



Chasing Mercury

Kimberly Cooper Griffin

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Love is a hardy flower that can blossom in the midst of adversity, as Kimberly Cooper Griffin shows in *Chasing Mercury*, a tense, exciting lesbian romance that takes its characters to the limits of themselves.

After a traumatic airline crash, Nora discovers that she's not the only survivor. She pulls a mysterious, beautiful woman from the crumpled body of the plane. Although badly battered and suffering from amnesia, the woman—who's known for the majority of the novel by her seat number, 4B—slowly revives. Her attraction to Nora is undeniable, and the two women bond with an intensity that is hotter than a campfire. While they wait for rescue, they fall for one another. Returning to the everyday world, however, is another matter.

Chasing Mercury explores questions of intimacy and identity. The bond between Nora and 4B is unquestionable, but who is 4B? Will she, as Nora worries, remember who she is and realize that she's not actually gay? Or that she's in a relationship already? As 4B's memory slowly returns, the tension rises. A thrilling element is added by the deeper mystery of her identity, what she was doing on the plane, and why she's so drawn to Nora.

The main characters are wonderful foils for one another. Nora, a human Swiss Army knife, is cool under pressure, experienced in both the boardroom and the backcountry. 4B, on the other hand, is too hot to handle. *Chasing Mercury* gives both well-written characters ample opportunity to grow.

Griffin has a savvy, deft touch with fiction. She weaves in rich, vivid details that range from sexy to startling: for example, after the plane crash Nora sees "a thin black stream of smoke snaking up from one of the larger sections of the plane, threading its way upward." Griffin's wonderful characterization and adventurous storytelling make this the best kind of page-turner. She stays away from familiar butch/femme roles and instead puts Nora and 4B into "no man's land." Other characters, such as Nora's Aunt Mace, are lively and fun, and also avoid strong gender stereotypes. Griffin's refreshing take on love, family, and relationships is excellent.

Although the first two acts of the novel are fast-paced and satisfying, *Chasing Mercury* falters somewhat when Griffin overextends the plot. Her characters are sharp, interesting, and realistic; their problems, though improbable, are believable. The story is at its best when it maintains a tight focus on the core characters. Less truly is more in this exciting, gripping novel.

Chasing Mercury is a thriller that explores the landscape of the Alaskan wilderness and the human heart.

CLAIRE FOSTER (December 5, 2017)

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