



Wildfire at Midnight

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Midnight on Skye: a young crofter's daughter is cruelly and ritually murdered on the bleak Scottish mountainside. Very soon Gianetta Brooke, a guest at the deceptively idyllic Camasunary Hotel nearby, finds herself tangled in a web of rising fear and suspicion. When she discovers that her ex-husband has booked into the same hotel, the peaceful holiday for which she had hoped takes on quite another complexion.

Wildfire at Midnight Details

Date : Published 2011 by Hodder (first published 1956)

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Author : Mary Stewart

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From Reader Review *Wildfire at Midnight* for online ebook

Misfit says

Page 142, "I turned to look back at Blaven, only to find that the mist was, indeed, rolling down the slopes behind us like a tide of smoking lava. Blaven was already invisible, and a great wall of mist bore steadily across the glen behind us, obliterating the afternoon."

Can that woman write or not? Seeking relief from her hectic life as a model as well as the crush for the 1953 coronation, Divorcee Gianetta leaves London for a vacation at rustic resort on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, although she's a bit flummoxed at the surprise appearance of her ex-husband Nicholas Drury as one of the inn's guests. Gianetta soon finds herself in the midst of a murder mystery with a dead body or two and suspects everywhere - a local girl was murdered in a ritual resembling the ancient Beltane rites.

Soon two female guests disappear while climbing Blaven - but who was the third person seen heading towards the mountain with them? Could Gianetta be marked as the next victim? Inquiring minds want to know, but I am not telling - read it for yourself. This was a fabulous fast paced read and Stewart keeps you guessing to the very end with a doozy of a nail-biting finish set amongst the swirling mists, shifting bogs and the rocky crags of the Cuillin on the Isle of Skye. Written in the 1950's its a bit dated in places (I just cringed every time someone tossed a cigarette but down the mountainside) but other than that another solid read from Dame Mary Stewart.

Carol ?? says

[a broach that she believed belonged to a missing climber. Did she hot foot it to the nearest policeman. No, s

Nikki says

It was a grey and drizzly day, this morning — even if it brightened up later — so I felt like turning to one of my comfort reads. *Wildfire at Midnight* isn't one of my favourite Stewart novels, and indeed the sense of dread and atmosphere in the book makes it perhaps a touch darker than the others, especially with the moral conflict in the last part where Gianetta thinks she knows who did the crime.

The crime itself is pretty chillingly awful; I can't remember if any of Stewart's other novels features a mentally ill antagonist, but that's how it winds up in this one. And he is pretty unsettling, when you compare his later behaviour with all the rest of the book, and think about what lay under the surface... Not a comfortable thought, certainly. It's also not the warmest in terms of romance, since that's barely there — there's one or two great scenes which establish something, but not enough to really make you root for the relationship to happen.

So overall, definitely still not my favourite. But it's Mary Stewart: the writing is atmospheric, the heroine is self-sufficient, and the ending is, for the heroine at least, a happy one.

One thing I would like to know, from other readers — there's a scene early on where Gianetta is talking to the actress, Marcia. They're talking about the two schoolteachers who are there together: the rather sullen older one, Marion, and the younger one, Roberta. Marcia calls them "schwärmerinen". That seems to mean something to Gianetta, and she treats it as something scandalous/libellous — what on earth's the implication meant to be? I have the feeling I'm too young to know context.

Originally posted here.

Sara says

The front of my copy of this book says "Terror in the Hitchcock manner...a novel that terrifies as it entertains." That sums it up nicely. It is perhaps the most Hitchcock in nature of any of her novels. It is a bit of Agatha Christie as well...there is a murderer loose and it is definitely one of the fellow visitors or the townspeople involved with the hotel in which Gianetta (don't you love that name?) is staying.

I am going to be sorry when my quest to revisit all of Mary Stewart's novels is done. I have so enjoyed the ones I did this year. I don't have many more to go. I cannot express how these books transport me back in time...they are so new and yet so familiar to me. I am grateful that they are still available and that I have this opportunity to enjoy them once more.

