



The Dead Season

Christobel Kent

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Florence is shimmering in the summer heat. Former policeman turned private detective Sandro Cellini is investigating the case of a man who seems to have vanished into thin air, leaving his pregnant wife behind him. But the man lies amidst the shrubbery of a busy roundabout, his corpse bloating in the humid air.

The Dead Season Details

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Author : Christobel Kent

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Lizzie Hayes says

'The Dead Season' by Christobel Kent

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August in Florence - it's sweltering, with soaring temperatures, the city shimmers in the unrelenting heat. Most of the Florentines have decamped to cooler climes - the hills and beaches in the surrounding areas, leaving Florence with most of the cafes and shops closed. But Sandro Cellini ex-policeman now private detective will not be joining them, for Sandro has a new case, a young pregnant woman Anna Niescu whose boyfriend has disappeared.

Also remaining in the city is bankteller Roxana Delfino who works at the small old-fashioned Banca di Toscana Provinciale which has just ten branches, three of them in Florence. With the manager away on holiday, and most of Florence closed Roxana has more time to worry about her mother who is showing signs of dementia, and the disappearance of one of her regular customers,

What appears to be a straight forward missing person case quickly becomes complicated when a body is discovered. With his ex-partner Pierton assigned to the case Sandro, and his assistant Giulietta Sarto, along with his wife Luisa struggle to unravel the complex tangle that surrounds Anna Niescu.

This is an intriguing mystery, but more than that it is a story of people's lives, their fears, their hopes, and their yearnings, sometimes the yearnings that we don't tell even our closest friends, because we are sure that it's not going to happen for us. As the story progressed I was as equally involved in all their lives as with attempting to solve the mystery. Although the characters are all so individual there are parts of each of them with which I could identify, thus is the power of the true story teller.

I also loved this book, because I could smell Florence and not only because of the several references to the refuse bins, but because I could smell the heat. In England, we do have hot weather – we do – sometimes! But for me whenever one emerges on a summer morning the smell that greets one is the fresh smell that the rain has brought up, because it will have always rained at some point during the night - that's England. But the descriptions in this book coupled with the hot weather transported me to the Florence I have visited, and brought back wonderful memories.

When the stifling weather finally breaks, so does the case with shocking revelations. I cannot recommend this book too highly, I was enthralled throughout and can only say, put this book on your 'must read' list.

Reviewer: Lizzie Hayes

Earlier books in this series are: A Time of Mourning and, A Fine and Private Place.

Holly says

This book is a murder/mystery but it gives too much descriptive scenerios of Florence for my liking. Because of that, I found myself skipping a lot of paragraphs.

Summer heat is intense in August in Florence and this was repeated twice every page about how hot it was.....I got it, the first 50 times I heard it.

A murder has been committed with some very intrigue twists involved. The story intertwines 2 separate stories....and the gentleman murdered....is also an 'assumed' name taken by someone else within the story. At one different point in the story - there were a minimum of 6 people working on this one case..... Can't say it was one of the best reads for me.....

Barbara Nutting says

In a case of Sandro Cellini vs Guido Brunetti the Venice Commassario wins hands down. Donna Leon's series is wonderful, you want to fly right to Venice. This book is slower than molasses and Florence sounds awful. Even worse than Florida in August. I've read 200 pages and not much is going on. It reads like it's being poorly translated from Italian, which it isn't. Too boring to even finish. ??DNF

Gloria Mccracken says

A series set in modern day Florence, Italy, with interesting characters and a twisty plot.

Harry Lane says

Apparently Florence is very hot in August; it seemed as if the weather was a major character in this story. The story reflected the atmosphere, moving in fits and starts, pausing at moments to recollect where it was. I think the sense of place is less distinct than in Donna Leon's Commissario Brunetti novels. The characters are well drawn and engaging, and the plot moves along at a good clip. It was a bit difficult to keep up with some of the minor characters and their place in the story, but all in all a good read.

Jane says

Even better than the previous book. The mystery is nothing special, it's Sandro, the other regular characters, and the characters specific to this book that make it enjoyable reading. Loved the setting in Florence, Italy.

Susan Creech says

Suffocatingly depressing

Reader ends every word with a dimenuendo and drop in pitch. Writer gives us characters and situations that are pitifully tragic, shallow, and disastrous. If it had not been the only book I had and no Internet connection, I would not have finished it. Now I guess I'll go buy a pack of cigarettes and a gallon of whiskey. August is coming soon and I can't afford to go down to the sea.

John Brooke says

The Dead Season is Christobel Kent's 3rd book featuring ageing ex-cop-now-PI Sandro Cellini. The story unfolds in the stifling heat of Florence in August. This Brit author knows the city. The blurbs say "rich in atmospheric". Indeed. The way Christobel Kent surrounds your senses with the listless, perpetually breathless feeling of muggy, stinky, pressing humidity is almost too much to bear. She sees the color of smog-muted sunsets and hazy dawns perfectly, the dirty Arno limping along, the empty shops and cafes, all wilting, if not dead, in the stunning midday heat. No one in their right mind stays in Florence in August.

Except those who must. Or who cannot afford to leave. Sandro Cellini and his wife Luisa are stuck in town. Luisa is a patient wife (a cancer survivor learns the art of patience). Sandro struggles with the insecurities of a man losing sight of his prime years, but who knows he cannot afford to retire.

The story opens when their adoptive 'daughter' Giuli – a fortyish ex-addict/hooker/low-life who is rebuilding her life while working at a Woman's Centre – brings a very pregnant young woman, Anna, to Sandro. The father of her imminent child has disappeared - can Sandro find Claudio Josef Brunello?

