

Book Review – Death Drop by Claire MacLeary

In *Death Drop*, her fifth Marcus & Laird detective novel, Edinburgh author Claire MacLeary addresses issues around bullying, domestic violence, cross-dressing, cyber fraud and people trafficking.

And of course her two detectives, Wilma Marcus and Maggie Laird, are still struggling with their own domestic lives; difficult children, difficult partners, difficult finances, difficult parents – not to mention their ongoing differences regarding just what their agency should and shouldn't be investigating in the first place.

Big, brash, ambitious Wilma wants to solve exciting cases by whatever means she can. Cautious Maggie doesn't want to take any more chances"

'You've no imagination, that's your problem. Canna see past the end of your nose.'

'And yours is, you never know when to draw the line. Here's what's going to happen. You'll write down everything you've just told me. Then we'll put the facts in order and take them

to the police.'

'If you do that, pal, it's curtains for us.'

Maggie said, 'You don't mean that' 'Try me' said Wilma.

In Aberdeen, a woman, who soon turns out to be a man in drag, has been found hanging from the crossbeam of his own garage. His wife and son knew about his cross dressing, his daughter did not. Days earlier, 'UR DEAD' has been written in the dust coating his work van. He told his wife it was a joke. He did not tell her he'd been sacked.

Did he jump or was he pushed? The police of North East Division need to find out.

Frankie Bain, aged 9, has just moved from Tullos to Seaton. Her parents have split up, she misses her Dad, and her mother has a new and unsavoury boyfriend. Frankie was bullied at her last school, and now it's starting all over again:

That wee gang of girls has moved away now. The rest are with their pals, playing games or just hanging out. No one's asked me to join in. Who'd want to be bestie with a weirdo like me?

Maggie is a classroom assistant at the school. Frankie is about to tell her a secret when the bell rings and the moment is lost. Maggie thinks Frankie is questioning her gender identity.

A few days later, Frankie has disappeared.

Meanwhile, a widowed farmer in Inverurie has been conned by an online dating agency. It's not the money he's bothered about, it's his pride, and the fear that if his family finds out he'll be a laughing stock. He wants Maggie to track down whoever is behind the scam and close them down. Maggie is

doubtful, but for Wilma burgeoning crime equals burgeoning profit:

'Think on it' Wilma continued, unabashed. 'We'd be like agony aunts. Eyes alight, she spread her hands. 'With bells on.' Picking a piece of coconut from between her front teeth, 'How hard can it be?'

The police investigations into Frankie's disappearance and Vinny Sellars' death offer the reader an alternative view of events. As Wilma and Maggie (mainly Wilma..) attempt to solve the cases from their side, Chisholm escalates the hunt for Frankie to major incident status, sending his team out on the streets to dig out Aberdeen's low life – in particular a registered and recently released sex offender.

We once again meet DS Brian Burnett, who's still hoping in vain for promotion (and for a chance with Maggie Laird), hardworking Susan Strachan and her cocky graduate entrant colleague, Douglas Dunn. And after the retirement of one of their number, the team is now landed with a new and annoying arrival. DC Elizabeth Haldane is clearly keen to impress Chisholm, but just why has she been transferred from Tayside to Queen Street?

As ever, Wilma is the standout character in this story. She's dragged herself out of the gutter and married a 'decent' man – although Brian wants a traditional wife, not a private investigator who researches cases at night, tries to improve her vocabulary, and serves up frozen dinners to save time.

Wilma doesn't care if her methods of detection are legal or not. She loves excitement just as much as she likes food – and drink. She manages her two waster sons (and even gets them to do a bit of questionable sleuthing), keeps Brian happy (-ish) and works at the hospital to supplement their income. She's irrepressible, and although she tries Maggie's patience, her ambition, determination and enthusiasm bring her character

alive.

By contrast, Maggie is a worrier. If it's not her son's school fees, it's her student daughter's relationships; if it's neither of them, it's her ageing, and somewhat interfering, parents. Then there's her on-off relationship with DI Allan Chisholm. Like Wilma, she's working two jobs just to stay afloat, but unlike Wilma, she wants to stay within the law and away from police matters. The sharp contrast between the two women is what makes their working relationship interesting, but it's their underlying friendship and mutual support that make them human.

Claire Macleary's *Death Drop* offers another enjoyable and thought-provoking adventure for our two Aberdeen 'quines', against the backdrop of a city in flux.



Claire MacLeary

Death Drop by Claire MacLeary is published by Contraband, an imprint of Saraband and available [here](#).

