



When All the Lies Are Told

Michelle L. Rodgers

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Michelle L. Rodgers's mystery novel *When All the Lies Are Told* features strong women, family secrets, and sensual details.

Micah, an executive in her wealthy family's publishing business, wakes up with what she at first thinks is a hangover. She soon discovers that she's been "gutted from stem to stern" and is in a hospital bed. She's escaped death thanks in part to the helicopter that whisked her to a hospital with a weapon embedded in her spine.

The book's first few chapters are told from Micah's point of view as she struggles to recall what happened; they hold back information and tantalize the audience. Micah's injuries appear to have resulted from a gory fight between her and her powerful grandfather, whose body was found at the scene. From her hospital bed, she learns that she's the primary suspect in his murder. The family is so drenched in privilege that they expect the murder to be fixed. But, to play it safe, they hire an experienced trial lawyer, Ariel. By the time Ariel takes the case, it's clear that Micah and those in her orbit are keeping many secrets that will need to be uncovered if Ariel is to defend her client in an effective manner.

What starts out as a straightforward murder mystery gathers complexity as Micah reveals the depths of her family's legacy of violence and her attraction to Ariel, both of which are further complicated by Micah's erotic interest in dominance. Micah has a reputation for being promiscuous, for caring little about her sex partners, and for abusing drugs and alcohol. In addition to this boozy, cocky persona, she's also a savvy businesswoman who's in tune with digital trends in journalism and the democratization of media. "Now that every damn person owns a cell phone with a camera your gig is up. Every person out there is now a witness. Every person is now a reporter," she says at a board meeting, arguing for an end to her family's use of media to amass political power.

A refreshing range of distinctive women characters in relationship to one another propel the story, while figurative language assists in the advancement of the plot. One plot twist follows another as the case moves into the trial phase, where the book takes liberties with legal terminology and procedures, sometimes at the expense of clarity. Micah's much younger brother plays a mysterious role as the trial commences that brings additional family secrets out in the open. However, the book's shifts between points of view are not always signaled in a way that maintains this momentum.

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MICHELE SHARPE (February 25, 2021)

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