



Paper, Scissors, Death

Joanna Campbell Slan

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Every scrapbook tells a story. Memories of friends, family . . . and murder?

Mousy housewife Kiki Lowenstein has two great loves: scrapbooking and her young daughter, Anya. But her happy family album is ruined when her husband, George, is found naked and dead in a hotel room. As Kiki tracks down George's murderer, she discovers his sordid secret life.

Cruel taunts by George's former flame compel Kiki to spout an unwise threat. When the woman is murdered, Kiki's scissor-sharp words make her the prime suspect. She could be creating scrapbook keepsakes for the rest of her life-behind bars. Supported by her loyal friends, along with a little help (and a lot of stomach flutters) from the dashing Detective Detweiler, can Kiki cut the true killer out of the picture and design a new life for herself and Anya?

Paper, Scissors, Death Details

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From Reader Review Paper, Scissors, Death for online ebook

Sarahlynn says

Have you ever read a book by someone you know? It's a bit dangerous, because there's always the chance that you won't like it. Or, worse, that it will really suck. Then what do you say?

I'm no scrapbooker. In fact, I'm not very crafty at all. I know how to make neat homemade candles and fill jars with delicious recipe mixes. That's as close as I get to "craft" other than, you know, writing.

So when Joanna Campbell Slan, president of the Greater St. Louis Chapter of Sisters in Crime, announced that she had a mystery publishing this month, I was thrilled for her, excited to see it, and a little bit worried. The worried part came from the fact that this is Paper, Scissors, Death, the first in a series of "Scrap-N-Craft" mysteries starring Kiki Lowenstein.

I needn't have worried. Kiki the professional victim drove me a little crazy at first, as I'm more of a (less hairy) Dodie, myself. But I loved the way Kiki's friends Dodie and Mert quickly signed her up for "Tough Tamales University, School of Hard Knocks" and toughened her right up. "No More Mrs. Nice Guy," indeed.

What I'm saying is that I was hooked from the first word to the last. I finished the book this morning, and have spent the rest of the day still thinking about Kiki's life and imagining what will happen next. The characters were real to me, the sense of place was perfect, and the mystery was solid, deftly handled.

One of my favorite things about this book was the setting. I love a good book set in St. Louis, and this one was more so than most. It wasn't just the names of the streets and malls: I know those Ladue moms! I loved how Kiki held her flashlight like she was Albert Pujols at bat when she was going after the intruder in her house. I used to live right near Kiki, Anya, and Gracie's "transitional neighborhood!" And, yes, she did manage to work, "What high school did you go to?" into the story.

But it's not just local flavor. Slan is a great writer with a real knack for description. When she's depressed, Kiki sees a November sky like mixed concrete. The whole book is full of great little observations like that. And while most of the book is very fast-paced and funny, occasionally Slan slows things down with some fabulous descriptive prose. Witness this image of an early spring trip out to Babler State Park: The earliest spring flowers - jonquils, crocus, and snowdrops - had faded on yellowing stalks. The next wave was gathering courage to burst into bloom. Bare tree branches were tipped in a watercolor wash of celery, celadon, mint, lime, and olive. In a week or two, the skyline would shout hosannah with verdant life.

Lovely.

Kimberly says

I debated what to give this book. I ended up with 3 stars. There were good parts and bad parts. It started on the slow side, and there were some major editing issues... Several chapters at the beginning were out of order, later, the MC claimed she did something and I couldn't find that she did. Eventually, the pace picked up. I knew who the killer was early on, although I did suspect someone else for a short time. The MC was

both likable and unlikable, at the same time. Sometimes, she asked questions about things she was told (like not believing her husband's death was just a heart attack) while at other times, she just believed what she was told, no questions asked (that her husband stole half a million dollars from his business partner). I felt for her at times, all the bad luck she had, and other times I couldn't believe she let people run all over her. It was driving me nuts. In the end, I'm not sure if I'd read others in this series. I do have another one that I got free, so I might try it, but we'll see.

Marie Tovaas says

Couldn't put it down!

It's almost two am, and here I am writing a review at this hour of the morning. The story creeps up on you as slowly but surely Slan hooks you into her characters. Then there is the scrapbooking. It's not a sideline, it's integral to the story and the solution of the murders. While I am not a scrapbooker, I am a lifelong knitter. The level of artistry in Kiki's work is easy to understand, and how it shapes her life, work, and even her worldview. Read this fascinating book and fall in love with an artist, a mother, a widow, and most of all, a great human being...with a bullet wound. Now go find out how that happened!

