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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ THRILLER

The Bricklayer

Rene Natan
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Fred Dalton is a man who has it all. Owner of a highly successful construction company, he has a beautiful, vivacious wife, a lovely home, and a seemingly bright future. A tragic accident that leaves his wife in a wheelchair is the catalyst that sets in motion a series of events that threaten to send Fred's hard-won life spiraling out of control.

The Bricklayer begins with the funeral of Fred's wife, whose mysterious death causes authorities to begin looking at Fred as a suspect. While the stress of suspicion is disturbing enough, Fred also becomes increasingly concerned that two of his trusted employees may be embezzling from the company. To complicate matters even further, an old friend with a checkered past suddenly comes back to town and another former acquaintance, Tessa, begins a relentless pursuit of Fred despite the recent loss of his wife, who happened to be her best friend. When another suspicious death occurs with ties to Fred, the pressure mounts.

Rene Natan's story unfolds at a leisurely pace, maintaining a slow burn of building excitement from start to finish. *The Bricklayer* is a compelling and enjoyable thriller, filled with enough twists and turns and interesting characters to keep readers engaged. Dialogue reads naturally and the prose flows smoothly, deftly increasing the tension and intrigue all the way through to a satisfying conclusion.

The author's talent for comprehensive and credible characterization shines, and readers will appreciate getting to know each character thoroughly, from the incidental players to the protagonist. Main character Fred is drawn with a subtlety that matches his strong, reserved, and cautiously hopeful nature, and Natan writes all of her other characters with the same depth and sense of realism. The villains of the story—for there are more than one—are quietly malevolent in varying degrees. Natan draws their individual motives clearly while also maintaining a sense of humanity for some that adds clarity to their actions.

As crimes and mysteries continue to pop up all around him, Fred doggedly pursues a new life, rebuilding everything from his home to his heart, and readers will cheer on a budding romance even as they nervously wonder if that aspect of his life, too, will ultimately be endangered. Natan's protagonist is reserved and sympathetic without being stagnant or dull, and readers will surely root for his exoneration and future.

A former professor of computer science, Rene Natan is the author of several short stories and novels including *The Blackpox Threat*, a finalist in the 2011 National Indie Excellence Awards, and First Place winner of the 2012 Five Stars Royal Dragonfly Contest in the fiction category. *The Bricklayer* is skillfully structured and well edited, and the negligible number of typographical errors is easily overlooked due to the strength of the storytelling. Natan's talented writing is certain to sweep readers up into the whirlwind of mysterious scenarios surrounding Fred Dalton, and will ultimately make them glad they chose to pull *The Bricklayer* off the shelf.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (May 10, 2012)

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