

Carlotti

David Dalrymple

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In the compelling mob thriller Carlotti, a grieving man sets out to solve his mother's murder.

In David Dalrymple's intriguing thriller *Carlotti*, a plastic surgeon digs into his mother's suspicious death while trying to avoid the pull of his family's mafia connections.

Nick is determined to avoid the shadow of his mafia boss father Rock's legacy by throwing himself into his career as a plastic surgeon. When Liza, his mother, dies in a car crash, the police rule that her death was accidental, but Nick is suspicious. He learns that she was seen in heated discussion with a state senator hours before her death; the senator is soon tied to the mysterious death of a Brazilian lounge singer as well. More dark connections spring up, tying Nick's mother to the senator, and then back to Rock. Local detectives are slow to make the connection, so Nick races to find the truth. He, too, is targeted by someone in the shadows.

The conspiracy behind Liza's death is intricate, leading to a compelling mystery that's followed throughout the book. Careful foreshadowing and hints that might go unnoticed build this story up. Nick becomes the perfect person to perform the unofficial investigation due to his prestigious career and family connections. The characterizations are layered as well, and the pain evoked when each person endures hardships is realistic. In the meantime, Nick evolves from a rather self-centered person into one who's concerned with doing what's right, and who has frequent clashes with authority figures over proper procedures. His transformation occurs not just because of the loss of his mother, or even because of the trauma that he endures while striving to uncover her killer, but because of a rewarding connection that he forms with a fellow doctor who expresses deep faith.

The story is anchored in Philadelphia, where Nick's family is from. There, his investigation is followed in taut, steady terms. However, when he continues his investigation out of state, the story is less centered. Still, the prose is attentive to details, from characters' responses to the impact of traumas, to the procedures of Nick's day job and the makings of Liza's secret side projects. While not all of these elements add to the core mystery, they deepen the sense of Nick's engaging world. And while Liza's killer is revealed in the closing chapters after several satisfying developments, the real enjoyment comes from what Nick does after coming to terms with his mother's death.

In the redemptive mob thriller *Carlotti*, a man sets out to solve his mother's murder while working through his grief.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September 1, 2021)

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