

The Time for Murder is Meow

T. C. LoTempio

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Local politics mask a killer's identity in T. C. LoTempio's cozy *The Time for Murder is Meow*, a case set in a Connecticut town that is the buoyant start to a new series.

TV actress Crishell McMillan has just returned to Fox Hollow to take over her aunt's pet shop, the Purr N' Bark, when a bullying doyenne sparks a confrontation. She later turns up dead, and the fact that Crishell is first on the scene raises suspicion. Eager to clear her name, Crishell investigates with the help of her former costar, Gary; fellow small business owners; and her intelligent cats.

Amid the charm of restarting the pet shop and sometimes petty red herrings, the main characters pull the plot through its patterned twists and brisk interrogations. It tilts toward a handy tip-off, but the final reveal is satisfying because of its exploration of the lengths an obsessive murderer will go to in order to cover their trail.

Crishell and Gary—whose former roles on the *Spy Anyone* series equipped them just enough to piece together leads, if not enough to face real danger—have a comfortable rapport. Gary embodies a mix of star-powered flair and thoughtful concern that plays off Crishell's reckless independence. Both find themselves drawn to Fox Hollow, despite the townsfolk's habit of feeding the grapevine with alarming speed. Side plots on love for several characters add intrigue.

In this WASPy setting, characters don't always display thoughtfulness. Crishell's worldview makes it possible for her to casually remark "Too bad I don't have any blackface makeup" instead of calling it "greasepaint" in a scene where she's dressing to stay unseen.

Fans of feline mysteries will relish *The Time for Murder is Meow's* pet shop framework in this story of finding one's second act.

KAREN RIGBY (July/August 2019)

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