



A Whisper to the Living

Stuart M. Kaminsky

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A Whisper to the Living (Inspector Rostnikov)

A Whisper to the Living Details

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Tony says

14. Kaminsky, Stuart M. A WHISPER TO THE LIVING. (2010). ****. Unfortunately, Mr. Kaminsky passed away this past Fall. Whether this was his last novel, or there are more in the pipeline, I don't know. If this is his last, then it is fitting that it is a Rostnikov novel. Inspector Rostnikov works for a police agency in Moscow that deals only with cases involving impossible odds of being solved or those whose solution might reflect poorly on some high government official. There are three cases involved here: one involves the capture of the worst serial killer Russia has ever seen, the second seeks the killer of a boxer's wife and her lover, the third – though not really a case – requires the protection of a British female journalist in Russia doing a job of investigative reporting on prostitution. The serial killer case was handed to the special squad by the regular police force because they couldn't solve it. In reality, however, the police knew the identity of the killer – with 61 murders under his belt – but would not take the case any further because of an alleged relationship between the killer and Putin. Rostnikov soon learns the identity of the killer and, in his own way of wearing down a suspect, soon has him at the point where he will publicly confess. Rostnikov has no time for the niceties of politics, and has his boss, Colonel Yaklovev, make sure that he is not interfered with in doing his job. Rostnikov is a study in morality and private courage. He truly believes in justice and law, although such belief has been perverted in present-day Russia. He and his coworkers, which now includes his son, relentlessly pursue leads to their natural ends until the culprits are in the trap. The case of the boxer's wife and lover is also solved, but with surprising results. The job of watching over the British reporter is a little more complicated. She manages to find out who the big boss of the prostitution ring is and that he is the head of one of the world's largest corporations. He is also ruthless in maintaining his power and won't stop at anything to keep it. If you haven't read any of the Rostnikov novels, this probably isn't the one to start with, but by all means, start with one of them. You will be pleasantly amazed and entertained. Recommended.

Stephanie Thompson says

Russian series

Michael says

At one time or another I have read many of the Kaminsky's Rostnikov mysteries, but I am always puzzled by someone who can put together a pretty good story but who is allowed to get so many minor details wrong. I have not read any of Kaminsky's several other series so I suspect this is just a problem he has with the Russian setting.

As a police procedural, this is engaging enough (as are all the Rostnikov books). The members of his team occupy many of the usual stereotypes that exist for this kind of novel, some of them so exaggerated that it impinges on the believability - particularly Karpo, his almost supernatural associate, and the coroner, Paulinin.

What I really don't understand is what someone can't do a bit of fact checking. One of the detectives is given

the first name "Akardy" - there is no Akardy possible, only Arkady (which could be variously transliterated but not as Akardy). Other names are also wrong. The police higher-ups are said to travel in black ZiL automobiles - in the modern world there is no such thing. And so on.

Kaminsky decided at some point not to concern himself with his having started the series in 1989 with a character who had been a participant in World War II who can not conceivably still be working as a police inspector in the middle of the first decade of this century. At least in this installment he makes no specific reference to that history, but it reminds me of a cartoon where time marches on but the characters remain high school seniors forever.

According to the dust jacket, Kaminsky has passed away, so I feel somewhat guilty in criticizing his work - which after all is quite readable and engaging. I just wish someone had cleaned up some of the details.

Jim says

Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov is the Chief Inspector in the Moscow Office of Special Investigations. His office had been handed a serial murder case only six days before, but the murders had been going on for two years. The transfer was an attempt by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to cover up their own lack of progress and at the same time pass this hot potato on to someone else. Rostnikov and his fellow field operatives have a full workload and plenty to keep them busy both at work and away from it.

This is a very pragmatic, quirky and likeable group of cops. They are not afraid to pursue justice wherever it may lead them or step on some political toes when they need to. I had not read Kaminsky before, but was pleased to see that he has an extensive bibliography. I will definitely look for other books by him in the future.

