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Clarion Review ★★★★★ **MYSTERY**

Murder Once Removed

Roz Russell
CreateSpace (Sep 14, 2013)
$10.99 (352pp)
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Captivating with its spiraling story line, Murder Once Removed *is sure to excite and entertain any seasoned murder mystery reader.*

An exciting whodunit, Roz Russell's *Murder Once Removed* is a roller coaster of a mystery, with highs, lows, twists, and turns. This gripping novel, with a strong plot and well-developed characters, is sure to thrill by constantly changing the focus of the murder investigation at its center.

Jessica Curtis, a reporter for the *Albuquerque Post*, just found out that her mentor, Joe Taylor, was killed during his investigation into the murder of art dealer Michael Lange. Looking for Joe's assassin, and Michael's too, she takes over the story. Did Jessica's friend Jules kill these men to hide his embezzling from his job at the Art Alliance? Or was it Nicholas Adoni, also known as the artist Nikos, who began killing in a jealous rage and continued to cover up the first homicide? Did Senator Richie and his right-hand man, Miles Crenshaw, commit murders to conceal evidence that could make them lose the next election? As the bloodshed continues, Detective Paul Liguori wants Jessica to stop her investigation for her own safety, but Jessica won't give up until she has found the murderer.

Russell excels at creating different characters, each with their own mood—for example, bland and boring Miles Crenshaw, the brains behind the charming and handsome Senator Richie, is entirely average, from his plain brown hair and mediocre looks to his monotone voice. There is nothing that can be considered interesting about the man. He is juxtaposed with his charming and handsome boss, the politician that everyone cannot help but like.

Using a captivating writing style, Russell portrays the locale and disseminates information while setting a tone: "Jessica stood at her living room window, sipping coffee from a mug, her thoughts as cloudy as the darkening sky." The author also successfully conveys the mood and emotions of the characters in interesting ways: "Jessica felt like an actor in a three-act play. Badly miscast, she was a bit player about to assume her first starring role, only to find that the first two acts had been played out long ago by the assembled cast."

Jessica constantly changes her main suspect, for valid reasons, causing the revelation of the real murderer at the end to come as a true surprise. The suspense is created in multiple ways, from the killer leaving threats for Jessica to Joe's missing audio interview tapes to Jessica arriving home to see someone moving around in her home. All the while she is looking for the perpetrator who wants her dead too.

The novel, simply and strongly designed, is an engrossing story. A descriptive writing style creates an intense mystery.

Murder Once Removed grabs the reader by the collar to watch the hunt for a murderer. Captivating with its spiraling story line, it is sure to excite and entertain any seasoned murder mystery reader.

BETH VANHOUTEN (June 3, 2014)

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