



Mysteries & Collecting

by Christine
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I have a confession to make: I play with dollhouses.

But I'm not the only one who does. Thousands of adults like me not only collect, but also enjoy reading about collectors and collections, even in their mysteries.

Mysteries, especially those in the cozy and amateur detective categories, have changed over the years. The books have evolved from sleuth-centered stories to stories about sleuths and their pets, professions, or interests.

This trend has produced a crop of books in which the main character is also involved in a craft or hobby. Some detectives knit, crochet, scrapbook, or make dollhouses when they're not solving the mystery or finding the killer.

My new book, *Searching For a Starry Night*, focuses on the search for a missing miniature replica of Van Gogh's famous painting, "The Starry Night."

Besides checking out potential suspects, my sleuth Sam and her best friend, Lita, with the "help" of a mischievous Dachschild named Petey, naturally explore several dollhouses and miniature scenes in hope of locating the missing painting. Many of the items described in the book are from my own personal collection.



Not everyone likes this trend. Some readers prefer their mysteries on the grittier side. I've read mysteries like that myself, and I also get my share of gore when my darker half indulges in reading or writing horror, but mostly I find myself gravitating towards the lighter kinds of mysteries, the ones that make me smile or laugh out loud. Even so, sometimes there is a limit. A recent discussion on the Dorothy-L mystery email list had some readers saying they enjoyed such mysteries, while others didn't like reading about hobbies they didn't share, especially if they overwhelmed the mystery.

From my viewpoint, part of the fun of doing a hobby is not only reading about it, but also sharing it via photos, my website, and by writing about it. I enjoy such mysteries, even if I've never tried the particular craft and never

will. The crafters have a zest, humor, and a sense of creativity that I like. It's the fun of creating that makes them attractive, and makes them good sleuths. After all, you have to be imaginative to be a crafter or hobbyist, a good quality for a sleuth to have. Then there's the "fun" factor. People do crafts for pleasure. The same goes for the sleuths.

Truth be told, I'd rather take a detour into a dollhouse show, a soap-making lesson, or a scrapbooking class than be subjected to the up-close and sometimes too personal *CSI*-style forensics that is so prevalent on TV and in many crime novels.

So make me chuckle, give me a sleuth with real-life problems, (but not too many, please), throw in a craft or hobby along with a pet or favorite food (chocolate, of course), and you've made me happy. In *Searching For a Starry Night*, I've tried to do the same.

Searching For a Starry Night, Christine Verstraete, Quake/Echelon Press, June 2008, \$10.99