



1588: A Calendar of Crime: A Novel in Five Books

Shirley Mckay

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A novel in five books featuring:

A grisly murder

A vanishing corpse

A secret romance

A ghostly tale for Halloween

An innocent accused

1588. It is a dark and turbulent time. Scotland's queen has been executed, the Spanish king seeks revenge, and the people of St Andrews cling desperately to the rhythm of the old ways.

The ancient burgh is renowned throughout Europe as a seat of Church and learning but it is also a town full of suspicion, conspiracy and murder. Shirley McKay sets her intriguing and sometimes comic tale around the key points in the calendar: the four quarter days of Candlemas, Whitsun, Lammas, Martinmas and the feast day of Yule.

When the first victim is discovered on Candlemas Eve, Hew Cullan, scholar and lawyer, is called upon to investigate; the dark side of the sixteenth century comes alive in a rich tapestry infused with the textures of history and folklore, woven by a master crime writer.

1588: A Calendar of Crime: A Novel in Five Books Details

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Author : Shirley Mckay

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Donald says

This is a collection of short, previously published, stories, thematically linked together by the old seasons, or high days and holidays. As such, it's not quite as meaty with regards puzzles, mystery or crimes. We have some ghosts, a disappearing corpse, an innocent man accused, romance and a candle maker snuffed out. As usual Hew gets to the bottom of every mystery, and still has time to go about the usual festivities expected during the year.

Presented, as it is, as an Almanac, we get some historical notes to round out the stories, just in case you aren't entirely familiar with Candlemas, or Whitsunday these days . . .

I'm not entirely sure it's an experiment that works, especially in one, year end volume. Each story was released online for the corresponding season, and that probably worked slightly better.

Bett says

The language is so rich in this book that there is a glossary at the end for the archaic and colorful Scots words in the stories (it is structured as five separate but sequential tales). I didn't need to refer to it terribly often (context usually helps), but I read it for pleasure when I'd finished the book! The best reasons to read one of these books — it's a series— are the characters, atmosphere, and settings, as opposed to the mystery deaths. I enjoyed it a lot and am hunting around for the rest of the series.

Paul Bk says

Shirley McKay - 1588 A Calendar of Crime.
Latest in the Hew Cullan series of mysteries.

This is a lighter read than the crime I normally go for and I thoroughly enjoyed the change of mood. This book is a perfect fit for the lengthening chilly evenings and an ideal Christmas present for fans of historical murder mysteries.

'1588', is set in the year of the Armada, which forms some of the background to the stories, it is one of the themes that links the five stories here contained. The calendar is significant because the people of the time lived by the seasons and the stories are linked in the form of an almanac. It is this that gives the stories a loose feel of a novel although each of the tales have been published as individual e-Stories and can be read as such. This edition, elegantly presented for a standard hardback comes with a glossary of words and historical notes that provides a light guide to the background to the stories for those who want to learn more.

The crimes/tales are well crafted and entertaining. The stories themselves cover the death of a candle maker, Spanish ghosts, love as a destructive and redemptive force, false crimes, and personal peril for Hew Cullan. I thoroughly enjoyed '1588 A Calendar of Crime'. McKay is well versed in the history of the time; the superstition and beliefs, the emerging scientific knowledge, the cyclical nature of life. She is also comfortable with her characters and these two things have enabled her to concentrate on bringing a fresh edge and invention to the stories here told. There are also little twists on the familiar that work well. I liked the Scottish burr and McKay's light way with the old language just enough to place the novel properly in its setting. There are some darker moments, after all these were perilous times, but I was more struck by the playful and witty tone that deftly underpins the stories. Some of the encounters between characters, their

banter, misunderstandings and situations that arise made me smile, (McKay created a light air of farce in one or two places).

I didn't feel that not having read any of the previous Hew Cullan novels was a hindrance to enjoying this book, and I would not be averse to picking one up in the future if I was in the right mood. As good as Ellis Peters, Candace Robb, Paul Doherty for me.
