ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

MYSTERY

Murder on Bearskin Neck
Gunilla Caulfield
BookSurge
978-1-4392-5932-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

This cozy mystery by former librarian Gunilla Caulfield is a potpourri of tempting ingredients-a picturesque New England fishing village, sweet pet dogs, literary references, a librarian protagonist who has a secret lover, and of course, a murder. Caulfield fills the pages with excellent insider details that ring true and make the reader feel right at home in Rockport, Massachusetts. Unfortunately, some amateur mistakes by the author intrude on the reader's enjoyment.

Annie Quitnot is a spinster librarian with vibrant red hair, a feisty attitude, and a love for William Shakespeare. She also has a secret lover in her past: Carlo Valenti, internationally known artist. Secrets are difficult to keep in a small town like Rockport where Annie has lived her entire life. And when Carlo is murdered, it becomes apparent that at least two others knew of the affair and were happy to inform the police, setting up Annie as the number one suspect. When Carlo's studio is set ablaze, the police drag Annie in for questioning; when Carlo's art sponsor is attacked, Annie looks good for the crime. But when Annie's own house comes under attack, things begin to smell fishy.

This sweet novel of small-town simplicity and duplicity could zing off the shelves with some strengthening of the writing itself. Authorial intrusions jerk readers out of several of the scenes. For example: "'Did you hear who's been murdered?' Sally asks, keeping Annie on tenterhooks instead of offering the information up front. This is the game she plays and Annie knows she has to play alongÂ…" These information dumps act like commercial breaks in the middle of the story. They provide interesting tidbits and insight, but should have been more skillfully woven into the tapestry of the scenes.

Caulfield keeps up a good pace, and characters are introduced as needed. Perhaps the actual villain of the piece needs a stronger motivation so there is more credibility when the murderer is unmasked. But still, the author has done her homework and knows the setting, the details, and the tics and tells of this small community and its inhabitants. She offers a well-

constructed tale with plenty of red herrings and insight into the lives of her colorful characters. More attention to perfecting the writing would make this a viable series that any cozy mystery lover would place on the top of their to-be-read stack.