



Bitter Medicine

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V.I. Warshawski, Chicago's toughest female investigator, has some suspicions about the upscale hospital where her young, Hispanic, pregnant friend Consuelo has died. A woman of action, V.I. starts to battle hospital bureaucrats in an effort to find out what happened--an investigation for which she is well equipped, being a lawyer as well--but as the plot thickens, youth gangs, antiabortionists, and homicides combine to create an ugly, bewildering puzzle surrounding Consuelo's death. There is the death of a dedicated young doctor, an attempt to buy off Consuelo's punk boyfriend, a right-to-life group's attack on a clinic for the poor. V.I. herself gets a nasty beating at the hands of a gang leader she once represented in court.

Unlikely alliances begin to emerge, including one involving V.I.'s former husband, a high-powered lawyer, and a fanatical antiabortionist. Nothing, however, will be too much for Warshawski to handle, gun tucked into her waistband and wisecracks readily springing to her lips.

The author clearly knows where she is going with her tightly-constructed plot, and some minor characters (an elderly former union organizer, an ironic black detective) add a feeling of real-life Chicago. V.I. herself is best seen in action; when she is at leisure, she can be a bit boring -- telling the reader in detail about her jogging, swimming, and snacking activities, and engaging in a lackluster affair with a nervous doctor. Warshawski seems much too tough to be coy about her sex life and worried about her waistline. Fortunately, however, most of the time she is far too busy to sleep, let alone jog, and the plot speeds like the "E1" toward a satisfying finish.

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