

House of Harwood: A Novella

Olivia Batker Pritzker

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House of Harwood is an intriguing novella, especially for those who enjoy stories about family secrets, function, and dysfunction.

In *House of Harwood*, a mystery novella by Olivia Batker Pritzker, the Harwood family's Thanksgiving dinner drama turns the tables on a centuries-old, cultured clan. As one family member drops his silverware and loosens his shirt collar, hidden animosities are about to be uncovered. Will the Harwood family's stellar civic reputation be put to the test when they are placed under the microscope of local law enforcement?

House of Harwood is a small book with big story to tell. The narrative moves from a seemingly innocent choke-on-a-turkey dinner to an intriguing revelation of a conflicted family. Through chapters set up as flashbacks, each character's relationship with other family members is brought out. Catherine, for example, has never known what it feels like to care about another person in any real way. Then her daughter is born, and every decision Catherine makes is to preserve her daughter's happiness, future, and well-being—all more important than her own.

The writing is delightfully skillful, and the timing of character development is superb. The plot reveals characters' motives and intentions in a timely and succinct manner. Victor Alden, for example, introduced early in the book as being his wife's "delightful prince" and not from a "good family," is revealed, through a subtle plot, to be a less-than-stellar spouse. This causes his wife, Victoria, to become less trusting and more possessive and jealous. During dinner, Victor lets his mind wander, and a sinister idea comes to him, "unfurling beautifully in his mind like a gray silk ribbon."

The downside to having a large cast of characters is the potential for confusion, especially when one character is missing for a time, and two others share the very similar names of Victoria and Victor. With advice from a book designer, a page listing each character and mentioning his or her relationships with other characters would be helpful.

The story line is easy to follow and understandable. The serif font and the width of margins help make the book attractive and quick to read. The front cover is simple and refined, though the font used in the title could be a little thicker.

House of Harwood is an intriguing, interesting little book, especially for those who enjoy stories about family secrets, function, and dysfunction.

JOAN E. PHELPS (March 2, 2015)

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