

Carry the Dog

Stephanie Gangi

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In Stephanie Gangi's elegiac, absorbing novel *Carry the Dog*, a woman reevaluates her photographer mother's exploitative opus.

At fifty-nine, Bea is pained by revived interest in the Marx Nudes, her mother Miriam's 1960s series. Its photographs featured Bea and her twin in sexualized poses. A MoMA curator and a Hollywood producer wants to bring Miriam's work back into the limelight, calling it seminal and sensational. Bea wonders whether preserving her mother's artistic legacy will harm or heal her.

The novel is artful in intertwining Bea's present with her past. In New York, she copes with aging and tries to foster relationships; she recalls her rock-and-roll youth and marriage, which saved her from despair but led to eventual disappointments. Taped interviews created during her mother's notorious counterculture days arise, too. This startling collage is laced with constant insights, while poetic sequences cover the circumstances surrounding Bea's family. The reflective mood and intense narration recreate the artistic world of a bygone era; even the characters' names allude to famous photographers, from Berenice Abbott and Ansel Adams to Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Ultimately, Bea casts blame aside to achieve a more nuanced state of bereavement—though she stops short of feeling full sympathy. Miriam's abusive actions obligate survivors to reconfigure their ideas about the past, and to accept truths without excusing them, all while learning to establish new boundaries to protect themselves. As Bea sifts through archives and her inherited traumas come into focus, she also begins to consider how her father enabled Miriam. The photographer herself is rendered as a troubled, talented woman working against the confines of her times. Though there's dark psychology involved in it, *Carry the Dog* is also a novel about hope and renewal.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2021)

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