

## Call Me Carmela: A Dot Meyerhoff Mystery

**Ellen Kirschman**

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In Ellen Kirschman's stunning mystery novel *Call Me Carmela*, a police psychologist helps a teenager find her birth parents, exposing secrets that endanger everyone involved.

Dot, a contract psychologist with the police department, stops for her usual breakfast at Fran's Diner. The owner is distraught: Her eighteen-year-old goddaughter Ava is missing after having discovered the name of her birth mother. Ava wants more information, but in response to her prodding, her adoptive parents, Dan and Sharon, go "ballistic."

When Ava shows up at the diner, Fran asks Dot to mediate. Despite her misgivings, Dot agrees, seeing herself in the brash, insecure teenager. She contacts Ava's birth mother, Iliana, who is reluctant to discuss the brutal circumstances of Ava's conception. Still, after mulling it over, Iliana agrees to meet Ava.

Ava presses on with Dot's support. However, in her indignation for herself and Iliana, she often acts without considering the consequences of her choices. The relationships around Ava implode, with the adults resisting forward movement: Dan returns to destructive habits, and Dot keeps revisiting her decisions with a previous client, a rookie police officer who committed suicide.

The story is tense and realistic, focused on people's inner conflicts and harmful and self-serving reactions. The short, urgent chapters often end with piquing questions. And Dot puts Ava's story into greater context by discussing California's adoption process, her own experiences as a teenager, and her professional responsibilities and ethics.

*Call Me Carmela* is a thrilling novel in which a police psychologist and an adopted teenager face betrayals and threats while digging into circumstances of the younger's birth.

LYNNE JENSEN LAMPE (November / December 2024)

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