

No Rest in His Bones

S. A. Nicola

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Cheating, lying, and stealing are the foundation of this book's structure as a couple traces their descent.

No Rest in His Bones, by S. A. Nicola, is a gritty yet sentimental story of a marriage and how it is affected by tremors of faith and mind.

The opening chapter clearly establishes two key pillars of the book: mental illness and faith. Protagonist Michael's clear voice recounts his answers to the question, "When did you know your wife was a sociopath?" as he contemplates his wife Liz's imprisonment and his own unnamed guilt. With interest piqued and the problem introduced, the subsequent chapters go back to trace the couple's path to this point. Along the way, the narrative covers infertility, secrets in marriage, debt, infidelity, kidnap, and murder. As a result, the story comes across as issue-laden and overly plotted.

The title comes from Psalm 38:3–4, which expresses feeling the weight of guilt. It echoes Michael's words in the final chapter: "Pastor Thomas has assured me repeatedly that I am forgiven. He has shared scripture as proof and told me that I don't need an earthly sign to know that all my sins are covered by the cross. Despite this, I've stubbornly pleaded with God for a sign. I'm a needy child begging for reassurance."

The novel uses dual narration, with husband (Michael) and wife (Liz) taking turns as narrator, a chapter at a time. This is a popular method, which Nicola wields well, casting each character as a balance of goodness and flaws, giving room for each one to share their unfiltered point of view. Being so close to each mind creates space for both understanding and doubt; as the story progresses, virtue and guilt are revealed on both sides, an intentional muddying of the narrative waters. The plot is divided into three parts—"The Cheating," "The Lying," and "The Stealing"—giving loose structure as the couple traces their own descent over several years.

While the book's more extreme situations (kidnapping and prison) are realistically portrayed, the realism is at its peak in the more day-to-day drama of sky-high credit card bills and difficulty conceiving a child—and especially the suburban isolation that resonates on every page. Nicola also conveys the complicated causes of, and stigma associated with, mental illness. Michael says in the final chapter, "Liz was a monster. That was something that seemed almost universally agreed upon. What people seemed to be shockingly blind to was that Liz wasn't born a monster. She became a monster. In fact, she was a monster of my own creation." Statements like this provoke the pressing questions: Who is the bad guy? What does *bad guy* really mean?

No Rest in His Bones is a cautionary tale—a more mellow, moralistic, less pulse-racing *Gone Girl*.

MELISSA WUSKE (August 11, 2014)

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