Sabrina says

So, I actually had already read the second book because I didn't realize this was a series. This one was kind of hard to read because a few of the relationships I had already established were being set up, but by the end I was happy. I think it's super cute how the author integrates the scrapbooking into the mysteries without putting it in a way that would be annoying to a non-scrapbooker. Plus, the little tips and tricks from "Kiki" are great to have. If you're a fan of mysteries and slightly girly books, then I'd highly recommend this.

Sheila says

Tightly written murder mystery where Kiki knows something is not right about her husband's death but it looks like natural causes to the police. She keeps at it until she can get a detective to see it her way.

These are excellent characters and an excellent story. Every time I thought I knew who the murderer was, they got killed or were guilty of some other crime. I did not guess until the end as it was being explained to me. I cannot wait to read the next one.

Julie Failla Earhart says

Writing is all about writing what you know---or what you are willing to research. Author of at least eight books about scrapbooking, Joanna Campbell Slan mixes her passion for scrapbooking and her passion for writing, and viola! Paper, Scissors, Death: A Kiki Lowenstein Scrap-N-Craft Mystery was born.

This first book in what appears to be a series finds the rich-but-down-to-earth Kiki learning that her husband

George has died naked in a St. Louis motel room. The reader knows it's murder and not something as lurid as a heart attack during an afternoon delight, but Kiki doesn't.

Kiki not only has to deal with George's two-timing death, but he's left her without a penny to her name. She has to sell her gold Lexus and find a way to support herself and her daughter Anya. It doesn't help that there isn't enough money for the staples, but Anya's private school costs more than Kiki could possibly make in a year. George's mother is willing to do anything for Anya, but she despises Kiki's mere existence.

Kiki, a scrapbooker extraordinaire, turns to her hobby for income. She gets a freelance gig at the store she frequented when she had money. One of her first jobs is as the instructor at a bridal shower. Kiki makes a supposedly cutting remark to one of the shower's guests. When the guest, also an old flame of George's turns up dead, Kiki is the primary suspect. I didn't really understand that logic as the remark was rather lame.

Nonetheless, Kiki not only has two murders to solve, but someone has broken into the shabby place she and Anya now call home.

Paper, Scissors, Death: A Kiki Lowenstein Scrap-N-Craft Mystery was a fun and quick read. I enjoyed the scrapbooking tips Slan gives. Not a scrapbooker myself, the hobby sounds complicated, but it did not get in the way of this light-hearted, fun cozy. I'm already ready for Kiki's next adventure.

review originally published on www.armchairinterviews.com

Lacey says

Star rating: 3.5 stars

When her husband is found dead of an apparent 'heart attack', Kiki Lowenstein knows that that can't possibly be the case. George was found to be in perfect health after his last doctors visit, so immediately Kiki knows something is wrong. But after losing her house and most of her possessions because of George's shady business dealings, Kiki just hasn't found the time to investigate his death properly. It isn't until after George's supposed mistress is found shot to death in a mall parking lot, that Kiki's line of questioning starts to draw some attention... But not the kind of attention she was looking for.

This was a cute cozy mystery. It wasn't amazing but it wasn't completely awful either. Kiki is a hard character to pin down. While most of the time she takes things lying down, she's also had a really difficult life and doesn't seem to know any better. It isn't until the last third of the novel that Kiki really starts to come out of her shell and stops letting people railroad her. One of the main reasons why I lowered this novel from 4 stars to 3 was its lack of action. There is a lot of plot building and character development but there's also a ridiculous amount of scrap booking advice. I understand that the main character is an avid scrap booker and works at a scrap booking store... But it doesn't need to be reiterated every 10 pages! We get it, Kiki loves scrap booking! Otherwise the characters were fun, I especially liked Anya, Gracie, Detective Detwieller and Mert. I'll pick up the next in this series sometime and hope it's even better than this one.

Nancy says

First, the lead character, Kiki Lowenstein, came across to me as being too dumb for words. Her husband had a heart attack, or was it murder, under rather questionable circumstances and his business partner swooped in a little too quickly demanding repayment of missing funds,. What woman who has an 11 year old to support would just up and sell everything she owns to pay back a supposed half a million dollar debt. No proof, no paperwork, no anything. Dumb.

Second, if you are being investigated for murdering said husband, why would the lead investigator come to your home and make dinner or was it breakfast, for you? Any episode of Law and Order would show you that this would never happen, and it doesn't matter how cute your great dane is.

I am really beginning to question this whole cozy mystery genre. Many of the books are just getting ridiculous, the same plots are used over and over with only the location / business / craft / and pet de jour changing.

When I first started reading cozies I loved them. The writers were unique but now it appears that anyone can jump on this bandwagon and publish a book. Sort of like Harlequin does cozies, but without the bodice ripping.

