Death of a Gossip (Hamish Macbeth Mysteries, No. 1) by M. C. Beaton

A Fun And Very Different British Mystery.

Jane Winters--Lady Jane--was a noted gossip columnist enrolled in the Lachdubh School of Casting (fish casting, that is). She had something on everyone in class--and so, bobby Hamish Macbeth figured, any one of them could have killed her. Martins.

Features:
* MEET CONSTABLE HAMISH MACBETH, THE LOCAL CONSTABLE WHO SOLVES ALL KINDS OF CRIMES FOR HIS SCOTTISH VILLAGE.

My Personal Review:
Death of a Gossip is the first book in the Hamish Macbeth mysteries by M.C. Beaton. I decided to read this book after having found many of the references to Hamish Macbeths motives in the later books to be obscure and puzzling. I was pleased to find that Death of a Gossip does a fine job of setting up the premise for the series; outlining the characters of Hamish Macbeth and his friend, Priscilla Hallburton-Smythe; and establishing a plot structure for the future murder spree in the small village of Lochdubh in the northwestern Highlands of Scotland. If you want to understand those underpinnings, you definitely need to read this book.

However, the book is quite unlike the others in the series in important ways:

1. The premise behind the murder is much more thoughtful and better developed than in the following books.

2. The tension between the victim and the other characters is also better developed.

3. The interplay between Hamish and Priscilla is awkward and embarrassingly at the edge of prurience for burlesque purposes. In later books, this relationship is much better grounded and more interesting.
4. The detection involved is clumsy and disappointing. Its as though M.C. Beaton had missed the last class on how to write a mystery story. In the later books, the detection is a rewarding element of the stories. So this is an unusual false start.

I mention all of these things lest you fail to realize that you have better books ahead of you.

If you have read none of the Hamish Macbeth stories, I recommend you start with this one and read through them in the order that they were published. Youll enjoy the character development better that way.

Heres a thumbnail of the set-up. Hamish Macbeth is the sole police constable in a small village where theres not much to do. Hes impoverished because hes the eldest son in a Scottish family with lots of wee lads and lassies who need financial support. Due to a Highland tradition, he cannot even think of getting married until another son can replace him as an extra provider for the younger children in the large family. Since Hamish is much older than the other children, that day will be long in coming. Theres not much for him to do, and he uses a lot of his time to scrounge free food and drink, raise chickens . . . and to poach on occasion. His one vice is his mongrel dog, Towser, who often eats better than Hamish does. Hamish has been struck dumb by the beauty and grace of Priscilla Hallburton-Smythe, daughter of the local landed gentry. Priscilla is unaware of his feelings. Others think that Hamish is retarded because of how much Priscilla affects him. The Hallburton-Smythes see marrying off Priscilla well as their main activity.

As this story opens, its fishing season . . . and many beginning anglers arrive for the fishing school. They expect to struggle with tying flies, getting lines untangled and overcoming midges, but they dont expect the pointed comments of Lady Jane Hamilton . . . which hint at the hidden secrets in their closets. Lady Jane is obnoxious in other ways, and soon everyone feels threatened. Someone must feel more threatened than others because Lady Jane is found dead. Who did it? Hamish will find out, even though hes ordered off the case.

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