Lynn says

This is the sixteenth and final book in the Rostnikov series (the author died before its publication), but it is not in any meaningful way a conclusion to the story. Although some of the loose ends are tied up, others are introduced, which leaves those who have come to care about these characters hanging. What was the point of telling us that Rostnikov is aware of something troubling Karpov when there is no way for the reader to ever find out what it is? Is Sarah Rostnikov actually dying? What could Lydia Tkach possibly have said to convince Maya to come back to Moscow; will she or won't she stay there and give Sasha one more chance; and frankly, why should she? His thoughts earlier in the story make it clear that there is no way he will ever be a faithful husband, no matter how much he loves her. It sounds at the end as if Karpov has begun to move on from his grief over Mathilde's death, but it's hard to know what he can move on *to* - he has no life, and the hints in earlier books that he might be starting to open up to some people are not developed in this book.

I suspect that Kaminsky would have stopped after *Murder on the Trans-Siberian Express* - there is quite a time gap between books 14 and 15; perhaps he was tired of these characters. The last book feels like something he maybe threw together because so many people wanted it. I think he would have been better though to stop with *People Who Walk in Darkness*. The end of that story left the characters' storylines essentially resolved, and in ways consistent with their histories and personalities.

Sandi says

What will probably be the final book in the Rostnikov series since the author passed away in 2009 though I would be overjoyed if there was a secret cache of further books somewhere. I love the characters in this series and was glad to see certain things finally play out. I will very much miss Rostnikov, Karpo, and all the others but luckily I have plenty of more of Stuart M. Kaminsky's work to read.

Clark Hallman says

I have read 35 novels written by Stuart Kaminsky including all of his Abe Lieberman novels, all of his Lew Fonesca novels, all of his Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov novels, one or two of his Toby Peters novels and one CIS: New York novel. Obviously I enjoy his work and it saddens me to realize that *A Whisper to the Living* is likely to be the last new Kaminsky novel. Unfortunately, he died in October 2009. According to Wikipedia he died of after a stroke made him ineligible for a liver transplant, which was necessary to treat the hepatitis he contracted as an army medic in the late 1950s in France. Kaminsky was a remarkable writer who had earned an M.A. in English from the University of Illinois and a Ph.D. in speech from Northwestern University. He spent over 20 years teaching, first at Northwestern and later at Florida State. He published more than 50 novels and was a past president of the Mystery Writers of America. All his novels are populated by very interesting (and quirky) characters, which I found delightful. In addition, he placed put his characters in dangerous situations that provided plenty of action. The Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov series also immersed readers into the intriguing environment of the Soviet Union (during the early novels) and post-Soviet Russian (in the later novels) culture and law enforcement. I found this book to be very enjoyable. In addition to his usual multi-case story lines Kaminsky also brought all his recurring characters together in this novel in a way that was very satisfying for long-time fans like me. I will miss Inspector Rostnikov.

Alan says

I was mistaken in thinking that I had previously read the last Rostinkov novel before I read this one. I understand that not every series can have nice neat endings, because real life doesn't operate that way either. With Stuart Kaminsky's death I know I won't see any more stories about Rostinkov and his friends in Moscow's Office of Special Investigations.

We have, as has become the formula for these books, three ongoing investigations. Rostinkov himself is handling the a serial killer of drunks and old men in the park. Rostinkov's son Isoef and Zelach are handling the disappearance of a boxer who might be the next heavyweight champion of the world, but his wife and wife's lover are now both dead, murder victims. Sasha and Elena, Isoef's bride to be, are assigned to protect an English journalist visiting Moscow to write about prostitution rings, and of course her story uncovers more than that.

From a procedural viewpoint the progression of each story is satisfactory. A sense of melancholy pervades Rostinkov's investigation. He is definitely an old man by this point (when the series started he had been a child soldier during WWII) and the wear and tear of decades of police work and dealing with political

corruption is wearing him down.

Isoef doesn't have his father's political savvy, and it may be hurting his career. Karpo is in the background more than many of the books, and Karpo's grip on sanity may be slipping even more. For Sasha the question is can this weak willed man hold together his marriage.

A minor frustration, beside not seeing how the personal story lines will play out, is what appear to be some grammatical and spelling errors slip through. Whether this is a sign of Kaminsky being bored with the series, or his declining health, and a lazy editor is a question I asked myself.

Richard says

One of four series of mysteries he writes, Mr. Kaminsky makes the locale of all his books very clear. He is not from Moscow, or even Russia where this series is set, although he make the setting realistic.

