



Murder for Liar

Verlin Darrow

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Murder for Liar is an offbeat mystery novel in which a therapist's sense of reality comes to seem fragile.

In Verlin Darrow's mystery novel *Murder for Liar*, a therapist's safety and sanity are threatened by a strange, pseudospiritual plot.

Tom has had some unusual psychotherapy patients before, but no one like George, who insists that Tom is an angel who's destined to help change the world. Tom rejects George's assessment. Then a series of bizarre incidents and coincidences leave him doubting his mental health and his understanding of reality. When he learns that these strange events may be connected to a serial killer who is stalking Santa Cruz, Tom makes life-changing decisions about his career, his belief system, and how he wants to live.

Cynical and somewhat morbid, Tom is an interesting hero and a questionable therapist: he violates the accepted boundaries of patient-therapist relationships more than once, and he indulges in outdated terminology for a patient's condition; elsewhere, an offensive word is used to no purpose. His hot temper is mitigated by his ability to acknowledge and discuss his feelings in healthy (or at least humorous) ways. This inspires sympathy for his increasing confusion and anger when his predictable world is turned on its head. Several supporting characters are less convincing, embodying stereotypes about feminists and environmentalists—a fact that may serve as a clue to what is really going on. Still, the narrative also plays into stereotypes about mentally ill people being violent, dangerous individuals to its detriment.

In the course of his investigation, Tom meets a number of memorable people, including Dizzy, a beautiful artist who might be the serial killer's next target, and Zig-Zag, another one of George's alleged angels. Each has a crucial role to play as Tom seeks the truth behind the killings and George's assertions. And as a former private investigator, Tom has all of the skills necessary to solve the mystery. His work proceeds at a steady pace until the odd yet harmless events in his life take a sudden turn for the deadly. Intense fight scenes lead into surreal sequences that further confuse and trouble Tom. He struggles to shake off the aftereffects of these unnerving episodes, only to find himself in real danger. It all culminates in an exciting high-speed chase.

In the end, Tom does not get all that he wanted: concrete answers remain elusive. But some justice still seems possible in *Murder for Liar*, an offbeat mystery novel in which a therapist's sense of reality comes to seem fragile.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (June 29, 2023)

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