

A Lively, Lovely Lowcountry Mystery

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 30 August 2011 13:01

 Linda Lovely heads to Beaufort to promote *Dear Killer*, a thrilling new mystery set in the SC Lowcountry.

For my money, few things in life are more deliciously satisfying than curling up with a good mystery. From my early days as a Nancy Drew fanatic, through my Agatha Christie-inspired youth, right on up to my P.D. Jamesian, Elizabeth Georgian adulthood, when the simple urge to read for pleasure hits, I know of no better literary genre. But please note: I did say a good mystery emphasis on good and I'm a fairly demanding critic. I require a distinctive setting, a large, colorful cast of suspects, a memorable hero/heroine I can root for, and a plot that keeps me breathlessly turning pages and guessing til the end. Oh, and the writing must be impeccable.

I'm happy to inform my readers that Linda Lovely's new mystery novel *Dear Killer* meets all my requirements, and then some! Snappy writing? Check. Dynamic heroine? Check. Vivid array of suspects? Check, check, check! Interesting setting? I'll say. And not only is it interesting it's familiar. *Dear Killer* is set in the SC Lowcountry, featuring names and places you're guaranteed to recognize. Lovely, a former resident of Fripp Island, doesn't scrimp on the fun-to-spot details.

And she even gives us a mature romance to follow.

Here's the set-up: Marley Clark, a 52 year old widow (and Sigourney Weaver look-alike) recently retired from a career in military intelligence, now works as a part-time security guard on a private SC island. While patrolling her turf one night, she finds a resident drowned and bobbing naked amid a bunch of veggies in a Jacuzzi. Asked to serve as the lead investigator's liaison, Marley finds herself drawn to handsome Deputy Braden Mann, a dozen years her junior, and is thrilled to find him drawn back. Together, they sort through a collection of oddball suspects and hidden motives as the bodies begin to pile up on Dear Island. As their mutual attraction grows, so does the danger.

And it's all great fun!

Linda Lovely will be giving a talk for USCB's Oscher Lifelong Learning Program (OLLI) on September 14th and signing books in Beaufort on September 17th. She was kind enough to speak with me via email recently.

ME: Linda, your bio says you've written several manuscripts some of them award winners. Is "Dear Killer" your first published book?

LL: Yes. Since times are tough for traditional publishers, I was delighted to find a publisher who loved Marley and wanted a series featuring my over-50 heroine. My two stand-alone romantic suspense novels are under consideration at other publishing houses.

ME: As a fellow former resident, I suspect Fripp Island was your inspiration for the setting of "Dear Killer." Can you confirm?

LL: While Dear Island is a composite, Fripp Island provided plenty of inspiration. Before buying a home on Fripp, we rented on Harbor Island and freelance work for a Hilton Head advertising agency allowed me to scout many more island communities. Having all these images to choose from helped me mold my fictional island's geography and structures to suit my nefarious purposes. Of course, spending so much time beachcombing, kayaking, bicycling, walking, golfing, etc. on Fripp imprinted many gorgeous island scenes in my brain for later recall and tweaking.

ME: Your protagonist, Marley Clark, is a terrific heroine, but not necessarily "typical." I'm wondering if she's an alter ego of yours? Or maybe based on someone you know? Tell me a little about how you created the character.

LL: As a baby boomer, I was tired of young heroines having all the fun. So I

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decided to create a sexy over-fifty heroine who was physically fit and mentally sharp, one who had a sense of humor about aging and still enjoyed sex. To give Marley a logical reason to become embroiled in mysteries, I made her a part-time island security officer. I liberally borrowed background from a retired military intelligence officer♦my best friend since kindergarten♦to ensure my heroine had the skills to kick butt. While Marley shares my sense of humor and general worldview, I unfortunately don♦t see her when I look in a mirror.</p><p>♦</p> <p>ME: You're presenting an OLLI program about "changing perspectives of older protagonists" in Beaufort on September 14th. Can you give us a preview? What do you mean by "changing perspectives"? (As we♦ve discussed, Marley Clark is not exactly Miss Jane Marple!)</p> <p> </p> <p>LL: For decades, the older heroines in our literature tended to be typecast as nosey spinsters or sexless, cookie-baking grandmas. Older male protagonists fared slightly better, though three-dimensional male heroes of a certain age were also in short supply. That♦s changing. My presentation will examine the interests, lifestyles and accomplishments of the real-life fifty-and-above set. Then we♦ll look at how an increasing number of novels portray this demographic in a more upbeat light.</p> <p>♦</p> <p>ME: There are so many terrific "mature" actresses in Hollywood who I♦d bet would love to play Marley. I think she has great potential as a big screen heroine. Have you thought along those lines at all?</p> <p> </p> <p>LL: Hmmm♦ Geena Davis, Renee Russo, Julianne Moore, Annette Bening and Marisa Tomei come to mind.</p> <p>♦</p> <p>ME: As a lifelong mystery buff who can♦t imagine actually writing one, I♦ve always wondered: What♦s the secret formula? Do you come up with your plot first... or do you create your cast of characters and let the story unfold organically?</p> <p>♦</p> <p>LL: I start with setting, main characters and basic plot. But I♦m definitely a ♦pantster.♦ The plot evolves and subplots pop up as I write. My characters regularly surprise the heck out of me with what they say and do.</p> <p>♦</p> <p>ME: How much research went into writing "Dear Killer"? It's full of technical details that most folks don't have at their fingertips...</p> <p> </p> <p>LL: I♦ve always loved research and the chance to interview experts for my nonfiction writing projects. I had even more fun researching ♦Dear Killer.♦ This was my first opportunity to call a golf pro and ask which piece of maintenance equipment he♦d select to kill someone. Once I had his answer, I took a spin at the controls.</p> <p>♦</p> <p>ME: I see you've already started a second Marley Clark book, "No Wake Zone," which appears to be set in your home state of Iowa. Will readers follow Marley to other locales in future books? Do you ever plan to bring her back to the Lowcountry?</p> <p> </p> <p>LL: My publisher has slated ♦No Wake Zone,♦ the Iowa-based sequel to ♦Dear Island,♦ for release in second quarter, 2012. In book number three, Marley will definitely come back home to Dear Island.</p> <p>♦</p> <p>♦</p> <p><i>Linda Lovely will be speaking at OLLI on September 14th. For more information, call 842-208-8247. She will also be signing books at the McIntosh Book Shoppe, 917 Bay Street in Beaufort on Saturday, September 17 from 1 ♦ 4 pm.</i></p>