The plot is simple. Kiki Lowenstein, a scrapbooking extraordinaire, is accused of murdering her husband, her mother in law thinks that she is now an unfit parent, her husband's ex-business partner is demanding repayment of missing funds. Her husband's girlfriend is making a nuisance of herself, and wants Kiki to make her a scrapbook. Sells her million dollar home in record time and her fancy cars, keeps daughter in private school at all costs, can't have your friends talking about you. Live in substandard conditions, own a dog that is too cute for words, and when that isn't enough, in walks a police detective who will either charge you with your husband's murder or make you a meal.

Barbara George says

Ok some things seemed poorly researched. Like the spaghetti sauce made with a can of paste. The ignorance and gullibility of Kiki to just give up everything she owns and pay someone a half million dollars without some research. Seems like the depth of her reality is in scrap booking only. Good story but sometimes hard to accept how bad things keep hitting her and she just accepts them. I didn't feel sorry for her I wanted to clobber her with a well made scrapbook.

Allyson Abbott says

An easy read, which I really enjoyed.

Kitty says

I expected to really enjoy this book, and while I found it a bit disappointing, I think the *series* has

potential.

The good: I did feel that the quality of writing was a cut above the usual "crafty cozy mystery". There were some great lines - a few actual laugh-out-loud moments. And I thought the author did a terrific job of incorporating scrapbooking into the story. It didn't feel like an afterthought - clearly the author scraps herself. In fact, the book inspired me to pull out some paper and scissors myself.

The bad: without giving away any major spoilers, the main character has clearly been a doormat her entire life, and continues to be trampled all over for most of the book. I like to see a main character triumph over adversity as much as the next person, but there was a lot more trampling than triumph here. I found myself getting depressed along with the main character, as things went from bad to worse. This woman could not get a break anywhere. It was just too much.

That said, I am curious to see where the series goes from here. Everything I didn't like about the book could easily be taken care of in the next one. It was a "good" book... it just wasn't a "fun" one.

Jeanie Jackson says

I adore this series and have been waiting anxiously to read Paper, Scissors, Death ever since I heard that Joanna Campbell Slan was getting the rights back. For many series, if I don't start with the first book, I can't make myself go back because the later books are usually better, not so with this series. Every book is equally awesome! It was great to see the beginning of Kiki's working relationship with Dodie and to see more of her early relationship with Mert and Detweiller. We get the very beginning in the prequel, Love, Die, Neighbor. The mystery is really well plotted but it will always be the great characters that keep me coming back.

I have difficulty holding print books so I had to wait for the ebook and I loved it. I finished about 6 am!

Sandra says

This was one of the best cozy mysteries I have read lately - - - until the last line. I resent authors that leave the reader up in the air in hopes of selling their next book.

I would have rated it 4.5 but 4 is all I can give simply because of the ending.

Read on my Kobo.

June 2016 - I read it again while on holidays and thought the same way about it.

Barbara ★ says

[Kiki's husband, George's business partner tells her George stole/borrowed a half million dollars and she has to pay it back to protect George's reputation AND SHE DOES!!!! She asks no questions, she just sells her

house and give him the money. And not only that but she goes from being a rich woman living in a mansion to a poor one living in a hovel and doesn't complain not even once. Seriously? WTH? What planet does KiKi live on?

Moondance says

Two days before Thanksgiving, a man doesn't think about dying.

Kiki Lowenstein's husband, George, dies in a room at the Ritz-Carlton of an apparent heart attack. Or so she is told. The aftermath of his death reveals that he owes his business partner half a million dollars and his mother is the beneficiary of his life insurance. This leaves Kiki and her daughter Anya in quite a mess. Kiki goes from being a part of high society to working at the scrapbooking store she frequented. Bits of gossip make Kiki suspect that George was murdered and she begins her own investigation much to the concern of Detective Chad Detweiler.

This was an average read for me. Some of the pacing of the story was odd. I found it hard to believe that Kiki accepted the fact that she owed half a million dollars to George's partner yet questioned so many other things. I liked Dodie, the owner of Time in a Bottle. and Kiki's former housekeeper, Mert. Her former friends were pretentious and annoying. It was amazing how quickly supposed friends turned their backs. I didn't mind the budding romance between Kiki and Detweiler as much as I thought I would. Kiki's mother in law was a horror. I felt so badly for Anya every time she had to go with her grandmother.

One of the best things about the story was Gracie the Great Dane and the various dogs that Kiki looked after. The scrapbooking tips were good even though I am not a scrapbooker. The cliffhanger ending was just enough to make me want to read the next book.
