

The Impostor: A Medical Mystery

Pamela Triolo

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Right to die and other medical issues are tackled in this well-developed tale told from health-care workers' point of view.

Pamela Triolo's second novel about nurses could easily be ripped from the headlines. *The Impostor* tackles timely themes of end-of-life care and the right to die as one chooses. These issues are linked together by a strong group of characters: health-care workers at the Texas Medical Center.

The cast includes Santos Rosa, a compassionate, patient-centered, twenty-something Latina nurse. She works with her Caucasian best friend-cum-boyfriend, Patrick, who wrestles with his feelings for Santos while trying to deliver the best quality care. Into the mix comes Staci, a solicitous Caucasian newcomer who manages to fit right in, but may have something to hide. Together, the trio navigates the hardships end-of-life care, and what happens when relationships, both inside and outside the office, turn deadly. The author's fast-paced, engrossing medical thriller requires a high suspension of disbelief, although it succeeds at entertaining, with well-developed characters.

The trio of protagonists is multifaceted, each with their own internal conflicts, and Triolo writes each chapter from a different character's viewpoint. Santos, in particular, possesses many layers. In addition to wondering how to keep her team of colleagues running smoothly, she also juggles her dueling feelings for Patrick and thoughts about her Latina heritage. Triolo adeptly makes heritage a part of Santos's identity, but does not define her by her racial ancestry. "Though Colorado had great Tex-Mex food, there was nothing like homemade family specialties, recipes passed down for generations in a family that had immigrated to the United States from Mexico decades ago."

Staci, too, is a well-developed character: a con woman of sorts with a good heart. The plot stretches credibility with Staci's actions because, although Staci is quite smart, it seems too easy for her to parlay a stolen nurse's license and knowledge that she gained from an Emergency Medical Technician course into a position on Santos's team of nurses. The author compensates somewhat for these dubious circumstances by making Staci strong enough to face down her enemies and legitimately have empathy for her patients.

The antagonists are one-dimensional sociopaths whose sole purpose is to behave in an over-the-top, evil manner in order to contrast with the protagonists' goodness. The novel would pack a bigger punch if the abusive boyfriend and the cold, unfeeling nurse had more to their personalities than their malevolent motivations. Occasionally, Triolo's insertion of statistics and facts about end-of-life care comes across like an info dump rather than information deftly woven into the story line.

Triolo adds texture to her prose through well-placed use of similes and metaphors. For example, Patrick's friend Nick is described as "tall and lean as a flagpole," with "the metabolism of a hummingbird and the nose of a beagle."

The uninitiated may have difficulty wading through all the nurse-specific terminology, even though Triolo defines most of it. This novel will interest anybody who works in or is intrigued by the medical field.

JILL ALLEN (December 1, 2014)

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