

BRICKBURN Synopsis

A Novel by Karl Meade

Livingston Alberti has a tumour in his head that won't keep still. His time is up, they tell him, but he keeps his mouth shut. He wants his daughter Melonie back. He has to tell her this story, what he's done, what they've all done, so Melonie can live her life clear and fresh. But Livingston has a problem: his lifelong friend, Detective Wood, names him the lead suspect in the Paskapoo Novella collapse, in the death of his father, Albert Alberti, and in the gruesome de-thumbing of a rival architect.

BRICKBURN is Melonie's noir, multi-generational story: from Filippo Alberti and Herbert Wyle, stonemason and financier, who fought to build Sandstone City (Calgary) after the great fire of 1886; to their two sons, Albert Alberti and Victor Wyle, who fought over its modernist deconstruction during the boom and bust of the 1970s and '80s; to Melonie's father and aunt, Livingston and Aeolia, who fought over the fallout from this century of conflict. It is a story of passion and vanity, paternity and inheritance, invention and imitation. But in the end, it is a story of love and redemption and charity, as Livingston struggles before his own death to break the cycle of rivalry and revenge for his daughter.

Think Chinatown's long goodbye, in the skin of a lion.

Livingston's long goodbye began three years ago, when he failed to save his family in an apparent "home-invasion gone wrong." He awoke from a coma three months later, with a plate and a tumour in his head, to find his wife and son dead, and his thirteen-year-old daughter Melonie living with her new legal guardian, Livingston's sister, Aeolia Alberti. Precisely one year later, the prime suspect in the invasion, Jacob Richardson, has his thumbs hacked off in his parking lot. And now, another year later, Livingston awakes in the night to find a coked-up

Detective Wood reading Livingston's latest version of his family history, written at the behest of Livingston's stepmother, Petra Wyle, matron of Brickburn Mansion.

'And such a *motivated history*,' Wood laughs, gesturing at the collapsed Novella outside. But how is Wood going to prove it all—that a hundred years and three generations of rivalry and revenge between the Alberti and Wyle families sifted down to this one night? That all three cases converged right here?

Wood alleges the collapse was no accident, and the body in the rubble is none other than its creator, Albert Alberti. The suspect list is long and illustrious, topped by son and daughter, Livingston and Aeolia, followed by Albert's ex-partner and rival, Victor Wyle, and then Jacob Richardson, the thumbless prodigy. When Wood abruptly "arrests" Livingston, Livingston discovers Wood's walls covered with images connecting all three cases, with another wall dedicated to the homeless Steve Maple, whom Livingston rescued from the street a year earlier, and whom Wood believes is in indebted cahoots with Livingston. Just as abruptly, Wood releases Livingston to have him followed by Wood's ex-mentor, private detective Porphyry Petrovitch, a mysteriously close friend of Petra Wyle, and old flame of Albert Alberti.

Aeolia, as Project Manager of the Novella on Albert's behalf, comes under suspicion for the collapse. She confronts Livingston, who claims he wired the Novella, as they'd jointly planned, but he hadn't set off the charges. A skeptical Aeolia suspects Livingston of framing her in order to get Melonie back. When Melonie disappears, the specter of a vengeful Steve Maple looms. Livingston and Aeolia search frantically for Melonie, while Wood searches for Steve Maple, and Porphyry searches for her suddenly missing son, Ivan Petrovitch, leader of the homeless movement Walk-On-By (WOB) and friend of Steve Maple.

Livingston and Aeolia's search for Melonie leads them to Brickburn, where they confront

their stepmother, Petra, with a new revelation: ‘Why is this Ivan Petrovitch the sole beneficiary of Albert’s will?’ Petra waves toward the window: ‘Why don’t you ask him yourself.’

Albert strolls up the walkway, alive and well, and accompanied by Porphyry Petrovitch. ‘He is our son,’ says Albert, his hand on Porphyry’s shoulder. ‘And it was I who destroyed the Novella. Victor Wyle wired it, but only I can destroy it!’

Detective Wood pounces on the gathering, announcing that the body in the rubble is Ivan Petrovitch. Albert’s building has killed his own son.

An aghast Livingston flees. His time is up. His brain has flooded. He finds Jacob Richardson and forces him to accuse Livingston of cutting off his thumbs, instead of Steve Maple; then Livingston tricks Albert into revealing how he set the Novella detonators. Then Livingston learns that Steve Maple has taken Melonie hostage in Livingston’s apartment, and wired the building to collapse—just like the Albertis’ Novella crushed Steve’s friend and leader, “Brother Ivan.” Livingston sneaks into his apartment, and while Wood secretly listens, Livingston convinces a distraught Steve that it was Livingston who cut off Richardson’s thumbs, and destroyed the Novella. Just as Livingston collapses, trying to save Melonie, a terrified Steve Maple accidentally detonates the building.

Twenty-five years later, Melonie Smith has changed her name and pieced together the story. Her father, Livingston, died that night in her lap, after telling Wood his two great lies that cleared Steve Maple of the Thumbs case, and cleared Albert of the Novella destruction. Now Porphyry, Aeolia, and Melonie jointly run Ivan’s Walk-On-By homeless movement, funded by Albert and Livingston’s legacy assets. Aeolia has built two memorial structures, which merge Albert’s two sons’ visions of homeless emancipation. Porphyry passes the WOB reigns to Melonie, who may one day hand over to her son, Smith Smith. Or maybe he will start with his own clean slate.