

Who Killed 'Tom Jones'?

Gale Martin

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Part romance, part mystery, part thirties-style screwball comedy, this novel set against the backdrop of a regional Tom Jones impersonator contest will provoke laughter as it presents puns and witty lines.

Gale Martin's *Who Killed 'Tom Jones'?* is as fluffy and delicious as one of the deep-fried funnel cakes that are a primary food group in Pankey, Pennsylvania, where heroine Ellie resides. She is a live-in receptionist at the small, family-owned Finger Rest Home and is a late bloomer in the love department, having endured long years during her parents' divorce and her mother's fatal illness until finding solace at "The Finger." Outwardly, she is a passive sort, letting others order restaurant meals for her, dress her, and stick cigarettes in her mouth, though she has many witty internal dialogues.

Though Ellie is a fairly bland character, she does serve as the straight man for a cast of quirky rest home residents: Mrs. Hand (perpetually grumpy and tough as nails though she uses a walker); Mr. Harvey (horny and corny); Mrs. Peachey (yoga nut with an extensive wardrobe); and Jorge (Finger chauffeur and English language instructor at the local library in spite of his constant malapropisms). Ellie takes this crew on a field trip to a Tom Jones impersonator contest, where one of the leading contenders for the \$25,000 grand prize is found murdered backstage. The Finger posse morphs into a team of amateur detectives, and the rest of the plot unfolds with their antics as they try to uncover the murderer's identity.

The novel straddles the genres of mystery and romance, though it veers off to the romantic side most often as Ellie finds herself smooching three different eligible bachelors (and enjoying a spicy lovemaking scene with one of them). Some suspension of disbelief will be required for mystery readers whose antennae are attuned for clues and things that are not quite right (as in the police detective who asks Ellie out on a date, even though she's considered a potential suspect in the homicide investigation)—but this is more of a romp than a hardboiled murder mystery, so it's all part of the fun. The focus is on the vicarious thrill of entering the world of Tom Jones impersonators who dress like Adam Ant and the female devotees who throw undergarments at them during their sweaty performances.

The humor is constant and welcome in these pages. Some of the jokes are old chestnuts, but others are stunningly good, as when Ellie transcribes a phone message for her boss about the need for a pedicure for one of the senior residents ("Finger: Hand, Toenails") or when she heads out for a date at the fanciest restaurant in town, Café le Grippe (French for "the flu").

Who Killed 'Tom Jones'? is an amusing and sassy novel that will appeal to fans of romance and cozy mysteries alike. Martin researched her subject well, even meeting with Steve McCoy, widely considered to be the world's foremost Tom Jones impersonator, who served as the inspiration for the character Stan McCann. One suspects that Sir Thomas Jones might have a dog-eared copy of this on his nightstand, too.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (February 21, 2014)

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