



Malignant Assumptions

Carrie Rubin

Indigo Dot Press (Aug 27, 2024)

Hardcover \$24.99 (266pp)

978-1-958160-10-7

A sharp and curious doctor in training is just the right tour guide through the labyrinthine murder mystery novel Malignant Assumptions.

Carrie Rubin's series mystery novel *Malignant Assumptions* is an entertaining whodunit with an unusual heroine who investigates a suspicious death while working as a pathology resident.

In this series title, Liza, who self-describes as a “schizoid,” drives a fellow pathology resident, Megan, to Boston to check up on her Aunt Fiona, who's gone missing. When Liza and Megan discover Fiona's flattened body inside her Murphy bed, Liza refuses to accept that the death was an accident. She undertakes an unauthorized, reckless investigation into Fiona's death. She is driven more by curiosity and obsession than concern for her bereaved colleague, though.

Liza's investigation leads to the discovery that Aunt Fiona's sexual proclivities were outré, which in turns leads to a “date” with a creepy, oversexed fifty-five-year-old doctor. He takes her to an “intimate space, dimly lit with wall sconces and overhead chandeliers that emit a golden hue, [boasting] a spattering of central tables, half of which are occupied by patrons in various stages of undress.” In turn, this leads to an encounter with Nyx, a dominatrix named after the “goddess of night, a child of chaos and darkness and one you don't want to mess with”; Nyx turns out to be an invaluable ally, including when Liza faces outside trouble.

Indeed, for Liza, the investigation is but one of multiple challenges she's facing, expanding the novel's scope. She's supposed to be devoting her time to a grant proposal for a research project, and its due date approaches. Further, a disputatious former convict, Chopper, is blackmailing her over a misunderstanding. And after returning from Boston, she also helps to rescue her brutish landlord mid-heart attack.

Blending humor, suspense, and character-study elements into its storylines, this is a compelling novel. The secondary characters are developed in a thorough and engaging manner; their behaviors are credible and their actions authentic. Still, with Liza around, most people are mere supporting players. Indeed, Liza consumes the spotlight as a bright, resourceful, and steadfast amateur sleuth who has keen insights into the people around her, though perhaps not so much into herself. Complex and tenacious, she's not above straddling the line between what is ethical and what is not. Indeed, her alliance with Nyx involves dubious actions that she defends with the unconvincing utilitarianism precept that the most ethical choice is the one that yields the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

A physician in training investigates a suspicious death in *Malignant Assumption*, a fun mystery novel that will keep audiences guessing until the end.

DAVID BUSHMAN (July 17, 2024)

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