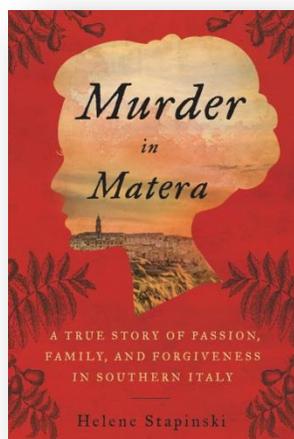


Spotlight on Books



Murder in Matera by Helene Stapinski

Thanks in no small part to Ancestry, the family history website, there has been a resurgence of interest into exploring our genetic roots. As someone who has researched his own family tree, I truly understand the appeal. You get the thrill of detective work while discovering things about yourself.

Add to that the pleasure of armchair traveling with Helene Stapinski's *Murder in Matera*.

With this memoir/travelogue/ancestral mystery, Stapinski is obsessed with uncovering the truth behind a long rumored murder in her family tree, a murder that ultimately led to her great-great grandmother Vita immigrating to the United States. Stapinski travels to where it all began, Italy's Matera province, and starts digging.

To hear her tell it, this murder has potentially devastated the family tree that followed, leading to many a crime-ridden branch. Stapinski, a mother, fears that the legacy will continue. I did not entirely buy this angle; as anyone who's done any research into their own family tree or has a family that passes down its own stories can tell you, there are bound to be dark and sinister tales. The law of averages suggests that you will hit a crime eventually. Furthermore, the stories that get passed down are often the ones with the juiciest details, often exaggerated for effect, and like a game of telephone, winding up far from what actually happened. I suspected very early on that Stapinski's fear of genetic corruption was a facade; a way to draw in readers (or perhaps her publisher), a hook beyond typical travelogue.

That aside, I thoroughly enjoyed the rich descriptions of Matera, its current sights and sounds, as well as its history. As for the family tree sleuthing, Stapinski has the skill of a seasoned mystery writer, doling out clues and intrigue to keep a reader hooked. When she makes her discoveries, you will want to celebrate along with her.

Hopefully *Murder in Matera* will also inspire readers to start digging into their own family's long lost stories. Maybe an exotic trip will be warranted!

John Mutford, Library Manager

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