



The Waters of Eternal Youth, by Donna Leon
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, August 2017

Essential to every successful mystery series is an intrepid detective solving crimes in an atmospheric locale. *The Waters of Eternal Youth* is Donna Leon's twenty-fifth novel featuring Commissario Guido Brunetti and set in majestic Venice. Indeed, Venice is itself a character, full of intrigue, winding narrow streets, and decayed elegance.

Commissario Brunetti, himself from a modest background, is married to Paola, the daughter of a wealthy count. One evening, attending posh dinner party at his in-laws' exquisite *palazzo*, Brunetti is seated next to Contessa Demetrian Lando-Continui, the matriarch of one of Venice's oldest families. She asks Brunetti to see her tomorrow, as she has an important request.

Before Brunetti visits the Contessa, he stops by his office and asks his resourceful assistant Signorina Elettra to look into reports about the Lando-Continui family. Signorina quickly recalls that many years ago the Contessa's teenage granddaughter Manuela nearly drowned in a terrible accident.

Intrigued, Brunetti then visits the Contessa at her grand *palazzo*. Sitting together in room filled with centuries-old antiques, the elderly Contessa implores Brunetti to reopen her granddaughter's case. Fifteen years ago, teenage Manuela somehow fell into a canal. Alas, by the time she was pulled out by a local alcoholic, she had been underwater for too long and suffered brain damage. Sadly, Manuela, now 30, has the mental capacity of a child. The heartbroken Contessa wants answers: Was Manuela pushed and, if so, by whom?

Brunetti delves into the case, searching for the erstwhile hero who had rescued Manuela. He also visits the childlike Manuela, hoping that something will jog her memory. Before her accident, Manuela was an accomplished equestrian; Brunetti visits the stables where she rode. However, while Brunetti is investigating, someone out there will stop at nothing to keep him off the track.

As mysteries go, *The Waters of Eternal Youth* is a neat little package. But Brunetti is too mellow an investigator for my tastes. I prefer edgy, acerbic detectives like the brooding Venetian Aurelio Zen, of the late British writer Michael Dibdin's Italy-based crime series. Start with Dibdin's *Dead Lagoon*, and you'll be hooked.