

BETA READER SAMPLE REPORT

Title: FOUR STEPS

Author: Wendy Hudson

Plot:

Alex, the only surviving family member from a grisly murder, tries to move on with her life while still living on the farm where the murders took place. During one of her escapes hiking in the Scottish Highlands she meets Lori and begins a tenuous relationship. When the murderer comes back to “finish the job” he nearly kills Lori until Alex finds the strength to take matters into her own hands.

First Impression:

The opening chapter is a doozy. It clearly sets the tone as a thriller that is nicely balanced by the burgeoning romance between Alex and Lori.

Main Characters:

Lori – The relationship with Alex takes her by surprise but her process of coming out, along with her confusion and fear of how others will react, feels authentic.

Alex – On the surface, Alex puts up a good front. How she is able to function, given what happened to her family, shows she has enormous strength. Are there some signs of struggle before the case reopens? Maybe there would be on a second reading but there is a little disconnect until the plot lines come together.

John – John’s dementia creates a really interesting storyline. The way his son treats him creates sympathy but at the same time we know he had something to do with the murders. It helps maintain a pace for how things are revealed nicely.

Dialog:

The dialog is great – very natural. There could be a little adjustment to show a greater difference between Lori and Alex as it sometimes was challenging to remember who was speaking due to their voices being so similar.

Plausibility:

In the world of suspense/thrillers, this is totally plausible – slightly heightened reality for the purpose of story but nothing that takes you out of it. This is also true for the romance plotline. Although the long drives between London and Glasgow/the Highlands, which I’m sure people do all the time, seem exhausting to me.

Genre:

I really like this mix of LGBTQ romance with suspenseful thriller. The activities Alex and Lori and their group of friends do bring a realistic level of action. Their love of somewhat extreme outdoor sports has its own risks and challenges so it lends nicely to the physicality of a thriller.

Pace:

Both the romance and the mystery are nicely paced. It is a pretty fast read because you both want Alex and Lori to get together but also because you want to know how the mystery will turn out.

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Author's Requested Focus: The ending

In general, the ending is a believable and satisfying conclusion to the story and the various plot lines. Is it believable that even their friends are partnered up in new romances? Maybe a little saccharine but it does leave open the door to other stories with these characters, which hopefully there will be.

Overall Thoughts:

I enjoyed FOUR STEPS a lot. At the beginning, it was slightly jarring to go back and forth between the Alex and Lori storyline and the John and his son storyline. Once I got further into the book and the lines started to cross, it all clicked into place. I also enjoyed that this was not your run of the mill romance or traditional procedural mystery. It was unlike so much else that I found it refreshing. I'm not crazy about the cover art. I think there's a missed opportunity to put a really moody Scottish landscape that would attract readers. Still not sure I'd stay overnight in a bothy though. HA!