit. The body is that of Jason Klingstein a local gay man. Megan finds herself the next target when she and her new girlfriend are attacked in the parking lot of the shopping mall. In an attempt to avoid her own violent demise Megan flees the area aboard her boat leaving behind friends lover police protection and her fledging career as a business consultant. Her journey ends in the heart of a hurricane when a vicious plot of punishment is revealed.

Author Capt. Marti Brown is obviously no stranger to life on the water. Her descriptions of boat life are authentic the result of sailing the seas since 1990. She has published two previous books guides for those who spend most of their time on the water. Her expertise is evident in her descriptions of storms sunsets and manatees: “Two whiskered nostrils surfaced in the front of a large semi-submerged mammal…A smaller quiver in the water rose up outlining another grey mass as a baby calf surfaced to take a breath.”

The book's premise is promising the oceanic descriptions are engaging and Brown is passionate about defending the rights of gays and lesbians but the book falls short of its potential. The characters tend toward stereotypes: Megan is the pretty lesbian with a core of steel that allows her to verbally defend herself against angry homophobes; her attackers drive a "sinister van" while drinking alcohol; the British bartender heartily speckles her lines with words like "luv" and "blimey." Even the characters' names fail to distinguish the figures they represent: Diane Mark Sally Ann and Billie all struggle to maintain any sense of individuality.

While Brown is admirably fervent about speaking out against homophobia through the construct of her novel she lacks the eloquence to make her diatribe a seamless part of the whole. For a full two pages Megan rails against the state of the nation with lines like "This national aversion to change and to embracing diversity can only mean disaster for us as we look to develop and move forward with new ideas and new technologies in order to compete in the global economy." A worthy belief but a clunky delivery.

This tendency to preach combined with a trove of technical description on how to prepare for a hurricane bogs down any sense of suspense Brown manages to raise. Though her first published attempt at fiction falls short of its promise Brown does have solid writing skills that she will hopefully apply again to mystery on the high seas.

Andi Diehn