Tweety says

Oh. My. Goodness. *What* just hit me?

Giantta is a divorcee, and with a little encouragement from her mother takes a much needed holiday... to the Isle of Skye. The instant Giantta sets foot on the island she knows something is wrong. No one seems to want to tell her just what is going on. When she gets to the hotel she doesn't have a chance to take it easy before she finds out that a ghastly murder had been committed and that her ex-husband, Nicolas Durey is on the island, in her hotel. Everyone is a suspect, right down to Nicolas. Worse, Giantta, may be the next victim, but why? Then Giantta goes alone up the mountain and the fog comes rolling down upon her, cutting her off from daffy and escape. Hurling her strait into the murderer's arms.

The chase through the bog, the mist carrying every intake of breath, the bog quivering with the murderer's soft footsteps as he calls Giantta's name through the fog gives ...

This was shivering suspense! I loved it so much! This book nearly strangled a scream or two from me, especially the bog and craggy cliff scenes. Just hear this passage : "It was uncanny and horrible, to look at someone's familiar face, to listen to someone's familiar voice, and to see a complete stranger looking out of (their) eye's."

Brilliant! This goes on my Top-2014-Reads shelf for sure!

Mary Stewart kept me guessing till the last chapter, literally. I feel I should have guessed who the murderer was, there were In-Your-Face clues, but I still thought, no it's not really him/her. It can't be! And Yet... all the clues said so. But beware of red herrings... they are there only to deceive.

PG for some imagery and the non-stop smoking

Isn't it a beautiful spot for a mountain sacrifice?

Dorcas says

contented sigh

I am so glad I decided to give Mary Stewart another go after being rather disillusioned with *The Ivy Tree* and *Airs Above the Ground* (which I never even finished). This book was the bomb it really was. Not *A* bomb, *THE* bomb, which is quite different!

A divorcee takes a much needed respite at a hotel on the Isle Of Skye only to find that along with an assorted group of climbers, fishermen, and writers, her ex husband has also turned up. It's not long before she is informed that a rather grisly murder took place just before she arrived. This alone would be reason enough to pack her bags and leave but before anything can be done in that direction, another guest goes missing...

I found this similar in vein to an Agatha Christie or M.M.Kaye's mystery series where you have a group of people, one of which is the murderer but no one knows who. So pretty spooky because there's no one to trust.

I loved the atmosphere of this novel, the writer really penned the area perfectly~ the obliterating mists that engulf within seconds, treacherous mountainsides and shivering bogs; Celtic superstitions and (in my case) shrieking anticipation.

It was a book where I had the killer pegged, then I didn't, then I did. So it kept you second guessing yourself which is what you want. All around a 5 star read!

CONTENT:

SEX: None

VIOLENCE: There are murders (described after the fact)

PROFANITY: Mild

PARANORMAL ELEMENTS: Not really. Old Celtic mountain worship is mentioned. But there's no "other worldly" i.e., ghostly happenings.

DRUG USE: A LOT of smoking!! One reviewer, my GR friend Laura counted 28 cigarettes. A sign of the times in which it was written but a little annoying.

MY RATING: PG

Linda says

3.5 stars

Are you in the mood for an older 'contemporary' gothic mystery? One that takes place in 1953 rather than the 1800s? Instead of a gloomy castle, there is an inn. And the setting has windy mountains rather than the

commonplace ocean and its cliffs. Wildfire at Midnight contained the token first-person tense, an unfaithful marriage, the heroine's need to get away and **murder**. Or I should say, murders. There are plenty of secrets with madness and mayhem and the final melodramatic scene of revelation.

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Four years have passed since Gianetta divorced Nicholas Drury. He was an older writer and she was employed as a model. They loved each other passionately before allowing their jobs and distance to affect their marriage. Now, Gianetta needed some rest and her parents were receptive to this. They encouraged her journey to Camas Fhionnaridh (or Fhionnarigh, the author spells it both ways) in the Isle of Skye, Scotland.

