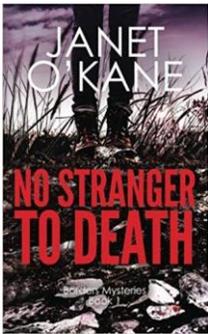


Review of **No Stranger to Death** by Janet O’Kane © 2013



*No Stranger to Death* is the first in the Borders Mysteries series, written by Janet O’Kane. The protagonist in the story is a General Practitioner (a medical doctor) working in a fictional town in the Scottish Borders, not far from the Scotland/England line. Zoe Moreland is no stranger to either death or suffering. She deals with it in her profession and has faced both in her personal life, enough so she is not inclined to investigate when she and her dog stumble across a body in the remains of a Guy Fawkes bonfire (a traditional English celebration akin to the fireworks enjoyed by Americans on July the fifth each year).

Zoe is in a position of trust in the village, which means she must talk to the police, within the bounds of professional ethics, but not to the highly traditional small town gossips. Keeping secrets is part of her stock-in-trade and secrets are at the heart of the story.

*No Stranger to Death* is an example of the excellent work being done by some self-published authors. When compared to several would-be murder mysteries issued by traditional publishing houses and written by (it is claimed) New York Times best-selling authors, Ms. O’Kane’s work beats them hands down. Her characters are vivid, the dialogue believable, the settings evocative.

Authors from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction would recognize the blameless young woman who gets caught up in crime through no fault of her own. Modern readers, trained in modern investigation methods, may fault the heroine for her lack of activity. Dr. Moreland has information thrust upon her throughout the book, but it is not until she is running from something at the end of the book that she runs into the guilty party and realizes her mistake.

Golden Age authors (and some more modern writers) would also have found the descriptions of immoral behavior on the part of several of the characters to be unnecessarily specific and not helpful to the plot.

The author is adept at handling the culture she depicts, aided, no doubt, by the fact that she actually lives in the area. I especially admired her handling of the Scots dialect scattered throughout the manuscript. It caught the flavor of the people and added authenticity to the dialogue.

The strongest dyad in the story (in my personal opinion) is the relationship between the heroine and the deaf friend who supports her. The friend plays the role of sidekick, but she is a strong, charismatic person who sees life very clearly, a trait Zoe Moreland needs and comes to rely on.

Excerpt:

“I know what you’re up to, Doctor.”

Zoe looked around. Luckily, no one was nearby. She did not want to be seen arguing out on the pavement.

“You’ve misunderstood my intentions.”

"I don't think so." Brian took a few steps forward, delivering a blast of bad breath which reminded Zoe of their encounter some days earlier. "I've only got one thing to say to you."

"And what's that?"

"Stop interfering in other people's lives."

"I'm a doctor, Brian. If someone asks for my advice on a medical matter, I'll try to help them."

I found *No Stranger to Death* to be an engaging read, with a clear resolution and enough mystery to keep me wondering what Zoe was thinking until the very end. It goes on my keeper shelf.

Maggie Foster