



# Vita Nuova

*Magdalen Nabb*

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**Vita Nuova** Magdalen Nabb

Praise for the Marshal Guarnaccia Series:

“It takes a writer as good as Magdalen Nabb to remind us of how subtle the art of the mystery can be. . . . Nabb has Simenon’s knack.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“If you didn’t make it to Florence this summer, don’t despair. . . . There’s a new Marshal Guarnaccia investigation.”—*Chicago Tribune*

“Surpasses the best of Simenon.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“There is no other series quite like the Guarnaccia stories.”—*The Washington Post Book World*

Daniela is a quiet single mother studying for a doctorate in chemistry. She rarely goes out, so her murder in her bedroom at the family’s new villa seems inexplicable. It is true that her mother, who appears to be an alcoholic; her younger sister, who has had mental problems; and her father, who has made his money running nightclubs and is probably involved in the international sex trade, are not your average home-loving Italian nuclear family, but what can she have done to be singled out for slaughter? And why has the prosecutor asked specifically for Marshal Guarnaccia to head the investigation?

This is the fourteenth book in this acclaimed series. **Magdalen Nabb**, who was born and educated in England, lived and wrote in Florence, where she died on August 18, 2007.

## Vita Nuova Details

Date : Published June 1st 2008 by Soho Crime (first published January 1st 2008)

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Author : Magdalen Nabb

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# From Reader Review Vita Nuova for online ebook

**Anneselden7 Selden Berry says**

## **Brilliant character mystery**

? Sadly the last of a series written by Magdalen Nabb, this mystery is based in Florence, as were all her mysteries. She wrote meticulous character studies of The Marshal, a low-ranking officer in the Carabinieri. His moral code, his stolid loyalty to everything he was responsible for sets him apart from other mystery "detective."

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## **Daisy says**

Warm, contemplative, discerning characters and the setting (Florence) carry this mystery more than the plot does. But I liked it very much. It's the last in a series, I gather, and the only one I've read. It might be interesting to go back now and read the very first one.

*'You've given up smoking, then?'*

*'Not at all. I never give up giving up. Just giving it a rest for a bit.'* p. 57

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## **Pascale says**

Yet another routine murder mystery with a lovable policeman doing right by women and children and illegal immigrants in the face of corruption and madness. There's a bit of everything in this soup: rings of slave girls from Eastern Europe, incest and fratricide. It would put you off ever setting foot in Florence if you believed a word of it.

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## **J. says**

This should really get four stars, but it's nothing special.

Except, that is, in the overcrowded and ridiculously bottom-heavy field of Mysteries, which are lately more and more populated with idiot schemes for plots, cutesie/impossible detectives, cringeworthy dialogue, and freshman-year-poetry style mishaps.

It has become really difficult to find Mysteries that have no "close-the-cover-and-stand-away-from-the-book" moments, the point where all the telltale signs converge to prove they were not mistaken, the page where you lose a little faith in yourself for having come this far in pursuit of what's rapidly translating itself into The Stupid.

One symptom of this epidemic is the can-you-top-this competition wherein any newly written murder must be somehow more spectacularly grisly and uncannily gross than whatever is in current bestsellers. (If you're

writing mysteries and you really think it's about *that*, you've got a lot to learn. Start with Aeschylus, work your way forward in time. Pause, reboot with Edgar Allen Poe. It's what you don't show that really tweaks them out, dude.)

Even voiding and ignoring those *grand mal* kinds of experiences, there's often enough some little nag that means you won't be returning to an author, and won't be recommending the present volume either. Any 'catchword' or repeated expression, a sidekick who is a little too gullible, a woman detective in front of whom entire gangs of construction workers cower, a character who is just in the plot to be funny, and, unless un-named and deep in the background, any pet anything. Trade you two grouchy superintendents for a story that has no *nicknames* involved...

So the need to consume as many good Mysteries as possible is balanced by the desire to get snagged by the fewest 'drawback' ones, with reading time being finite and all... It's always great to find an un-showy, un-remarkably functional mystery, that is free of all the negatives.

It's not the same as fiction, or, say *literature*, where a work has to score high into the positives on all counts, as well as being original. Mystery simply has to function properly for what it is, which is genre exercise in a pre-existing subset, of which there are only a few, such as Procedural, Society, Psych, Cozy, Manorhouse, Locked-Room, etc. What's required is simply avoiding those land-mines, like the temptation, for example, to have the detective always saying or worse, *wearing* some signature item or other. Or whistling.

It's going to sound like faint praise after all that, but Magdalen Nabb and her conscientious detective Guarnaccia avoid all the negatives and put the right positives on the scoreboard (and in the right order). But it's true. The Florence locale is concrete and believable, the characters real, and the crimes are not hyped to compete with Cormack McCarthy or James Ellroy or Hannibal Lector.

