

To Solve This Murder, Follow the Dog

Author Blaize Clement strikes a familiar, and wonderful, chord with dog-centered murder mystery.

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If you've read and enjoyed the murder mystery series of Susan Conant ("Gaits of Heaven: A Dog Lover's Mystery," Berkley), Cynthia Baxter ("Putting on the Dog," Bantam), and even Sue Grafton ("S is for Silence," Berkley), you are sure to enjoy the second book in Blaize Clement's series about pet sitter Dixie Hemingway, who seems to find a dead body around every corner.

When I first started reading "Duplicity Dogged the Dachshund" from St. Martin's Minotaur, I thought perhaps Clement was a pen name of Grafton's. As a young writer, I planned to use the name Paige McClarion, so I smelled a literary play on names in "Blaize" (who names their child this?) and "Clement" (C. Moore of "A Visit from St. Nicholas" fame).

Catching a scent of mystery, I went to Clement's website, but found a photo that looked nothing like the creator of the Kinsey Millhone series. So, I'm pretty sure that Grafton, whose new book "T is for Trespass" comes out in November, did not, in fact, write "Duplicity."

Clement is much better at making a mystery last.

Her second book starts simply enough, with Dixie's discovery of a dead body. Well, Dixie doesn't exactly discover it. One of her pet-sitting charges – a Dachshund named Mame – does. The tale unfolds, as most such murder mysteries do, with suspect upon suspect dangled before us, then discarded, despite Hemingway's past as a sheriff's deputy, or perhaps because of it.

Part of the appeal of Clement's book, and Grafton's series as well, is the attention to detail that lets you picture the protagonist, her home, and the area where she lives, and the purported bad guys:

"By the time I finished the calls, it was time to leave for my afternoon visits. I took a quick shower and put on fresh shorts, a clean T and clean white Keds, and slathered sunscreen on every inch of exposed skin. Except for our father's black eyelashes, Michael and I inherited our mother's blond coloring, so I fry after just a few minutes of sun."

Clean, crisp descriptions like this contrast beautifully with the ever-twisting plot.

Tripping around Siesta Key, Fla., to Hemingway's various pet-sitting jobs makes the book of particular interest to dog and pet lovers. And, of course, Dixie's personal history hooks us:

"Maybe my prolonged mourning was really a revolving fear, a hamster wheel I ran on because I didn't have the courage to move forward. My mother had run away physically. Maybe I had run away emotionally. The question was, What could I do about it? The answer was, I didn't have the foggiest idea."

Fortunately, the erstwhile detective develops clarity as her unofficial investigation continues.

Further driving us through the book is that we do want to know who killed the very nice, rather odd, man who owned a Doberman Pinscher named Reggie. We also want to know whether it's Dixie who pinpoints the real murderer.

This book isn't for children, but any adult who doesn't object to graphic sexual descriptions, some contemporary profanity, or homosexual relationships – and who likes this genre and pets – should enjoy it thoroughly.