



Under the Sheets

Gweneth Ferdinand

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It is important for all readers to have access to stories they can relate to. Since not every romance is heterosexual, neither is every romance novel. In *Under the Sheets*, author Gweneth Ferdinand explores the connections among a large group of lesbian women. Dealing with many of the issues that all relationships can go through—from simple immaturity to drug abuse and even unexpected death—the author leads readers through a series of scenarios that feature different characters all searching for their happily ever after.

The author evokes a clear sense of community by explaining how all of her characters know one another, and the reader will easily believe that these women would attend the same social events, shop at the same stores, and eat at the same restaurants.

Unfortunately, the book's flaws outweigh its positive attributes. The cast of characters is very large and there is not enough description to help the reader differentiate between them or to turn them into fully fleshed characters. For example, Alva, one of the most prominent characters in the book, is described as "the quiet one, yet she was loved by everyone," while her close friend Ronnie is described as "loving and kind hearted." Moreover, the couples at the heart of the book form and disintegrate rapidly, with little explanation as to why. In Alva's story, she starts out depressed over the recent breakup of her long term relationship. She decides to go shopping with a friend, Toni, and by the end of the day the two are in a committed relationship and living together. This development is simply not believable.

Perhaps the biggest problem in *Under the Sheets* is that the writing is amateurish. When describing the death of one character, the author writes, "Knowing she was at wit's end, she should have been honest enough instead of demonstrating her carelessness like that, causing a lot of people grief." Additionally, the book doesn't contain chapter divisions to make its 228 more manageable. Chapters can signify a change in focus, the progression of time, or the completion of one piece of the story, and without them, readers can easily become confused. The author attempts to weave together stories about several couples, and it is difficult to tell where one couple's story ends and another's begins.

Ultimately, this book fails to engage readers. It lacks coherency and believability, and its characters are flat. Readers—gay or straight—who are looking for a good romantic read should turn elsewhere.

CATHERINE THURESON (July 12, 2010)

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