His other work included four nonfiction biographies about film people: Gary Cooper, John Huston, Clint Eastwood and Don Siegel. His 24 Toby Peters books always revolved around Hollywood and film personalities.

His characters are always very real and very much characters. They are life like and subject to going home with you. I love his dialogue, especially between battling parents and adult children.

I am very sorry to hear this is his last book, as he passed away in the fall of 2009.

Michael says

It was very hard to read this book, but not because it wasn't a wonderful story. Kaminsky was my favorite authors for many, many years, with his Toby Peters series, Abe Lieberman series, and the Porfiry Rostnikov series. This was the last Rostnikov book, published shortly after Kaminsky's death in 2009. For those who haven't read these stories, Rostnikov is a Russian detective whose favorite English author is Ed McBain. He's not your everyday detective and he doesn't work in what we'd recognize as an American police department. His methods are unique, and there might be a bit of Columbo in his techniques, and he always solves his cases. This one involves a serial killer in Moscow, and the case is kicked sideways to Rostnikov's "Special Investigations Branch" when the normal police investigation goes nowhere. There is Kremlin intrigue and all the familiar characters in this novel (the other investigators who work with and for Rostnikov) and like all Kaminsky novels, the characters are fully developed and real. This isn't a "whodunnit" because we learn who the serial killer is in the beginning of the book, but we read on to find out how Rostnikov will unmask the killer, as well as the several other investigations being conducted at the same time. I miss Mr. Kaminsky greatly.

John Kues says

So sad to read what I assume is Stuart Kaminsky's last book, since he died last fall. I really like his characters, and to think I had never heard of him until 2 yrs ago. Just a chance meeting with a guy in line to

get Sara Paretsky's autograph. He was getting autographs on all of her books and he also had a book about mystery writers by Stuart Kaminsky and told me I should check him out. Such a prolific writer. Inspector Rostnikov is a Russian Inspector who likes to read Ed McBain novels, has an artificial leg, and knows how to work the ins and outs of complex Russian society. Loves to work on plumbing in his free time and lift weights. Kaminsky seems to get all the nuances of Russian life, down to the food and little stuff of everyday living. Sometimes it is hard for me to follow all the characters. This is the 16th story in the Rostnikov series. He has four distinct series, 10 in Abe Lieberman Mysteries, 6 Lew Fonesca and 24 Toby Peters (who drives a Crosley!) Mysteries, plus some biographies. Not much of a review, I am just a fan of his writing.

Sharon says

wow-thought I'd read all of these by the amazing Mr. Kaminsky-glad I found a few!! was excellent, by the way!
no errors.

Chris says

Last in the Porfiry series; author became sick and passed. Somehow this book feels like it could have been the last written book in the series... which could have gone on quite a bit more, but was some how good to end here. Good sense of characters and environment. Plot line at times a push. ;-))

Ellen says

Each Inspector Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov novel has been a little miracle. How did Stuart Kaminsky make everyone so real? How did he move his characters from cold war to corrupt democracy? And how come he had to die, leaving his people in mid-sentence, mid-thought, mid-life?

I hadn't realized that Kaminsky had died until my husband, to whom I had recommended A Whisper to the Living, read the author blurb on the back of the jacket.

So, here are some questions I'll never have answered:

- Does Karpo (last seen blowing a note on the ocarina after having slept next to a stray black cat) continue to thaw, maybe even to love again?
- Do Sasha and Maya ever get to live apart from his incredibly annoying mother
- What happens to Zelko when his mother dies?
- Has Sara's brain tumor grown back?

And a little warning to any author tempted to cherry-pick the characters and write sequels: You'll never be able to do them justice, so don't even try.

Suzy says

I think this is the second to last in the Inspector Porfiry Rostnikov series by Stuart Kaminsky. So sorry this series ends with the next book. Just superb. The first I read in the series was the fourth book A Cold Red Sunrise, which I recently reread. I was hooked. May have to try other series by Kaminsky. Chap 3 Except for having murdered his wife, Aloyosha Tarasov was a law-abiding Russian. He took no bribes, played no favorites, kept the secrets of his superiors, and always did what he was told. He was considered a highly competent investigator, and rightly so. He wanted nothing more than to survive, do the work he loved, and be respected. His wife had never understood that. She had wanted to get out of Russia, with or without her husband. Were she to leave, his career would be in jeopardy.
