*Coffee, Shopping, Murder, Love* rev. by Annette Ruiz

Carlos Allende

Red Hen Press

Carlos Allende was born in 1974 in Mexico City but currently resides in Santa Monica, California with his husband. Allende says that he knew he wanted to be a writer since he was a little boy, but surprisingly, he holds a BA in Economics and a Masters in Global Management. Additionally, he obtained a PhD in Media Psychology. Currently, he’s an instructor at UCLA Extension where he teaches in the Writers’ Program and even developed his own course, The Psychology of Compelling Storytelling. Allende’s previous novels include *Cuadrillas y Contradanzas*,a melodrama set in Mexico, and *Love,* *or the Witches of Windward Circle* which is a horror story set in Venice, California. Allende is openly gay and says that he knew since he was young, and his sexual orientation along with living in California influenced his latest novel, *Coffee, Shopping, Murder, Love*, which was published in June 2022.

*Coffee, Shopping, Murder, Love* is set in modern day California and tells the story of Jignesh, a gay Indian man who is trying to cover up the hidden bodies in his freezer, and Charlie, Jignesh’s “lover” who sold him the freezer. This story is extremely humorous even though it deals with murder, which makes the novel even more enticing.

“*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fucketty, fuck.* I killed a woman. I killed a woman.I killed an innocent woman. But I have a plan. I have a plan. I do have a plan, don’t I? I’m panting, I’m driving and panting. I cannot breathe, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what God am I supposed to pray to in these situations? Help me, Lord Krishna. Help me and I promise to never swear again by the name of a Christian god.”

Even though Jignesh is a murderer, the reader finds themselves rooting for him. Allende wrote the book in an interesting way where every chapter switches between Charlie and Jignesh’s point of view, but when we get Jignesh’s perspective, we are forced to place ourselves in the position of a murder and go through the flow of his actions. Because the book is written in a lighthearted tone, the reader does not feel the same horrified or repulsed emotions that they would have if Allende wrote Jignesh to be the typical evil killer. When Jignesh murders someone, the reader doesn’t feel like he is doing it because he is pure evil or full of hatred; Jignesh regrets it and panics and those emotions are so human and not like the monster we would expect a murderer to be. Allende humanizes Jignesh and the reader sympathizes with him. *Coffee, Shopping, Murder, Love* pulls the reader in every time Jignesh gets close to being caught and has the reader turning the page, hoping that he won’t get caught**.**​​ The novel’s “partners in crime,” Jignesh and Charlie, spice up the book with their unhinged commentary and inner monologue that make the novel fun and entertaining. Their comments leave the reader giggling at the absurdity of their thought process.

This novel is written in a way where we feel like Jignesh and Charlie are directly speaking to the reader through the pages. The use of first person contributes to this but the writing style itself is what feels intimate and allows the reader to easily imagine what the characters are going through. It allows the reader to easily immerse themselves in the plot and connect with Jignesh and Charlie.

“Besides, I’m a little upset about what happened last night. Whoever said that killing is easy never committed a crime. Or carried a body into a freezer. What did I yell when I hit Justin? Something rather silly. I take a sip of my coffee. Something like *Bazinga!*

*What are you laughing at?* Clara asks through the Google chat.

Shoot. I forgot that everyone can hear anyone’s farts in this office.”

The combination of humor with dark tones of murder make *Coffee, Shopping, Murder, Love* a funny yet suspenseful read, and it lures the reader in with each page full of Jignesh and Charlie’s unhinged commentary and panicked inner monologue from Jignesh.