



## Stuck in Manistique

**Dennis Cuesta**

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*Set in small-town Michigan, Stuck in Manistique is an unconventional novel that is both entertaining and cathartic.*

Dennis Cuesta's quirky and atmospheric novel, *Stuck in Manistique*, strikes a perfect balance between lighthearted fun and heartrending emotion.

When Mark's Aunt Vivian dies, he discovers that he has inherited her home in the small town of Manistique, located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It's only when a young woman with an eye patch knocks on the door asking if he has a room available for the night that he learns Vivian had been running a bed-and-breakfast. The traveler, Emily, is a recent medical school graduate whose car is in the shop after a deer hit it (she insists that it's not the other way around). Mark grudgingly allows her to stay in one of the rooms—they are lovingly themed: a lighthouse, Indian Lake, and other UP features—and from there, hilarity ensues.

With much bumbling, a few more visitors to Manistique show up at the B and B over the next few days, further complicating Mark's progress toward selling the house and Emily's slow discovery of Vivian's life and how it intertwines with hers. There are several subplots and plot strands that are often surprising, but that all come together by the end.

*Stuck in Manistique* utilizes many of the tropes of the romantic comedy genre to great success. For instance, characters hide seemingly arbitrary details from one another for fear of scaring each other away, though those details wind up having extraordinary implications. The romance is, refreshingly, between characters other than the two protagonists.

Banter between characters is most enjoyable; they tease one another despite only knowing each other a few days, and they latch onto inside jokes that maintain their humor over the course of the book. The often goofy dialogue flows well and speeds up the pace of the story in between more emotional scenes.

The more serious sections of the book slow it, but they also provide ample room for character development. Doctors deal with the echoing pain of losing young patients to preventable mistakes. Emily discovers Vivian's journal, which reveals tragic hidden backstories. Both Mark and Emily have distinct personalities, and they're enjoyable to follow. The minor characters bring their fair share of drama, including an elderly man who loses track of his casino tourism group and a Native American man who seeks a resting place for Vivian's ashes.

The Upper Peninsula setting will be familiar to Michiganders, and the book does an excellent job of conveying its sense of community and revealing the beauty of the UP's inland lakes, long roads, and flora and fauna. The book's twists and turns are original, putting new spins on tropes and archetypal characters.

*Stuck in Manistique* is an unconventional novel that is both entertaining and cathartic.

AIMEE JODOIN (August 23, 2018)

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