Typical of stories from this era, just about everyone smokes and enjoys a good drink; something to take the edge off after a trying day of vacation. Fishing, a form of relaxation, takes place at the oddest hours. And pleasure is found by scaling the mountains. That is, unless you spend time with someone else's spouse.

I am not sure why but I knew when a particular character was introduced that the person was the killer. It was more of what Mrs. Stewart *didn't mention* that clued me in. If you love some creepiness and a mystery with the feel of an old black and white movie –no Technicolor here!- look for this vintage short story of suspense.

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## Tammie says

3.5 stars. Wildfire at Midnight was mostly a good read. It was just over two hundred pages but it felt longer than that, mainly because of all the description and some of the back and forth dialog that went nowhere. While I don't always mind the description in Mary Stewart's books, I did find it rather boring at times in this one. I didn't really care what the rocky cliffs and mountainous ranges looked like all that much. A one-time brief description would have sufficed. However here are a couple of photos of the Isle of Skye where the story takes place and it is visually stunning.

I also got bored with some of the needless conversation between characters that sometimes felt never ending. There were two whole pages dedicated to people wondering if a couple of others they were out searching for had been found after one man motioned for another to come have a look over the side of a cliff. There was also a lot of sitting around and chatting with nothing really going on, but at least there was some good information given about the characters that way. It just went on a little too long.

Like all of Stewart's books this is a romantic suspense. I felt like the romance was really underplayed here, but at least there was no instalove. I also would really like to know what all led up to Gianetta's divorce as we as readers are left guessing a lot about what happened and only given some minute details. (view spoiler) I think the thing that bothered me the most about this book was how Gianetta responded to a woman about her husband cheating on her as though it was something that she just had to overlook if she wanted to keep her husband because those kind of things just happened. That mentality really irks me!

Mary Stewart could write some really edge of your seat suspenseful scenes and that's the number one reason I like her books and Wildfire at Midnight did not disappoint in that way. The parts when Gianetta was lost in the fog with the killer after her were the best, but the parts when she was sneaking around the hotel at night and looking after a character all night long that the police were protecting also kept me glued to the book. I

can't say that I was surprised at who the killer turned out to be, I pretty much picked him out right away as the number one suspect, but there were times when Stewart made me second guess myself.

In the end I liked this book a lot and as far as my enjoyment of it went I rate it in the middle of the pack of Stewart's books. It's not one of my favorites, but it's loads better than the Stormy Petrel which is at the bottom for me and above *Airs Above the Ground*. It was hard to decide which one I liked better. The one thing *Airs Above the Ground* had going for it that this book doesn't is that I felt like the main character was a bit smarter and more resourceful. In this book Gianetta lost points with me for a fainting spell and not being able to bring herself to protect herself against someone who was going to kill her. In the end she had to be rescued which annoyed me, however this book was still more entertaining and suspenseful than *Airs Above the Ground* so it wins out.

So far this is how I'm ranking the Mary Stewart books I've read:

1. *The Moonspinners*
2. *Nine Coaches Waiting*
3. *Madam Will You Talk?*
4. *The Ivy Tree*
5. *Wildfire at Midnight*
6. *Airs Above the Ground*
7. *The Stormy Petrel*

Review also posted at [Writings of a Reader](#)

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## **Olga Godim says**

### **2.5 stars**

Serves me right to select a read based on something other than literary merit. This one fit into my PopSugar Reading Challenge, but unfortunately it was blah. Not bad – Mary Stewart never wrote anything bad – but definitely not her best book.

Unlike her other romantic fiction, which usually occurs in some glamorous sunny locations like France or Greece, this one takes the readers to the remote, cloud-shrouded Scottish island of Skye. The landscape is forbidding, the mountains menacing, the weather gray and foggy most of the time, and the murders that pepper the plot are grisly and senseless. And of course, our heroine, a London fashion model, totally ignorant and unbelievably naive, is in the middle of the investigation. That's her relaxing vacation after all.