What's almost as important for the voracious Mystery reader is that when there is a find, there are more. And there are-- this is 13 in a series of 13, so a clean dozen elsewhere to feed the beastly addiction. The game, as always, is afoot.

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## Scilla says

Marshal Guarnaccia is called to a very fancy home where a young single mother has been found dead in her bedroom. She has been shot six times. She was discovered by her sister, who is still screaming and crying. The mother is drunk most of the time. The investigation is difficult because the prosecutor is a friend of the man who owns the house, Paoletti. Guarnaccia wants to know who is the father of the child, and this seems to be a big secret. During the investigation, Guarnaccia is aided by Nesti, a journalist, who takes him to Paoletti's "night club" and "hotel". It appears that Paoletti is involved in bringing in prostitutes and running illegal businesses which are protected by his "employment agency". However, it is dangerous to investigate too much because Paoletti has the prosecutor in his pocket.

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## Monica says

“Vita Nuova” is the last book in the series Magdalen Nabb wrote featuring the wonderful Marshal

Guarnaccia before her untimely death in 2001. And this is most certainly her best book ever. She has mastered the literary skill of mystery/crime writing. Her characters are solid and totally believable. To me, Marshal Guarnaccia is as real as they come. He's someone I would want to meet. Through these 14 books Nabb has fully developed not only her main character, Marshal Guarnaccia, but also each of the secondary characters who make repeat appearances in her books. Also a little mention that her descriptions of Florence are precise and wonderful...taking me back to that amazing city with each book that I read.

In "Vita Nuova" Marshal Guarnaccia is faced with his own main demon...his inability to believe that he has the talent to solve a murder. He is always second guessing himself and all it takes is the condescending attitude of one of his superiors to send him reeling down into a funk. Yet it's precisely Guarnaccia who has the compassion and understanding to get to the bottom of a murder by his natural understanding of how people think and react.

I am going to miss these books!! Thank you Magdalen Nabb for a wonderful 14 books!

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### **Deborah Moulton says**

Delving into the flood of Eastern European girls who find themselves locked into prostitution in Italy, Marshal Salvatore Guarnaccia tries to understand how it all works. A murder opens the door.

The thinnest veneer of civility and respectability covers his main prey: a businessman using the cover of a temporary staffing agency to run a huge prostitution ring, complete with casino, strip shows and hotel. The ugly East European girls end up in menial jobs through the temp agency and the beautiful ones are turned into strippers and prostitutes.

The trick comes when the cream of Florentine society and its legal representatives (judges, prosecutors, etc.) are all patrons. In the end, the Marshal unmasks this particular operation and a dirty prosecutor, but the prostitution networks remain unimpeded.

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### **Austen to Zafón says**

I liked it, but it definitely wasn't my favorite of the Guarnaccia books I've read so far. They're a bit difficult to find and I was reading them in order, but then came across this one, her last before she died, and had to snap it up. It was darker for me than the others, dealing with the prostitution and enslavement of young and vulnerable immigrants. It isn't graphic in any way, but you know what's going on with these young girls. As always though, I love the details of Florence from an insiders POV; the tourists, the politics, the classism, the tight communities, the food, and the weather. And Guarnaccia, a laid-back Sicilian somewhat out of place amongst the often impatient Tuscans, always shines in Nabb's books. He's one of my favorite detectives: humble, thorough, kind, a bit slow, incredibly observant of not just people but his surroundings, and a devoted if not always perfect husband. If you haven't read any Nabb, I suggest starting with the first in the series, *Death of an Englishman*. You won't be disappointed.

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## **Sandra says**

"3,5 stars"

This was my third book (I read book 5 + 6) and it just didn't read as smoothly as the other two which I gave a four star rating. Also the dialogues seemed a little bit odd at times in this one. But overall I really like this series.

Compare to Commissario Brunetti from Donna Leon I find Nabbs books just a little bit deeper and they have more substance to me. Both play in Italy and they have a quiet likeable main character but in Donna Leons books the focus is also about Brunettis family. What his wife does, there is always something going on with his kids etc. Which makes for an entertaining light read but personal when I pick up a mystery story I want the focus at the mystery which is the case in Nabbs books. Family is also important but mostly they are gone and more in his thoughts. While Donna Leons books seem to be more successful (at least in Germany where you can see them everywhere and they even made TV movies out of it) and I read them once in a while when I'm in the mood for it, I prefer the Nabbs series.

These books are not so much about who has done it but they are more about social and character studies and these come across very believable. If you like Scandinavian thrillers where everything is detailed and calm and not about action and wild chases going on, you should give it a try.

In this particular case its about a homicide in a rich family. Who has done it?. And the central themes are human trafficking and what do you do if you have a case where you face a lot of powerful people which could ruin you and at the end you might have reached nothing? Do you still go for it?

Some things weren't that surprising but there were still some little twists I didn't see coming at the end.

