



The Girl at the Bar

Nicholas Nash

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This is a refreshing thriller, with a compassionate protagonist and a complex set of crimes to solve.

Prepare for a roller-coaster ride of a thriller: Nicholas Nash's *The Girl at the Bar* mixes a beautiful woman, an unemployed Wall Streeter, cancer research, and long-buried secrets together in a novel that zooms along at just the right speed.

Ragnar Johnson is fired from his Wall Street firm over his part in a quick money-making plan and stops into his favorite bar for some liquid consolation. There, he meets the intelligent and beautiful Rebecca; they strike up a conversation, talk for hours, and she goes home with him. When he wakes up the next morning with memories of a wonderful evening, Rebecca's gone, leaving only her bra behind. He's not exactly sure how to take the gesture, but hope flickers in him nonetheless.

Soon after, the NYPD sends detectives to his apartment to ask about his evening guest. Rebecca's been reported missing, Ragnar seems to be the last person to have seen her before she disappeared, and he's now a suspect. Rebecca left a deep impression on him, and he starts his own investigation. The more he learns about her, the more he's driven to find her, and his intelligence and career knowledge in analysis give him the tools to do so.

The Girl at the Bar is a near-future thriller, featuring advancements from current technology in areas of cancer research and computer programming. Excitement and detail run high.

Characters are adeptly constructed; none do anything beyond their established behaviors, and backstories, movements, and thoughts are all well plotted. Distinguishing features—as with Ragnar, who has difficulties with speaking—help to differentiate characters from one another. The variety and number of characters in *The Girl at the Bar* are well balanced, offering a wide range of personalities without resorting to stereotypes as well as providing multiple information sources for solving the crimes in the story.

Some character traits stretch credulity, as with Ragnar's mental health diagnosis, which would likely have made his Wall Street work much more difficult. Ragnar's compassion and willingness to help others compel him to action very effectively.

This is a thriller that reveals its progressions consistently and at all the right times, maintaining the guessing game until the very end. The structure is tight without being spare, and the story moves through time well. Flashbacks are judiciously used, and the final scene revealing the key element gives an elegantly simple resolution with the revelation of one name.

The Girl at the Bar is a refreshing change from the glut of military and political thrillers more often seen in the genre. Atypical characters, a convoluted set of crimes, and its main character's compassion set it apart in a very positive way.

J. G. STINSON (January 24, 2017)

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