But Anna's man is not who he appears to be. A borrowed name creates confusion – and more so when the actual Claudio is found dead in the bushes beside a major city thoroughfare. He died violently. Why/how is not clear. We now have a missing father and a dead banker: two different cases?

Or is there a connection? The mystery constellates around a small branch of a minor bank. Sandro Cellini plies information and unofficial favors from his former police partner Pietro, still an inspector with the force. Again, author Kent creates almost unbearable atmosphere as slow moving Sandro sweats, drowns in the self-pity of ineffectual man, and hates himself for his failure. As Sandro makes painful progress toward understanding, the oppressive, relentless heat defines his every move and thought.

Of course the heat also gets to the several women filling various roles in this mystery. Luisa, Giuli, Anna; Roxana and Marisa at the bank; Roxana's mother; an Russian immigré, Dasha, who works with Anna at a small hotel; the elderly lady hotelier who's their boss; and a feisty female fruit vendor. These women of Florence surround Sandro Cellini, and in many ways they dominate the story. At the risk of sounding simplistic (and perhaps not politically correct?), I'll dare suggest that you could call this a 'woman's' mystery with a man at the heart of it. A valiant man, but coming apart at the seams. This male reader was getting a bit frustrated with how stunned Sandro starts off...and remains till it's almost too late. This has to be part of the writer's design. It may be easier for a female reader's imagination to connect with this situation?

No question, Kent is a masterful writer. She knows her setting perfectly. Beyond the killing heat there are the tastes, styles, class attitudes... the trees, parks, apartments and gardens of Florence. And she knows how to 'stagger' the time-frame, giving us a sense of the present moment seamlessly interwoven with the past that leads to that moment. That's good writing, both for tension, and for compressing the narrative flow. There is much to be admired in this crime writer's way of building her story.

BUT her main characters here are so addled, distraught, helpless, fateful, it never lets up... Yes, it is August; the trope has power. But Christobel Kent stays so close and tight with the heat and its effects on the thinking and actions of these characters that, 300 hundred or pages in, it begins to veer close to melodrama. At least to my ear.

That said, I will certainly seek out the two earlier Sandro Cellini books to see how they play out.

4 stars. In my humble opinion The Dead Season was wanting some flatness here and there - some ironic cop

objectivity. I didn't feel it. Rather, I was overwhelmed by the emotion of heat.

Carolyn Rose says

Interesting setting-Florence in the exhausting heat of August. Much detail about the lives of the characters. The wrap-up felt a little rushed.

Anna says

ok ... I get it ... Florence in August is awful ... don't need to have it beaten in over and over ...

It's a pretty decent detective thriller once you strip away the attempts to create atmosphere and the rambling minutiae. The subplots and characters actually support the main story; my only observation in that direction is that it took six chapters to set up the story and another two chapters to get to the actual investigation. Aside from a few local references, the story could have been set anywhere, even though the cover makes a point of having Florence as the setting.

Cliff says

No one with any sense, tourists and the characters in this book excepted, stay in Florence during August. The weather is very hot and very humid and those that can escape to the coast where it is cooler. Sando Cellini (was the name chosen to give a link to the more famous Benvenuto?) an ex police officer turned private detective is asked by a very pregnant chambermaid to find her lover who has disappeared. At the same time a teller in a small provincial bank notices the disappearance of a regular customer and then the body of her manager is discovered on a local roundabout. The heat of the locale can be felt in the prose as nothing moves fast. There is another murder and slowly and satisfactorily all the threads of the story come together as a violent summer thunderstorm descends on the city. I can't say there is a twist at the end, but the perpetrator comes as a surprise, although perhaps it should not have been. Read in the damp of a miserable English spring, the book took me well into a scorching Florence as a contrast.

Kiran says

Slow-burn doesn't even begin to cover the snail pace of most of this book, where nothing happened at all until suddenly everything happened in the final few chapters. Once again, as a crime/mystery novel the plot didn't hold up well at all, but the effort was all placed in the characters - Sandro, Luisa, Guili and Anna. This felt as suffocating to read as the heat in Florence was throughout the book.

Helen Almond says

I like this. It gets so so reviews but I enjoyed it, it has a nice pace and good characters.

Monica says

I am very partial to character driven crime fiction, and Christobel Kent is an excellent practitioner of the genre. It is August in Florence and it's stifling - everyone who can leave the city has done so. Those who cannot are restless and edgy. Sandro Cellini, former Florence police officer turned private investigator, and his wife Luisa are well developed characters whose relationship has evolved nicely over several books - in their sixties, happily married, still engaged in their respective careers. Giuli, the former addict who has become their protege and Sandro's assistant is another complex and interesting character. It is Giuli who brings Sandro a new client - Anna, a young, naive and very pregnant woman who is worried about her missing fiancée who has told her he is a bank manager.

The bank manager whose name Anna gives Sandro is found dead by the side of the road in the suburbs and Sandro's ex-partner is assigned to investigate the death. Is it accident, suicide or murder? The body in question is the bank manager by that name, but not the man who is Anna's fiancée. So the investigation of the death and the hunt for the missing man are parallel cases. There are a couple of interesting subplots involving the bank and its employees, real estate speculation and missing money. The minor characters are vividly drawn and the threads of the plots are woven together seamlessly. And Florence itself is a significant character, richly described.

It's a very well written, engaging read.

Karen says

I am enjoying this series.
