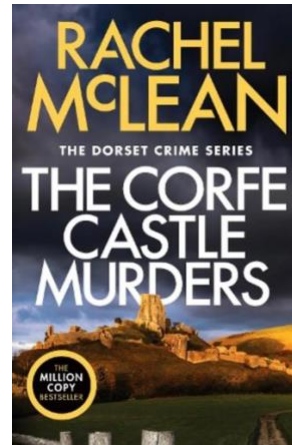


THE CORFE CASTLE MURDERS

By Rachel McLean

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This classic murder mystery is set in the semi-rural village of Corfe Castle in Dorset. The lead character, DCI Lesley Clarke, sustained a head injury whilst on duty during a bomb attack in Birmingham. She is given a choice to either retire from the police force early or to work for a period of 'respite' in a quieter location. She chooses the latter, hence her move to Dorset. The day before she officially starts her new job, she is in the area when she hears a scream and runs to find the cause. Laila, a young student archaeologist, had just found the brutally murdered body of her lover and archaeological associate Archie at the dig site near the Castle. Laila soon becomes the second murder victim and Lesley has to hit the ground running. She has to navigate working in this new slower paced area, with a new team that seems to challenge her methods and decisions at every turn, especially her DS, Dennis.

Lesley is a straight-talking city police officer, and her character is complex. She has a lot going on in her life. The supporting characters offered an interesting dynamic. There is an element of North vs South, that things are 'slower' and done differently in Dorset compared to Birmingham but the team seem to eventually start working together to solve the murders. It sets the scene for further stories in this series.

Reviews from the book club members varied:

"I really enjoyed this novel. The author had the happy knack of creating lots of natural sounding flowing dialogue and built the relationships between lots of easily remembered characters. The unusual setting of an archaeological dig was interesting. The barely contained exasperation throughout the case between the detectives was funny and confidently written. Simple phrases used e.g. "his face darkened", "she shoved her way past Terry", "Crystal calmly slurped her tea" (despite being the murderer!), were useful, informative, descriptive as stage play

directions. Is there a moral to the story? Those with loose morals might be more likely to get murdered?"

"Not a literally masterpiece. Basic murder mystery. Easy read, short chapters, story moves along at a fast pace. Lots of characters, information about them given in a few words but none of them have much substance. First chapter, Laila always nervous, nosy Crystal, creepy Patrick and a dead body. Second chapter is the "heroine" DCI Lesley Clarke. Stropky, middle aged and swearing. A townie placed in a rural situation. This makes for some humour as does the saga of the swear box. Third chapter, the DCI meets her new team. The author does not have a very high regard of men. They are controlling, sexist, sarcastic and pathetic. The women are deemed to have more intelligence but nobody is particularly likeable. More questions raised than answers. Have to read the next book!?"

"I enjoyed the book but found it a bit dated - female leaders are more common these days but there are still men like her male colleagues around! It was an interesting story with good detail about the main characters and I liked the fact that the young PC's contribution was recognised. I would read more of her books."

"Mediocre crime novel. Very predictable. Plot was weak and unrealistic at times e.g. Laila's sister going to confront the potential murderer to show her evidence of a possible motive for her to have wanted Laila dead! Lesley finding her husband with another woman was predictable. Lots of cliches. It was patronising to people living in rural or semi-rural areas inferring that the detectives there were not as efficient as the detectives in 'the big city'. 'This is Dorset boss, not Birmingham', 'Things are slower here'. These were said many times throughout the story. It was easy to read but like watching a 'B' movie....bad lines, weak plot. But Lesley was a likeable character and an advocate for strong women and did prevail in the end."

"I raced through this police procedural. I liked the main character a lot and thought the sexism she had to deal with was well portrayed. The sergeants swear jar made me laugh and the characters did develop and compromise as the book went on. It was a page turner and I wanted to find out whodunnit, but once I had it was an anti-climax. For me, reading this book was a bit like eating a McDonalds: very enjoyable at the time but afterwards I kind of wish I hadn't."

"I usually enjoy crime stories and looked forward to reading this novel but as the tale unravelled, I became less interested. The story concentrated on DCI Lesley Clarke, a strong character, who found it difficult adjusting to a quiet district and gaining the trust of men who were not used to having a female boss. She was not a character I took to, which did not help in the enjoyment of the book. I kept expecting a twist in the tale. For me, it was a disappointing story."

"I watched a rerun of Springwatch from last year featuring Corfe Castle in its derelict state swifts and ravens creating a rather deathly hue! Read very few detective stories in recent years. Mixed feelings about this easy read book. The author seemed well up on police process with modern technology and regional variations on police ways of working and culture. She has a strong critique of all men in the story as inadequate, prejudiced, sexist and having a lack of awareness of how life works outside their own orbit. The women are strong minded. The plot seemed muddled and left a lot unexplained and was unbelievable that an axe as described could be a weapon of first choice. I would not choose to read the sequels."

Kathryn Baines