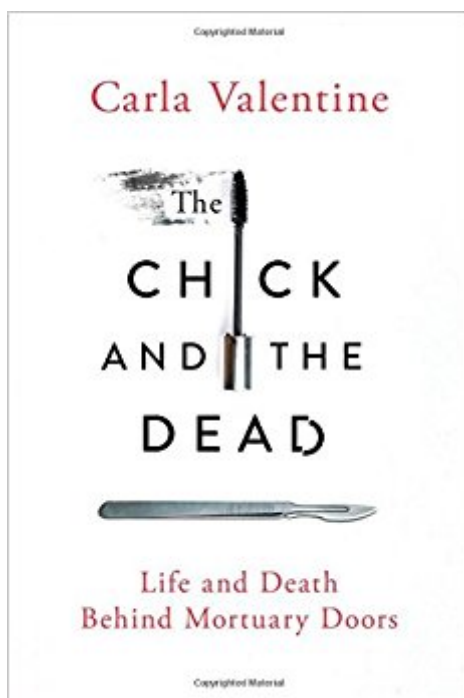


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# The Chick And The Dead: Life And Death Behind Mortuary Doors



## Synopsis

Carla Valentine works with the dead. After studying forensics, she assisted pathologists with post-mortems for years before becoming the curator of the world's most famous pathology museum. When it comes to death, she truly is an expert, and in this book she shares that expertise. Using the most common post-mortem process as the backbone of the narrative, *The Chick and the Dead* takes the reader through the process of an autopsy while also describing the history and changing cultures of our relationship with the dead. The book is full of vivid insight into what happens to our bodies in the end. Each chapter considers an aspect of an autopsy alongside an aspect of Carla's own life and work and touches on some of the more controversial aspects of our feelings towards death, including the relationship between sex and death and our attitudes toward human tissue collection. Starting with the first cut, we move from external examination into the body itself, discovering more about the heart, stomach and brain, and into dismembered and reconstructed bodies, at each stage taking a colorful detour into the question of what these things can teach us about the living. Join Carla on the journey from microscope-requesting nine-year-old to pathology educator and death engager at a Victorian museum (a journey made via around 5,000 autopsies) as she tells the story of exactly what it's like to live a life immersed in death.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[Valentine's] zest for gross-out depictions of bodily functions . . . works spectacularly well . . . the

book succeeds as a morbidly galloping parade of every possible kind of dead body." ---New York Times --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

CARLA VALENTINE has a certificate and diploma in Anatomical Pathology Technology and, during her eight-year mortuary career, continued her professional development by studying forensic anthropology at military college and taking part in skeletal excavations in Belgium and Venice. She writes and researches themes around sex and death on her blog entitled "The Chick and the Dead." She also runs a dating and networking site for death professionals called Dead Meet. She lives in the UK.

I couldn't put this book down! You don't need to be any kind of medical or death professional to understand the technical parts of this book. Ms. Valentine does a fantastic job of explaining things in a way that anyone could understand. She speaks of those under her care with the utmost respect and dignity. She is candid about her life, both joys and struggles, as she moves through the different stages of her career. I laughed, I got teary eyed, I'll probably read it again a few more times. I highly recommend this book to anyone curious about the post-mortem world as well as those who are already well familiar with it.

I was very excited about this book, and even pre-ordered it. This is exactly my kind of thing, and I am very interested in the Death Positive movement. I love the pathologists I follow on Instagram, got a trip to the Matter for Christmas, and am a big Caitlin Doughty fan. I was so disappointed with this book that I unfollowed the author on Facebook and Instagram. The positives are that the actual autopsy and anatomy subject matter are interesting, and I learned new things. If you have a weak stomach, this book probably isn't for you. It's very interesting to be walked through an autopsy from start to finish, and to have the inconsistencies pointed out as they're represented in the media. I found the negatives to be many. The book is not just a non-fiction exploration of death and mortuaries, it's also the author's memoir. Most books of this type do this expertly and elegantly, weaving the author's experience in with the subject matter (Smoke Gets in Your Eyes is a great example). I found the memoir aspect of this book clumsy and eye roll-inducing. For example, the author at one point talks about hearts and goes on a cringey philosophical tangent about life, seemingly while she is meant to be weighing the organ during an autopsy. She even says that she was staring into space while doing this and had to be snapped out of it. This passage seemed so deliberate and inauthentic. In many places, the language is contrived and clumsy in this way.

