



The Merlot Murders

Ellen Crosby

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A phone call at two thirty in the morning is never good news. Lucie Montgomery's semiestranged brother, Eli, calls her in France to tell her their father, Leland, has been killed in a hunting accident on the family's five-hundred-acre Virginia vineyard just as the fall harvest is about to begin. By the time he calls, Eli has already made funeral arrangements with what Lucie argues is indecent haste.

It is an emotional trip home -- the first since an automobile accident two years ago, which left Lucie disabled and dependent on a cane. Her family's once elegant home and winery are now shabby and run-down, thanks to her father's penchant for fringy business deals. Eli, also cash-strapped and desperate to support his new wife's extravagant lifestyle, has already convinced their rebellious younger sister, Mia, to sell the debt-ridden estate and reap the profits from the valuable land it sits on, overruling Lucie's protests.

On the eve of the funeral Lucie's godfather, Fitz, a partner in the family business, tells her Leland's death was no accident. Whoever killed him was motivated by the potential sale of the vineyard. It is the last conversation she will have with Fitz. Now the lone holdout preventing the vineyard sale, Lucie realizes she's next in line for another "accident." With her greedy brother, hell-raising sister, and a seemingly cut-rate vintner hired by Leland just before he died, all the suspects are disturbingly close to home. Unsure whom she can trust, Lucie must uncover the truth about the deaths of her father and godfather -- and oversee a successful harvest to save the vineyard she loves.

Set in the historic heart of Virginia's horse and hunt country, *The Merlot Murders* is filled with fascinating detail about the science and alchemy of wine making.

The Merlot Murders Details

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From Reader Review The Merlot Murders for online ebook

Anna says

I like mysteries, thrillers, detectives, police procedurals, you name it. And while I have a few favorite authors (Camilleri, Connelly, F. Kellerman, Larsson etc etc), I'm always worried that I soon run out of the cases by my favorite detectives, so I'm constantly searching for new mysteries to fill the future void and to expand the horizons. If I like the author, great, if not, at least I tried. And I would or will try another Wine Country mystery if one will cross my paths in the future...

What I really enjoyed about this mystery was all the details about winemaking, and about the region where it was based. Lucie, the protagonist, was fascinating too (she does not like being told what she can and what she can't do). And there was enough twists, action, intriguing characters and things happening for a cozy type of mystery. (I guess they also help me define my favorite ones much better: I can do one or two occasional cozy mysteries, but too many of these cause diabetes. I need something much manlier, like Connelly, Ludlum, Forsyth, for most of the time)

I'd recommend the book for those who like light, cozy, bubbly mysteries. If I had to define this book as a wine flavor, I'd say it was more a chardonnay than a merlot (merlot needs more body... bodies in this case, stronger flavor, way more aftertaste flavors, and makes you be able to drink more than a glass or two when you want. And less feminine flavor). There is a perfect blend of characters, and a good amount of things happening in this cozy mystery. (It's not this book, it's me. I just need WAY more twists, like in a Connelly, way more outrageous things happening, like in a Ludlum, and way more masculine writing, lke right now Forsyth).

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E says

Okay, yeah sure, I usually prefer more hard-boiled, dark detective fiction with PIs or police procedurals and avoid mysteries with cheesy titles (like this one) and amateur-sleuth-driven plots (fill in here all of the food-related, cat-protagonist, knitting, botany mysteries with the pun-filled titles, and you get what I mean). But having recently moved back to Virginia, I was seduced by the setting in the Virginia wine country and any excuse to think about drinking wine.

While the plot will not knock anyone's socks off, and the characters are sound rather than scintillating, both are solid enough to keep one reading. The real scene-stealer here is, well, the scenery. Crosby has a talent for capturing the mood imbued by an old, ruined French chateau, a vineyard at sunrise, the Blue Ridge mountains hovering behind mist in the distance, and many other details that give the book a few more layers of complexity than one might expect. And while the sidebar explanations of wine and winemaking can be a bit discursive, they are interesting and informative to readers interested in tidbits about wine.

The book also does a good job of avoiding the cloying, annoying cutesy characters often found in this type of mystery. While the plot is a bit formulaic, the protagonist Lucy's learning to regain equilibrium after her foot has been permanently damaged in a car accident lends an undertone of weary maturity to the 26-year-old's

otherwise charming (there, you have to use that word in reviewing this type of mystery) naivete, appropriate for her character's experience with the world.

Stephanie A. Cain says

I really enjoyed this one. The main character, Lucie, is an engaging character, and the setting is like a character of its own. You learn a lot about the process of growing grapes and making wine, as well as the history of the Virginia wine country.

