

A Scandal of the Particular

Steve Hamilton

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A Scandal of the Particular is an intelligent thriller about the romantic and ethical struggles of a disillusioned lawyer.

In Steve Hamilton's disturbing thriller *A Scandal of the Particular*, Vancouver's criminal justice system roils with controversies.

Kazan is a disillusioned lawyer who has fallen into drunken limbo after a separation from his romantic partner, Briar. Briar moved on to a relationship with Smith, a corrupt judge who uses his position for personal gain. The suspicious overdose death of a young idealistic gay man with connections to the city's lawyers, detectives, judges, and suspects sets Kazan into motion, though.

Kazan travels between courthouses, needle exchange sites, and seedy bars, revealing Vancouver's underbelly. It's a city tinged with corruption, and Kazan runs into reminders of old cases—regarding the treatment of First Nations people and involving those who are mentally ill—as he goes. His travails are detailed in atmospheric terms: the book makes note of the gloomy, rain-soaked darkness, which is made to evoke the spiritual turmoil that exists within Kazan.

Kazan's struggles with the morality of the justice system motivate him throughout. At his opposite is Smith, a man without a moral compass who views the courts as a system to be gamed. His attitude toward his profession is exposed with narrative skill in a scene where he enacts harsh penalties on an underprivileged woman without paying attention to the extenuating circumstances of her crime. Passing judgement is treated as an interruption rather than a solemn responsibility.

Briar, on the other hand, is minimally fleshed out. She is a romantic ideal for Kazan, a fantasy woman who waits for him to come home in a steamy bathtub. Her motivations are hazy; Kazan and Smith are polar opposites, and her ability to move between such divergent romantic partners strains credulity.

The book depicts the crime at the center of the story early on, so there is no doubt about who is guilty. Its suspense comes not from finding a culprit but rather from observing the machinations of social and legal systems and discovering the contortions individuals go through either to hide or to uncover crimes.

Though it is engaging when disclosing the motivations and inner lives of the cast through introspective passages, the prose is also awkward at times. Adrenaline is said to rush through a character like a "runaway Japanese subway train"; clichés arise, too, as when Kazan reflects that "one's identity comes from within."

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MATT BENZING (December 30, 2022)

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