



Malpractice! The Novel

William Louis Harvey

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The story deftly shows how malpractice suits often present compromising situations and rarely result in clear answers.

A girl's life will never be the same, and the impact of a fall may reach far beyond the physical injury she suffers. In fact, it may shatter the medical field and a few doctors' lives forever. In his novel, *Malpractice!*, William Louis Harvey depicts a fictional medical malpractice case, explores malpractice litigation in the 1970s, and considers how a shift in legal actions transformed the medical field.

Harvey delves into why malpractice suits suddenly gained unprecedented wins and the reasons malpractice insurance costs began soaring. But the novel also ponders whether believing that one is right in the fight for justice ever justifies bending the truth, especially when that truth is more gray than black and white.

Paul Butler, a preeminent malpractice attorney, takes the case of a young girl injured in a playground accident. In court, he argues the medical treatment she subsequently received was substandard. The defense attorneys argue otherwise. So what if Paul must stretch things just a little bit? The point he's making is the truth—he believes. Meanwhile, doctors' reputations and practices are on the line—good doctors who had the best intentions when caring for the girl, yet have a few things to hide. The stakes for both sides are high.

The novel covers a transforming social change that writers rarely explore. Well crafted and realistic, the story deftly shows that neither side of the courtroom drama emerges with perfectly clean hands, leading readers to see malpractice suits often do not have clear answers.

Though most of the courtroom activities feel spot on, occasionally courtroom observers overreact, weakening the realism of the scenes. There are also points when the plot seems too thin to carry the weight of the story line. This weakness becomes especially evident when the suspense of chapter endings is forced: "After the lunch break, Charles Quick and his team...would present the defense's case."

The primary way Harvey follows his characters outside of court is through their sex lives, in graphic scenes often told through flashback. This overattention to just one aspect of their lives feels disconnected from the rest of the book, and a tendency to tell rather than show creates flat characters and undermines the story: "The relationship began with a symphony concert, opera, and some excellent restaurants, and they were in bed together after the third date. The sex was good...she was particularly pleased by the contrast with her ex-husband."

The novel's premise starts strong. Yet, its execution gets a little off track, maybe like the story itself: doctors with great intention and skill couldn't achieve the desired outcome. Nevertheless, *Malpractice!* is a bold attempt to examine an interesting time period and an issue that impacts our society today.

DIANE GARDNER (November 26, 2013)

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