Lucie Montgomery has needed cane to walk since the accident that ended her relationship with Greg Knight two years ago. She went to France to recover and only returns to America when her father is found dead in the family vineyard. There she discovers her younger sister dating Greg, her brother ruled by his high-flying lifestyle, and the family estate mortgaged to the hilt.

As she struggles to keep the vineyard and make the harvest, more bodies turn up, and she has to face the fact that someone will stop at nothing to persuade her to sell the farm. Add in a vintner with a mysterious past and old high school friends, and you have a nice blend for a good mystery.

I'm definitely looking forward to the next volume in the series.

Cathy Cole says

Having read and enjoyed Ellen Crosby's Sophie Medina mysteries, I was looking forward to reading this first book in her Wine Country series-- even if I don't like wine. I found *The Merlot Murders* to be every bit as intelligently written and absorbing as *Multiple Exposure* and *Ghost Image*.

Lucie Montgomery is a complex character, and the plot certainly isn't short of family dynamics with her obnoxious brother Eli, his greedy wife, and their gullible little sister. There's also a head vintner on the property whose motivations aren't very clear.

Added to the first-rate mystery are fascinating snippets of the history of wine making in Virginia. Between this series and Martin Walker's series set in France, I have a feeling that I'm going to end up being a very knowledgeable oenophobe. Crosby also gives an outline of Lucie's family history as well as the house and vineyard. This information put me firmly in Lucie's No Sale camp, but it also made me wonder why no one else in the family felt the same way.

See? Although the mystery is taken care of through the course of *The Merlot Murders*, I'm left with questions about Lucie and her family, and this is definitely going to make me continue reading the series. Bring on the chardonnay!

Sandie says

A murder mystery deftly intertwined with instruction in the basics of wine making as well as a little Virginia

winemaking history is the imaginative cocktail offered up by author Ellen Crosby in *The Merlot Murders*.

Lucie Montgomery is an improbably heroine with an equally unlikely occupation. She is a woman who overcomes obstacles, both physical and emotional as she delves into two mysterious deaths while fending off a former lover, an abrasive vintner with a questionable past, assorted inquisitive friends and neighbors as well as a couple of greedy siblings.

Ms. Crosby has presented us with a myriad questions to be answered before this mystery can be solved. Was Lucie's father's accident really murder? Who killed her godfather, Fitz? Where is her mother's priceless diamond necklace? Who is secretly trying to buy the family winery? What secrets are her brother and sister-in-law concealing? Who is responsible for the near-fatal "accidents" that have befallen Lucie? There are an abundance of suspects, all possessing means and motive for murder.

Ms. Crosby's tale is a charming and unusual variation of the run of the mill murder mystery. Whoever would have thought of utilizing fermenting wine bubbles as a murder weapon? Who knew that wine fermentation could produce a lethal dose of carbon dioxide? Obviously Ms. Crosby does.

Diana Mott Davidson and Ellen Crosby appear to be kindred spirits. While one tempted us with *Killer Pancakes*, the other has produced an uncommon story that packs a one-two punch by combining interesting historical information with a captivating read that keeps you entertained from page one.

Suzanne says

This was a hard book for me to get through until I decided to gloss over the constant references to Jefferson wanting to start wineries in Virginia.

And I like history but this got to be too much.

For me there were too many characters and the main character seemed to be defined by her disability which occurred in an auto accident and not the fact that she is a strong and determined woman.

I have to admit I would have put the book down by the 3rd chapter but the writing is very good. Will I read any more in the series? I'm not sure. I would like to know what happens to some of the other characters who were there and then just disappeared, mainly because I don't like loose ends, but I won't be hurrying to get the next one.

Cathy Daniel says

Ahhhhh I LOVED this book! The ending was my favorite as she clearly is going to be smarter about men and moving on. (See my prior updates lol) can't wait to read more in this series!

Chaitra says

I've been reading good cozies for a while now, and this book is a sort of return to my old history with them.

So Lucie's not completely stupid. No, scratch that - she *is* completely stupid. She gets into accidents that are not her making, sure, but her *I'm completely fine* reactions are over the top and annoying. Her crutch is that she literally has a crutch to walk with having had an accident that mangled her leg. I would think that would make her more concerned for her well-being after an accident, but she seems to be set on proving herself Superwoman.

I can't also relate to a woman who knowingly gets herself into relationships with bad boys. I mean, her latest guy gambles with the money she got as her accident settlement, gets her into dangerous situations with the mob and she still doesn't kick the man out. He clears out her entire money out as a result and she just takes it with resignation. Apparently this we're supposed to sympathize with, but her brother isn't allowed a relationship with a sexy gold-digger. I'm not sure what the difference is, and how it is not hypocritical. Not that I cared for Eli, but at least agreed with him when he repeatedly exhorted his shrill sister to calm down.

