

WHAT THE CLUCK? IT'S
MURDER

JACQUELINE VICK

CLASSICAL READS

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*To Buster
May we meet again.*

ONE

“You can’t make me.”

I took a hurried step back from the source of my fear, stumbling over my own feet in the rush. The solid chest of Detective Martin Bowers broke my fall. He hooked his arms under mine to help me catch my balance.

Normally, I’d enjoy physical contact with the handsome police officer, currently off-duty. However, my attention remained on the black eyes that locked onto me in an unblinking stare. It didn’t take a pet psychic, which I was, to tell those eyes held more than contempt. They held murder.

The eyes belonged to the snow-white face of a Leghorn hen, and she showed no signs of the happy, *av shucks* attitude of Foghorn Leghorn, one of my childhood cartoon heroes.

Why on this beautiful early afternoon in March was I, Frankie Chandler, reluctant communicator with all things furry or feathered, facing off with a vicious hen?

It goes back to my best friend Penny’s wedding cruise last fall. There had been laughter, tears, and a few murders.

Not that the murders were part of the agenda. They just happened, and I discovered the first body below my state-room balcony.

Penny tattled to Detective Bowers in Wolf Creek, Arizona, and she made it sound as if I was a damsel in distress. That irritated me to no end, as Martin Bowers had made it clear he wanted nothing to do with me. It wasn't so much that he couldn't handle the embarrassment of dating a pet psychic. The clincher came when he, while holding my hand, got caught up in one of my psychic experiences with an angry feline, and he didn't like it.

What a baby.

Anyway, he responded to Penny's request for a White Knight and joined the cruise a few days later, and in between finding corpses and searching for the kitty who held the key to solving the murders, Bowers and I had a few friendly moments. At the end of the cruise, the normally stoic detective approached me in an unusual state of nervousness to ask for another chance at romance. Or maybe it was a first chance since we had never made it to an actual date.

That was the good news. For balance, there had to be bad news. Bowers also wanted me to meet his sisters. All seven of them.

Yes, seven. After the death of his mother, Bowers had been raised by a week's worth of sisters who doted on him as if he were the pearl without price. The invitation to meet his guardians, the guardians who would hate me for stealing their little brother away, was as enticing as a naked run through a minefield. I expected disapproval in the form of tight-lipped silence and sarcastic comments. Maybe a voodoo doll. Still, it was important to him, so after a few months of dating, and I mean honest-to-goodness dating