

**“Gone With a Handsomer Man” by Michael Lee West
2011, Minotaur Books; 337 pages**

Teeny Templeton believes she has finally found happiness. She’s engaged, and happily busy with wedding plans. She is thrilled when her thoughtful fiancé signs her up for cake decorating classes, and looks forward to designing the perfect wedding cake.

When the first class is unexpectedly canceled, Teeny heads home, anticipating a little down time with her sweetie. She has no idea there’s a naked badminton game going on in her backyard.

In shock, Teeny climbs the peach tree to get a better view of Bing and the girls, and, in a fit of rage, begins lobbing peaches at trio. Her aim is better than her judgment in men, and Teeny is arrested for assault.

In an instant, Teeny’s world falls apart. The wedding is off, and Bing has thrown her out of the house. To make matters worse, she’s given a restraining order and put on probation. She is forbidden to leave South Carolina, so the refuge of her family farm in Georgia is out of reach.

Homeless and unemployed, Teeny turns to Bing’s stepmother, Miss Dora, for help. Dora comes to the rescue, allowing Teeny to stay in the Spencer-Jackson house on Rainbow Row, which has been in Bing’s family for generations. Uncomfortable with the charity, but out of options, Teeny moves in.

When Bing is murdered a few days later, Teeny is the prime suspect. Desperate, she calls in local attorney Cooper O’Malley. To make matters more complicated, Cooper and Teeny have a history. In fact, Cooper was the first boy to break Teeny’s heart.

Cooper and his private detective, Red Butler, race against the clock to clear Teeny’s name and protect her from Bing’s killer. The plot is filled with crazy twists and turns, including real estate fraud, forgery and a poisoned peach pie as the stakes ratchet ever higher.

Author Michael Lee West has crafted a laugh-out-loud funny romp through the neighborhoods of Charleston. The mystery is intriguing, although I did figure out “whodunit” before I got to the end. It’s really the women in this story that keep the pages turning.

Teeny Templeton is a hoot. She’s a sweet Southern girl with a great big heart and a family cookbook full of bible verses and poisoned recipes written by the Templeton women during stressful times over the years.

Miss Dora, with her love of all things pink, is an aging Southern Belle with a steely underbelly and a ruthless sensibility. Ava, Cooper’s estranged wife, is a tough-as-nails archeologist who will stop at nothing to win back her man.

Gone With a Handsomer Man is a light, fun read. West perfectly evokes the warm, salty air and fragrant cooking of the South Carolina lowcountry, transporting her readers to Charleston with every sentence. This book is the perfect antidote for all that holiday stress, so add a stop at the library to your to-do list today!

Are you still seeking a gift for that hard to buy for someone? Adopt a book in their name. Ask for details at your library.

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