Another example is that the author shares every detail of her workout routine, including how long it was, what she did, and how she showered afterward. While I understand that this is part of her experience, most memoir authors need to edit themselves, because a reader doesn't want to read every aspect of the author's day, especially if it doesn't directly pertain to the subject matter. Another thing you will learn in this book is that the author is petite and blonde. She takes a lot of pleasure in not being the expected pathology technician, and she repeats this many times. This, I think, is part of the reason for the detailed accounts of her workouts. If you haven't forgotten by now, she is petite and blonde (oh, but now she is a redhead, an experience she likens to washing off a body because of the same presence of pink foam - really!). I found the author's self-focus grating several times. Additionally, as with the pink foam example above, the writing is just not very good. The book is organized into chapters, but each chapter jumps around without theme. Eventually, she'll come back to the main thread, but the result is an unfocused, meandering narrative. My biggest disappointment and complaint about this book, and the reason for unfollowing the author, is the blatantly disrespectful body shaming. It's very clear that the author takes a lot of pride in her petite frame and her workout routine. But the extent she goes to make her disapproval and personal fear of fat clear is an aspect I found abhorrent. A tame example is that she comments that some colleagues teased her for gaining weight. This sent her into a spiral of self-reflection she felt necessary to include in the book. Including that these comments induced her to double her workout routine (of course, because gaining weight when you're already healthy and fit would be tragic). But don't worry, readers, it was just being on the pill! Obviously, this ties into the self-editing issue above, but also gives insight into her mentality on weight. The most egregious and objectionable example, however, was one where she shared how she made a pact with her colleague to do the bariatric (obese) cases while she would take the decomp. Why are obese people more unappealing to her than bloat, maggots, and purge? Because she is so tiny and petite (her colleagues even call her "Tiny," just to underscore the point), that she fears opening up an obese body cavity and tumbling right in, with only her teeny, precious legs poking out and waving. At this point, I almost couldn't finish. I couldn't believe that someone who works on all kinds of people and is there for the dead to ensure they're treated respectfully, could be so disrespectful and mean. In my experience, many folks in this industry are kind, accepting, and open-minded, so this came as a shock. I had high hopes for this book, but only the educational details kept me from giving it one star.

Chick and the Dead HIGHLY Recommend Carla Valentine's book- Chick and the Dead (AKA Past Mortems in *ÃfÃ Ã Å,Ã â ¡Ã Â-ÃfÃ Ã Å,Ã â ¡Ã Â§*). Brilliantly written- Joseph Heller (Catch 22)

meets Mary Roach (Stiff) in this somewhat non-chronological and touchingly honest biography, taking you from dead cats to her role as Curator of the Pathology Museum at Bart's London- all constructed around the process of the autopsy itself, it is morbid, joyful, hilarious and shocking all at once. A fun read and a pleasant venture down the Styx (and back!!) to help us understand what happens to us when we confront the inevitable. No, not taxes. The other one.

Carla's book is phenomenal - literate and entertaining. Must-read for anyone interested in the Death professions.

Wanted more gross details about the actual autopsies. However, her career has been interesting and I enjoyed hearing about it as well as her personal life. She was intimate and personal throughout the book. I just wish she would have been more forthcoming with the gruesome details of her work. Also, reading other reviews, she doesn't mention the whole small and blonde thing excessively at all.

Very intriguing! I don't like blood and guts stuff, but she describes that type of thing in a professional manner. Good book!

Loved this book! I stumbled upon the author's Instagram accounts, and this was a fascinating further insight into the life of an inspiring, interesting woman and field of work.

Great read, fun and informative, and not overly technical. A perfect balance. Great for everyone from the future mortician to the curious layperson with morbid interests. Super entertaining.

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