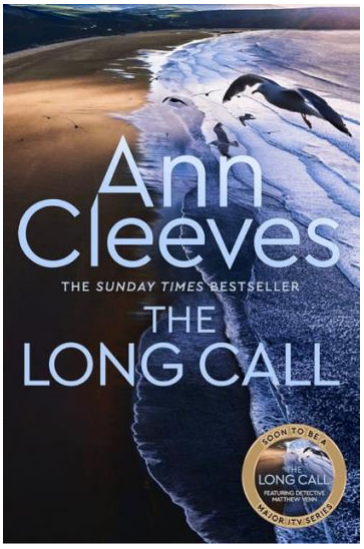
The Long Call

By Ann Cleeves



This was the first book in the series introducing DI Matthew Venn set in North Devon. A twisting tale of murders which keeps the reader engaged – and guessing - right to the end. Some comments from members of the Group:

“I was pleased to have this book as I had read it before but couldn’t remember the detail. I always like it when a story is set in a location I can relate to and I know the Barnstaple, Bideford area well. It started well as a good murder mystery – a body on the beach and even when identified nobody seems to know who he is. The story revolves around a Day Centre – lots of activities going on (even a mention of u3a), and the main characters all have a link to it and each other.

The characters are really interesting – the side they present to the world and a secret side that becomes known to the reader. Matthew Venn, the calm, efficient detective, his husband Jonathan, artistic and a worrier due to having been adopted, Jen the policewoman who left her abusive husband and has a low opinion of men generally and worries about not being a good enough single parent and others who all have their secrets. The author meets sensitive subjects head-on. Grief after death, parents/carers getting older, Downs syndrome and of course it is the curate who rapes the child. I don’t think it is a very nice book at all.”

“What appealed to me about the writing was the particular attention to contrasts of detail such as the description of the beautiful North Devon coastline to some leaves moving against a police station window. Also, how the large cast of varying characters surround the awful theme of assault on 3 vulnerable young girls. Everything was held together by the main character, Chief Inspector Matthew Venn for whom finding the murderer took so long. We see into his heart, soul and brain - a good man and conscientious detective with curiosity and conscientiousness who listens attentively whilst biting his lip, making connections to find the truth. After early rejections by his family, he leads a lonely life until he meets Jonathan, his husband, in whom he can confide – their love and respect for each other, a heartwarming contrast to the story.”

“The writer cleverly penetrates into the thoughts and feelings of so many differing characters, e.g. Jen, the red-haired detective, Ross, the placid policeman, not to mention the sweet-natured but vulnerable Downs syndrome girls. I will read more of Ann Cleeves!”

“For me, an unexpectedly good, engaging read. I have not been a follower of detective stories in recent years and had not come across this author before. I worked in North Devon

in my early twenties, living near Barnstaple and got to know the beaches and coastline intimately. I still visit friends there and can vouch for the accuracy and setting of the plot, I know exactly where the body was found! I was fascinated by the author's observations and insights of the folks who live in the area. The main characters are described in detail along with the tensions in their relationships really engaged me as the reader.

It's a thoroughly modern take on issue such as child abuse, extreme religion and the problems facing a gay police officer in a relatively conservative non-cosmopolitan environment. I would like to read more novels set in this area."

"I enjoyed this well-written, slow burner with enough detail explaining police procedural investigative work but not too in-depth to get bogged down in. I liked Matthew's character – quiet, methodical, caring and there were lots of threads which kept me guessing right to the end! The author weaves the elements of the story together – the current investigation, the slow revelation of Venn's own past, the threads are pulled together and the full picture emerges. A topical story – deep character work and social dynamics. It explores religious guilt, family dynamics and family estrangement."

"I liked:

- The strong sense of place, particularly the beautiful scenery set against the reality of seaside towns out of season
- The elegant, descriptive writing
- The well written, interesting characters interwoven with the plot
- The unusual introverted detective
- The matter-of-fact presentation of Matthew's relationship with his husband
- That the corpse was a man rather than a half-naked woman
- The depiction of a variety of characters with Down Syndrome

I disliked:

- The ending, which felt quite sudden and seemed to rely on the detective guessing the murderer through an intuitive leap and the murderer then handily confessing and filling in the blanks"

"I enjoyed this very twisty murder mystery a lot. The plot keeps the reader guessing to the end - the use of multiple points of view very cleverly keeps the reader guessing about the murderer's identity. I was genuinely surprised by the revelation of Chrissie's kidnapper. Also, the perception the reader has of Simon himself is well manipulated - from being a sad victim to someone who was genuinely trying to do good, And the portrayal of the Downs syndrome characters is nicely done - they are all proper individuals.

Indeed, all the characters are very human and individual, and therefore thoroughly engaging. There is a lot going on in terms of relationships between the police officers with their personal issues, the families of the Downs women, the life of the Woodyard community, and more. Like the best stories, it's not just about the mystery but about the characters. So much so that the book seems rather too short too me - I need to read the subsequent books to find out how they all develop."

"I don't know why, but I could not get into this book. The characters did not interest me apart from Lucy and her father. Perhaps it was because of Matthews same-sex relationship with (the name escapes me!)

The quick confession of the culprit seemed unrealistic to me or how she protected her fiancé knowing he was a rapist to the extent of committing a murder in an attempt to protect him.

All the characters seem to have minor roles, even the murdered man. I was disappointed not to hear more about him. This may have prevented us guessing who the culprit was but for me made for a boring story."

Christine Wright