

Liar Liar

Nancy Boyarsky

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In *Liar Liar*, a high-profile California rape trial seems a little suspicious. Nancy Boyarsky's tough and likable protagonist Nicole Graves thinks so, too.

It's Nicole's assignment to protect a college student who has accused a star athlete classmate of sexual assault. But Nicole's bumpkin-seeming ward makes a confession to her and runs away, and then things really start to go wrong.

This mystery, the third in Boyarksy's Nicole Graves series, is fast moving and can stand alone. As Nicole gets more and more involved in untangling the case, the audience learns more about her past. She's still in training to be an investigator, but that doesn't keep her from investigating on her own. At times, it seems like she's the only one on the case.

Nicole's morals keep getting her in trouble; major plot points revolve around her trying to clear the names of the innocent, and this do-gooding drives the plot. Her impulses and instincts get her in sticky situations, risking both her own safety and her relationship with her worried fiancé. Still, she closes in on what really happened.

Boyarsky's imagination serves up a court case that plays with expectations during an era where we push to believe women, resulting in some real bad baddies whom it feels good to root against.

The legal proceedings feel realistic, and the glam California backdrop is fun and vivid, traffic and all. The different characters Nicole meets within legal and police systems are dimensional; the mystery of who's on the up-and-up prevails. One issue with a minor character is left unaddressed, but otherwise the thrills wrap up in a satisfying conclusion, poising Nicole for her next big adventure.

It is great to see such a smart and determined woman protagonist in an unpredictable mystery with plenty of women supporting characters.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September/October 2018)

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