I didn't care much for the information dump about wine making - I like drinking it, not particularly its making. And since I don't think I've drunk a single wine that was made in Virginia, the location wasn't particularly interesting either. The murder mystery itself is sub-par. I deduced who the murderer was by eliminating every single person our heroine suspects. There was one person she studiously did not look at, and sure enough, that was our killer. Never mind motive. That wasn't important. Since this is fairly standard for most cozies, what I would look for is a good supporting cast. That was severely lacking in the book - there was not a single person I cared for or related to, not a single colorful character. Disappointing. I will give the next couple of books a try, because sometimes they change for the better, but it's not something I'll do in a hurry. 2 stars.

Lesley Looper says

After reading a couple other books in this series, I decided to go back and read the first one. I'm glad I did, as it gave me some history for the rest of the series. Each book could probably be read on its own just fine, but it's nice to have some background information sometimes. This book was a little on the dark side (deaths, betrayals, injuries, and such), but still a decent read.

Hannah says

I blame my dark eye circles and constant yawning today on this book; I made the mistake of starting *The Merlot Murders* late last night with the thought that I'd read a few chapters before retiring to bed. That never ended up happening, because it was simply *impossible* put the book down. I must confess, first of all, that I know virtually nothing about wine and have little interest in it. I don't even like drinking it. But it speaks to Ellen Crosby's excellent writing that I enjoyed not only the intricately woven mystery and characters, but the glimpses of the wine production process.

First of all, there's something about *The Merlot Murders* that feels so... vintage. In fact, the countryside atmosphere is so well-crafted that I was under the impression that it had a historical setting for quite a while. Something about it speaks to lovers of romance; there's something wonderfully earthy and realistic about it. Perhaps it's the way the setting is largely distanced from the trappings of modern technology? Whatever it is, I loved it.

The mystery is refreshingly not a straightforward one, nor is it so much centered on murders as it is about a web of characters, each with their own secrets and motives to hide. It was fascinating to watch everything unfold as Lucie returns to her home – to face the painful past that she'd left behind, and reconnect with the people she thought she knew, but had changed beyond recognition. There were two murders in total, both of which were very much rooted in secrets buried in the distant past. In a way, it's a story of how far people can be driven by greed, and it's the type of mystery that I like best; driven by the human condition.

Remarkably, none of the characters are particularly likeable. Even Lucie is too judgmental and bad-tempered, and Quinn is not only ornery but has a rather off-putting physical description. However, they make interesting character studies, and it is proof that you don't necessarily need likeable characters for the book to be an enjoyable one. Besides, it leaves them considerable room to grow in later books, which is an exciting thought.

BJ Rose says

I didn't realize this is part of a series when I picked it up - in fact, I didn't figure it out until I got to the end of the book and thought there should be more to the story, so I looked up the author's name and discovered more Wine Country Mystery books. Don't get me wrong - the murder mystery in this one is nicely solved, it's the family story that continues on. The author does a very nice job of getting the reader into the mindset of the winery owners, and there's a wine primer of sorts scattered throughout. I imagine this will continue in succeeding books, along with more of the story on what so far is a very dysfunctional family. And it looks as well that the titles will be alliterative - the next one is The Chardonnay Charade

James says

3 stars to Ellen Crosby's The Merlot Murders. I was very much looking forward to reading this book and in the end, I was glad I did. It was a complex whodunit mystery with a few side stories and a great new series full of interesting characters, settings and possibilities.

Story

Lucie returns home to Virginia from France after her father passes away. Some whispered it was murder, but her siblings just want to sell the family home and winery to be able to move on. With a new vintner, and some very distinct changes in personality of former friends and family, the 2 years Lucie's been gone since her car accident seem to have resulted in a significantly new landscape.

Lucie is determined to keep the winery and through a few deals and the will reading, she believes she can afford to keep it open, assuming she doesn't fall prey to the killer who seems to be out for her family. After uncovering a few truths, some hidden money and more motives that she could imagine, the surprise killer is one of the trusted.

Strengths

1. The setting and backdrop are fantastic. The land and environment is beautifully described. The wine-making process is detailed but not boring. The characters are clear and match Virginia expectations.
2. Lucie is an admirable protagonist. She has her flaws but she is determined and is very real. I would like to be friends with her.