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## **Erin says**

I was disappointed to find out that the author died in 2007. The marshal Guarnaccia is middle-aged, eats too much pasta, and watches bad TV when his wife is out of town. Much more believable than detectives that stay up doing surveillance until 2 am, and then get up at 6 am and jog on the beach. He's not a Sherlock Holmes, instead he has excellent intuition about human nature. Of course, I love that the setting is Florence, which Nabb captures in its charming grubbiness.

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## **Fiona Van says**

This author is new to me and when I finished the novel and looked eagerly to find others, I discovered that there are at least 13, but that sadly she had died in 2007. The book reminded me very much of Donna Leon's fiction; not just because they each have a middle aged honest middle ranking police officer as their hero and are set in a major Italian city, in Nabb's case Florence, but because of their humanity and their exploration of character and understanding of human frailty.

Investigating an apparently straightforward death, Guarnaccia realises that he has acquired knowledge of corruption at the highest level and that exposing it will bring disaster on himself and his family. This occurs when his wife and children are away from home and he is behaving with all the classic “deserted husband of long standing” patterns – ignoring the meals in the freezer in favour of take-away rubbish, flying into a fury with washing machines and air conditioning units and being angry with his much loved wife on the telephone. After a sleepless night he decides his only option is to send a report to the General Command of the Carabinieri and to submit his resignation. The scene where his commanding officer persuades him to trust him with this information and to withdraw the resignation is genuinely touching. The trust proves deserved and those responsible for the death are identified, but the reader is left sharing Guarnaccia’s uneasy feeling that those really responsible have not been punished.

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## Valeria says

It is the first novel I read from Nabb, and I am totally in love with how Florence in August was described, meteorologically speaking it's perfect.

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## Joyce Lagow says

#14 in the Marshal Guarnaccia series.[return][return]This is the last and, in my opinion, among the best of the series; Nabb died in 2007 shortly after writing this book. [return][return]I had not read any of the series for quite some time; as preparation, I reread all but one of the previous books (I do not have #9, *The Marshal at the Villa Torrini*). I was impressed once more by the uniform excellence of the series: the understated writing, the evocation of Florence, the intriguing plots.[return][return]But uniquely flavoring the series are the characters: the emergence of Guarnaccia himself as a unique protagonist in the genre. Guarnaccia, a Sicilian among the blunt Tuscans of Florence, is tall, overweight, seemingly slow, and pretty much inarticulate. Yet beneath an exterior of apparent mental dullness and lethargy, there lurks an inquisitive intellect, a nearly photographic memory for details, and an ability to put together a jumble of seemingly disparate images and words, details, to make eventually a coherent whole. He considers himself stupid, but except for the more foolish around him, no one else does. His superior, Captain Maestrangelo, is another well-drawn character who respects Guarnaccia; in this book, the two men finally break through the barriers of personality and formality that have characterized them in previous novels. It is Guarnaccia’s compassion, his understanding of the inhabitants of his Quarter and their little problems, that allows him to intuitively penetrate to the heart of issues. His inarticulate love for his family colors his outlook and the way he deals with these very ordinary people. [return][return]Other notable characters are Teresa, Guarnaccia’s sharp-tongued but understanding wife; his second in command, Brigadier Lorenzini; his two sons, Tot

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## Chezzie says

Uhg this book!! I haven't read any others in the series and now I don't want to. The main character being all woe is me to begin with annoyed me. The dialogue annoys me - I don't care about these stupid conversations that have nothing to do with the mystery. But most of all I hate how condescending the main character is and how infantilized all the women are. Not to mention that Guarnaccia's observations are often completely not plausible. You can't claim to not recognize a woman from any other and be a detective. Wtf and the ending

was equally disappointing.

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## **Jerald Veit says**

In the oppressive heat of a Florentine summer, a young single mother is brutally murdered in her bedroom. Was the crime committed by an unknown ex-boyfriend and possible father of her child, an angry gardener fired by her rich father, or the Italian or Russian mafia with links to international human trafficking? Magdalen Nabb carefully develops the story over the 262 pages of her rather short novel, revealing details bit by bit until the intricate puzzle is complete. This is a literary European-style mystery that keeps readers on their toes and requires a certain amount of concentration on their part. Not a quick read for the beach or the airport, in other words, and some readers may find the book too plodding -- there are no high-speed chases, spectacular explosions, or black-clad special ops invading small hostile countries. But thoughtful readers who enjoy fine writing, psychological depth, and well-drawn characters set in an exotic location (Florence, Italy is exotic to me, at any rate), would like this novel. Nabb's main character Marshal Guarnaccia, featured in several previous books of the series, is entirely real and human, as Nabb describes not only his actions, but his thoughts and emotions as well. I will miss him -- Magdalen Nabb passed away in 2007 at the age of 60 and Vita Nuova was completed just before her death. She died on an August day in Florence, perhaps a sweltering day very similar to the ones she describes in her last, and perhaps best book.

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