

Only in America

Luciano Cannucci

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In the thriller Only in America, the US's cultural vulnerabilities are exploited, and an innocent man is threatened with prison.

In Luciano Cannucci's thriller *Only in America*, a Canadian visitor is caught up in a controversial US legal battle that spirals into a chaotic international mystery.

Larry is an average Canadian who likes beer, hockey, and his work. Then, in a hotel bar on a business trip to the US, a beautiful woman strikes up a conversation with him. After the exchange sours and the woman trips and injures her head, Larry's life collapses. He's accused of assault and is dragged off to jail. The police and the public presume that he's guilty.

Larry's resourceful, well-connected lawyer, Benjamin, feels confident that he can turn the situation around—even as Larry's employer, the media, a corrupt mayor, and the Twitter-obsessed US president weigh in on Larry's case, intending to make an example of him. Secrets and oddities redouble, all of them with unpredictable repercussions. When videotape evidence calls Larry's presumed guilt into question, the influence of Larry's adversaries is tested.

Larry's attentive, focused inner thoughts convey his personality well. He handles the frustration of being falsely accused in a steadfast manner, and the situation itself is tense and empathetic. And Benjamin is developed in terms of how he welcomes conflict with powerful opponents. He is devout in terms of his willingness to fight for Larry—and to turn tragedies into opportunities. Through these men, the novel follows as police and politicians proclaim Larry's guilt to the world with an increasing sense of delayed justice, even planting the seeds for revenge.

But Larry's adversaries are not as well developed: both the mayor and president seem modeled after topical figures, and are fleshed out only insofar as they test the limits of their power and engage in back room deals. Their exchanges are repetitive, and they don't hold interest beyond their actions.

Throughout the story, the reliability of the US justice system is called into question, as is the value of the twenty-four-hour news cycle. Such commentary on American culture is voiced in conversations that are driven by people's egos, though. Further, the story is thick with information on police procedures and legal processes; while the covered problem-solving leans into violence, people's end games are directed by litigation. A slew of everyday details and minutiae slows the story, whose meandering middle focuses too much on the president, with Larry's story sidelined in the process. Hinted-at twists emerge toward the book's end, resulting surprises and personal reveals that challenge people's established roles. The resolution is rushed through, though.

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DELIA STANLEY (March 23, 2022)

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