Weaknesses

1. The ending is abrupt. As is typical for this type of story, the killer is revealed and the true motives become clear. But then it ends with a one-page wrap up of what happens next. I want to know how Lucie handles the new money, understand more about the necklace and papers found with it, and learn what happened to this year's wine harvest. While I'm sure some are covered in the next book of the series, I think an additional chapter was needed to roll out the ending of this story in a typical Virginian drawl.....

2. Lucie is flawed which is perfect for any hero or heroine; however, her taste in men is quite bad. For such a smart woman, she seems to allow her boyfriends to do things she wouldn't let anyone else in her life get away with. I'm not sure I believe that she was just blinded with love over Phillipe or Greg or anyone else. I think she should be a little smarter in this area.

Final Thoughts

I really appreciate the value of this new series. It's not a cozy, but it's not quite a thriller. It's a good whodunit mystery with some great characters and lots of possibilities. I look forward to picking up another story in this series.

About Me

For those new to me or my reviews... here's the scoop: I read A LOT. I write A LOT. And now I blog A LOT. First the book review goes on Goodreads, and then I send it on over to my WordPress blog at <https://thisismytruthnow.com>, where you'll also find TV & Film reviews, the revealing and introspective 365 Daily Challenge and lots of blogging about places I've visited all over the world. And you can find all my social media profiles to get the details on the who/what/when/where and my pictures. Leave a comment and let me know what you think. Vote in the poll and ratings. Thanks for stopping by.

Joanne says

I was going to give this 2 stars, but since I'm planning to read the next book in the series, I guess I must have liked it a little more than that! I listened to this book, and I must say I really enjoyed the descriptive language more than I probably would have had I been reading the book. Plus, I've noticed that the second book in a series is often better than the first, so I'm cautiously optimistic!

Partially crippled in a car accident 2 years ago, Lucie Montgomery has been living in France with her no-account boyfriend when she learns her father, Leland, has been killed in a hunting accident and is summoned home by her brother Eli to the Virginia vineyard where she grew up to attend the funeral. Upon her arrival, she is bombarded with all kinds of news! Her brother and her little sister, Mia, want to sell the vineyard, Mia is sleeping with Lucie's ex-boyfriend, Greg, (who caused the accident that crippled her), and Fitz, her godfather and partner in the vineyard tells her that he thinks that Leland was murdered. Fitz's murder seems to lend credence to his assertion that someone may indeed have killed Leland. The vineyard is in financial trouble, but some mysterious person or group wants to buy it, and Lucie is the next target since she is adamantly opposed to selling the vineyard with all of its rich history and the family home. Several people had motives to kill her, but the murderer came as a surprise to me!

I had a little trouble relating to Lucie even though I liked her determination to continue with the wine-making legacy. She seems to have a bit of a chip on her shoulder due to her bad leg, and she carries her insistence that she's "fine" all the time a little too far. Normal people call the police and go to the hospital when their car has been run off the road and rolled over several times - they're not "fine!" I like a little

quirkiness in the heroines in cozies, but mortal stupidity really annoys me! I DO want to see what happens in the next book, though!

Ed says

#1 in the Wine Country Mysteries. Lucie Montgomery takes over a struggling vineyard in Virginia horse country in this cozy mystery series debut. Interesting wine lore abounds but Lucie's personal interactions do not always ring true. Her brother and sister-in-law are caricatures. Her vintner wants to run the vineyard and winery with a free hand but Lucie argues that she is knowledgeable about the business and demands that he take input from her; the conflict runs through the book but her expertise is never really demonstrated.

Wine Country mystery - Lucie Montgomery, an American ex-pat who's been holed up in France for two years, returns to her family's vineyard in the Virginia countryside after the death of her father in a supposed hunting accident. Once home, Lucie discovers that the vineyard is collapsing under huge debt; her brother, Eli, has turned into a materialistic jerk; her little sister has taken up with Lucie's ex; and her godfather, Fitz, has become a lush. When, on the heels of papa Montgomery's funeral, Fitz is found dead, Lucie's suspicions are stoked. These deaths were no accident, and suspects abound.

Angela Holland says

I know I have said this about cozies before, but I loved this book. I enjoy all cozies that I read but this even more than others. One thing I like is that there was a little history involved in the story telling. Lucie is a person that I liked from page one, I even felt sorry for her at times even though she I think she can be a strong person. Greg made me want to reach in the book and slap him silly as well as Eli. I did not like either of them. Quinn is a person that one minute I liked and the next I did not. I still think there is some sort of mystery behind him that I hope to find out more about in future books. This is a series that I plan on continuing. There are many people that this book can appeal to, wine lovers, history lovers and mystery lovers. The history of wine and merlot in particular was very interesting to me. I recommend this book to all. I give it five stars.