The romantic line that is usually strong in this author's novels is almost invisible here, a trace rather than a full-bodied line.

The tension builds nicely, but the slow moving of the story takes away from that. Almost half the page space is given to descriptions. They are lovely and atmospheric. In theory, they should've heightened the feeling of dread in the reader, but their sheer mass produced the opposite effect: they bored me. After a while, I started skipping them and rapidly turning the pages unread to get to the good parts – the action. Too much of anything is never good, neither in fiction nor in real life.

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## **MomToKippy says**

Phew! I am so glad to have finished this. Because there are too many scary things lurking in the shadows here at night.

I've read only two books now by Mary Stewart but I have a good sense of her style. This story unfolds along the same lines as *This Rough Magic*. The nail biting, edge of your seat action/mystery scenes come to life. There are lots of quirky characters. Her heroines are younger, more worldly Miss Marples and seem to fall into the middle of an unfolding mystery despite themselves. They are compelled to put themselves into the most compromising and dangerous situations. The little tidbits of awkward romance thrown in could easily be edited out though as they are not well developed. This sort of thing obviously is not her forte and detracts only (very) slightly. I suppose as these were written in the 50s, it was necessary to throw in a little handsome-man-to-the-rescue bit. Really though, these stories feature strong intelligent women who defy all odds.

This mystery takes place on an awe-inspiring mountainous Scottish island shrouded in mist and richly historical. The vivid imagery employed is so distinctively artistic and poetic. Stewart is worth reading just for the physical descriptions of surroundings and mood created and this is no different. She is genius at creating atmosphere. You will be transported and it is magical. I find myself rereading passages because they are just so intense and alive. Like admiring a beautiful painting, you can not just walk by.

I may hesitate to read more of her work only because the dark ominous tone and violence are a bit too much for me but I will not fault her for my preferences. If you enjoy being transported and are a fan of classic murder mystery and poetic prose, then run (don't walk) to Mary Stewart.

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## **Veronique says**

My second Mary Stewart novel. This turned out to be a rather good little thriller.

Gianetta, a fashion model, decides to get away from London and its madness, especially with the coronation around the corner, to get solace in a remote lodge on the Isle of Sky. She is met by breathtaking views of a timeless landscape but also by the news that a young woman has been brutally murdered and that all at the lodge are under suspicion, including Gianetta's former husband who happens to be staying there too.

Naturally, no one has an alibi and all could be the culprit, giving this story a kind of Agatha Christie style. It is different however. Stewart focuses more on the aesthetics of nature and the romance aspect (although here it is firmly secondary to the mystery) while Christie is more into psychology, but both can write tense and thrilling scenes.

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## **boogenhagen says**

The best chase and hide scene ever, this book is worth the read for the big stalking scene with the bad guy and the h alone, fortunately the build up to the big scene is pretty good too. Tho the romance was sub-par but typical of the time period.



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## **Sarah Mac says**

I have to say this was my least favorite Mary Stewart thus far.

While the prose itself has her usual elegance & descriptive flair, the plot was simplistic & the characters were flat -- especially the narrator Gianetta. MS's heroines are normally sharp as tacks & on their toes re: suspicious happenings & romantic intrigue; they're not fooled by bland excuses & obvious red herrings, even if they're playing along in the eyes of the other characters. It takes a lot to befuddle a MS heroine...but Gianetta was a dim bulb. She rushes to stupid conclusions (esp about her ex-husband) & repeatedly puts herself in dangerous situations by doing exactly what she shouldn't -- i.e., leaving the safety of the hotel. She also does very little to contribute to solving the mystery, which is important for gothic/romantic suspense gals.

