



The Note

Christopher Cromwell

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The Note is a multilayered work that moves between continents and perspectives, all while maintaining its focus on the dynamics of one particular unusual family.

In Christopher Cromwell's *The Note*, a potential inheritance divides a family, and a man's strange and mystical gift is threatened. With richly drawn characters and a strong pace, *The Note* is an intriguing read and a surprising, ominous thriller.

One warm summer evening in Amsterdam, a man named Bertrand sits in the middle of a square on a dirty piece of cardboard, howling. His faculties are failing him, and as he sings for spare change, he feels "the cement dam" in his brain shatter, causing him to emit what sounds like a scream for help. As the crowd disperses, Bertrand flees, avoiding the police and escaping to a café.

Bertrand is revealed to be the son of a rich plastic surgeon, Hiram, whose wife is the beautiful, smart, but shallow Jenin. Jenin, Hiram's second wife, wants to ensure that Hiram's fortune does not go to her schizophrenic stepson Bertrand, and struggles to find him even as she tries to change Hiram's will in the face of his deteriorating health. Bertrand's strange musical gifts add a complicating factor into this tense dance of wealth, death, and family divisions.

The Note reads smoothly and effortlessly. The movement between backstory and present action is seamless. Even in quiet, reflective scenes, the thriller has a sinister edge that helps to power the story forward. Jenin is an intriguing foil to Bertrand, and the two characters closest to Hiram battle in subtle ways throughout the tense novel. The focus shifts continually between the different characters. Cromwell, instead of centering his novel on the aftermath of Hiram's death, takes the unusual option of depicting the machinations of Jenin as Hiram is ill, adding another layer of tension to the work.

The novel contains some mention of drug use, and a few descriptions veer into controversial territory, as when Cromwell describes one woman reacting "with stereotypical black woman fury." In general, however, the descriptions are one of the novel's greatest strengths, and Cromwell fully illustrates each scene that propels the story from one frame to the next.

The Note is a slow-building, tense, and multilayered work that moves between continents and perspectives, all while maintaining its focus on the dynamics of one particular unusual family. The book will appeal to thriller fans who are interested in well-drawn characters and taut tales with just a tinge of the supernatural.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN

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