

Capitol Murder

Mike Brogan

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Capitol Murder is a compelling thriller that looks inside the United States's health care system.

In Mike Brogan's political thriller *Capitol Murder*, two ambitious women working to see universal health care legislation passed in the United States experience the violent lengths that powerful men will go to in order to protect their profits.

When Ellie Nelson's father, a state senator, dies, she knows that she may need to step into his political role and see his work on the USMed Bill, a comprehensive coverage plan, completed. She did not know that she'd be solving his murder—and that other senators would be murdered for the same reason.

Working with her friend Madison, alongside the police and FBI, Ellie comes to realize that pro-USMed politicians and activists are being targeted. Many of them are killed with a fast-acting nerve agent that's introduced into their bloodstream in a mysterious, novel way. Ellie lands in the crosshairs herself: for-profit health care industries stand to lose millions, even trillions of dollars if the bill passes, and some businessmen are willing to do anything to stop that from happening.

Ellie and Madison are smart and competent women with a passion for their work; their conversations contain staggering statistics about the United States's for-profit health care system, medical debt, and premature deaths. Such rigorous details are paired with stories that humanize the numbers and generate righteous empathy for the women's cause. Madison works in advertising, creating USMed commercials; her perspective sheds light on how communication via videos can turn the tide of popular opinion and political voting. Ellie is a lawyer determined to see her father's important work finished; her ability to stay calm in times of crisis and listen to her intuition help in the task of tracking the killers down.

There are many in Ellie's world who want to see her father's legislation destroyed; the main villain is the for-profit health care industry as a whole, though. Those who want to see it protected are portrayed as greedy businessmen who get rich from people's pain and death. The interplay of politics and money is highlighted in the book's coverage of Super PAC contributions, backroom bribes, and blackmail. The person pulling the strings is left a secret for much of the book, resulting in tension. Ellie, Madison, and the police piece together the major players in a slow fashion.

The novel's clear social commentary is woven into conversations and characters' inner thoughts. That the USMed Bill is the connection between the murder victims is established on repeat, after which the procedural aspects of detective work become a point of focus. A budding romance between Ellie and her bodyguard is underdeveloped, though; a hasty fast forward covers their future later on. Still, between the nerve agent and the legislative vote, uncertainties and excitement linger. The book's resolution makes room for more Ellie and Madison adventures and drops a topical, but surprise, ending.

Capitol Murder is a compelling thriller that looks inside the United States's health care system, whose villains are taken on by two women who embody strength and compassion.

DELIA STANLEY (August 23, 2021)

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