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My First Murder (The Maria Kallio Series)



Synopsis

Twenty-three-year-old law student Maria Kallio is recruited for a temporary position at the Helsinki police department. Sweet-faced but tough and hot-tempered, Maria faces pushback from her new squad – so when a young playboy is murdered at his family’s summer villa, the new detective is out to prove herself. Found floating facedown at the water’s edge after a night of partying, Tommi Pelatonen appears to have been murdered by one of his closest friends – but why? As Maria discovers, bitter passion and jealousy seethe under the placid surface of the group’s privileged, carefree lifestyle. As Maria uncovers the victim’s unsavory secrets, motives for all seven suspects come to light. Now it’s up to her to untangle the clues before the killer strikes again. The first book in Leena Lehtolainen’s international bestselling Nordic crime series starring Detective Maria Kallio, *My First Murder* serves up murder with a slice of life in the Finnish upper crust.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was very excited when I first heard about this author. Like so many other people I have been thrilled with the recent translation of so many of the Scandinavian authors. With the exception of a few books by writers like Peter Hoeg or Henning Mankell I hadn’t been able to get my Scandi-fix until the last couple years. I had noticed that there was a gap on the shelf for Finnish authors. I snapped up this first of the Maria Kallio series and started reading before I had even left the post

office parking lot. The first couple of pages (no spoiler here) were a humorous description of a hangover that had me laughing out loud. After that I dumped the rest of my errands and headed home to dig in. Wellllll.... I didn't find the rest of the book lived up to the prologue. Here is what I mean: the writing seemed wooden and strangely dated (and not just back to 1993, the time when it was initially published in Finland). The phraseology was something you'd find in the head of Sam Spade, not a 20-something law student in 1993. Or maybe I'm wrong-- maybe everyone in Finland in 1993 spoke like they had just tumbled out of a Dash Hammett book from the 1930s. The reason this book got 4 rather than 3 stars out of me was because of the fascinating backdrop of Finland and Finnish life. Firstly-- everyone appears to know everyone else in Finland (hey, it's a country of only 5.4 million, I guess it's possible). Secondly-- the fact that everyone gets such whopping vacations over there is something I've known for a while. What was startling was the fact that they might have to hire part-time police officers to cover the vacation breaks. I worked as a prosecutor. If you could get a day off you were some kind of miracle worker.

I am no great expert in Finno-Scandinavian crime fiction. I've seen most of the Wallander TV series starring Kenneth Branagh (bleak and despairing, but highly recommended), and I've read one of the source novels. Other than that, I'm only familiar with one other Nordic police procedural, and this series debut from Finland. There seem to be some common strands, though, that are in stark counterpoise to the Anglo-American traditions. Most notably, murders are regarded by the police with horror and repugnance, rather than jaded acceptance (accompanied by stiff upper lips or Lennie Briscoe-style quips). They are evidently comparatively rare enough in these northern countries to still be viewed as shockingly disturbing breaches of the social order, to the point where they're almost unfathomable when outside the context of drunken brawling or gang violence. Based on the way the officers react in these books, I am sometimes reminded of the line from the movie "Demolition Man": "We're the police! We're not trained to handle this sort of violence!" Secondly, the protagonists spend a lot of time thinking about how they hate their jobs, yearning for the day they can quit. That's markedly true of this book's heroine, who in some ways is almost a rookie and yet already wants out. Thirdly, none of these novels have much in the way of the Angry Captain shouting at the detectives to make arrests, or the Schmoozing Insider telling them that the commissioner wants this case closed quickly and quietly.

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