Gianetta isn't alone in her flatness, though. The entire cast was bland in terms of MS's usual character development & mixed motives. The most interesting character was the middle-aged stage actress, but she left midway through the book based on a weak authorial whim (and we never did get to meet her mysterious limo driver, alas). The villain's crimes are interesting, & I don't mind the "he's batshit insane!" excuse for said murders, but we never got to know him very well. Likewise, the ex-husband was glossed over; we never learned exactly what he did to earn Gianetta's love-hate-love, nor why the marriage imploded in the first place. Frustrating.

Overall, the length of the book (very short) & the flat characterizations put me in mind of a Harlequin. While the writing was still a cut above Harley fluff, the Scooby-Doo mystery & nonsensical romantic turns (I hate you! But actually I've never stopped loving you! How could we not admit this earlier!) were more akin to slapdash Harlequin antics than Mary Stewart's finely-tuned characterizations...so I'll grade it according to my HQN scale.

Harlequin Scale says: 3 stars.

Not a terrible book...but don't expect MS's habitual awesomeness.

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## **Moonlight Reader says**

Stewart was such a capable writer that she could've written a textbook and made it worth reading. This one wasn't her best, but it was still very good, indeed.

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## **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

I have a collection of vintage Mary Stewart novels, and this one is only 175 pages in my 1963 paperback, so it's a very quick but enjoyable read. A bit different than Mary Stewart's other romantic suspense novels, this one has echoes of the old murder mysteries where a group of people in an isolated setting are gradually offed one by one, while the group frantically tries to figure out which of them is the murderer. The story is set in the mid-1950s, against a backdrop of Edmund Hillary's historic climb of Mt. Everest and Queen Elizabeth's

coronation.

Gianetta, a young British fashion model, relates in the first few pages her whirlwind romance with a tall, dark and handsome novelist, Nicholas Drury, and their divorce after only a few years as their relationship quickly fell apart and she caught Nicholas cheating. A few years later, Gianetta, now in her late 20s, impulsively decides to do some R&R in a lonely hotel on the Isle of Skye. When she arrives a couple of major shocks await her: the hotel guests include her ex-husband, Nicholas, and everyone in the hotel is on edge because of the recent murder of an 18 year old girl on the nearby mountain, Blaven.

To make matters worse, the murder appears to have been in the form of a ritualistic sacrifice. And then there is another murder on the mountain, and a vanished girl, and yet another murder--and it becomes apparent that only one of the hotel guests could have done it. The pace of the story accelerates as danger stalks Gianetta and the other hotel guests.

There are some really hair-raising scenes in the last part of the book. A scene in a fog, where no one can see more than 10 feet through the mist, and the murderer is searching for Gianetta because she Knows Something, just about had me crawling under my bed.

And then Gianetta, running blindly through the mists, runs herself into a quicksand-like bog . . .

And then . . . well, never mind. :)

Minus one star for Gianetta being a little too "damsel in distress" at the end (complete with fainting scene! (view spoiler)), for a bit too much of a "boys will be boys" attitude, and for promoting the idea that one mustn't make too much of a stink over a straying husband:

Gianetta: "Do you want to keep your husband or don't you?"

Wronged wife: "I--of course I want to keep him! What a silly question!"

Gianetta: "Then leave him alone. Don't you know yet that there's no room for pride in marriage? You have to choose between the two. If you can't keep quiet, then you must make up your mind to lose him. If you want him, then swallow your pride and shut up. It'll heal over; everything does, given time enough and a bit of peace."

While I agree with pride being a real stumbling block in a relationship, it's a false dichotomy to say that if one partner cheats, the other has to choose between keeping quiet or losing that person. There's a lot of room for heart-to-heart discussions without saying things that will damage the marriage irrevocably (assuming you still want to try to save your marriage). And I don't think keeping quiet about adultery ever helped a marriage much. Maybe it kept the couple together, but at what cost? Still, I'm able to roll with it here because (view spoiler).

Despite these missteps, I do think this is worth reading if you like old-fashioned murder mysteries. Mists and mountain climbing will never be quite the same to me again!

