



Man Walks Into a Room

By Nicole Krauss

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A luminous and unforgettable first novel by an astonishing new voice in fiction, hailed by *Esquire* magazine as “one of America’s best young writers.”

Samson Greene, a young and popular professor at Columbia, is found wandering in the Nevada desert. When his wife, Anna, comes to bring him home, she finds a man who remembers nothing, not even his own name. The removal of a small brain tumor saves his life, but his memories beyond the age of twelve are permanently lost.

Here is the story of a keenly intelligent, sensitive man returned to a life in which everything is strange and new. An emigrant from his own life, set free from all that once defined him, Samson Greene believes he has nothing left to lose. So, when a charismatic scientist asks him to participate in a bold experiment, he agrees. Launched into a turbulent journey that takes him to the furthest extremes of solitude and intimacy, what he gains is nothing short of the revelation of what it means to be human.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Nicole Krauss's elegant, haunting debut, *Man Walks into a Room*, is a what-if novel. What if, asks Krauss, a man woke up one day and he'd forgotten everything he knows? Samson Greene is found lost in the desert near Las Vegas, memory-less thanks to a tumor "applying its arbitrary, pernicious pressure to his brain." Once the tumor is removed, he can remember his childhood up until his 12th year, but then all is blank. He returns to New York, to his wife Anna, to his life as a Columbia University English professor, but none of these things makes sense to him anymore: "Samson could dredge up no feeling for his own life but that of vague admiration." When he receives a call from a mysterious scientist inviting him back to the desert for a sinister-sounding memory experiment, Samson heads West with a kind of despondent fatalism. Krauss's novel moves gracefully from exploration of a lost soul to science fiction to a meditation on memory. If the book unravels a bit at the end, it's only because Krauss is trying to do too much--certainly no literary sin. --
Claire Dederer

From Publishers Weekly

This elegiac first novel achieves a kind of beguiling dreamy tenderness as it tells the story of Samson Greene, a seemingly happy, well-adjusted English professor whose life is thrown wildly out of kilter by a small brain tumor. It is discovered only after he suddenly leaves home and is found wandering in the Nevada desert. Once the tumor is removed, he can remember nothing beyond the age of 12, so that his adult existence, his friends, his professional life and especially his wife, Anna, are a profound mystery to him. He and Anna try to resume their lives, but it is no good pretending that things can be as they were. Eventually Samson leaves again, this time for an experimental research station, also in the Western desert, where attempts are being made to graft the memories of one human into another's mind. Samson becomes friends with another resident at the station, an elderly eccentric called Donald, but when Donald's memories are grafted into Samson's mind, they are of a test nuclear explosion he witnessed as a young soldier. Adrift again, and even more disillusioned, Samson convinces himself he must find his medical records and also determine where his dead mother is buried; he succeeds in both endeavors, one with the aid of a drunken teenager in Las Vegas, the other with a senile uncle and achieves a kind of hard-won reconciliation to his lot. This outline of the story suggests a somber tale full of dark symbolism, but in fact it is surprisingly lighthearted, sharply observant and often touching. Krauss is a sure writer thoroughly in control of her material, and she creates, in Donald and Uncle Max, a pair of memorable characters. Only the ending, from the viewpoint of Anna, the lost wife, fails to bring quite the expected epiphany.

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From Library Journal

Imagine losing 24 years of memory everything that happened to you since just before starting seventh grade and the despair and utter loneliness you would feel when the memory of the girl you kissed at age 12 remains vivid while your wife is a stranger. This is Samson Greene after surgery to remove a brain tumor. Hearing of Samson's condition, a genius scientist asks him to participate in an experiment that consists of transferring another man's memory into Samson's emptiness. Samson doesn't deliberate long, as it sounds better than the limbo in which he exists, but the procedure goes terrifyingly awry. Trying to cope, Samson kidnaps (rescues?) Great Uncle Max from a nursing home in an attempt to find the burial place of his mother, whose death he cannot remember. Poet and critic Krauss has written a wonderful debut, full of shimmering sentences and real emotion, that raises provocative questions: Are we just a combination of habits that enable others to believe they know us? Is empathy possible without the other's memories? This debut will be welcomed in all collections of serious fiction. Judith Kicinski, Sarah Lawrence Coll. Lib., Bronxville, NY

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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