

Film Review: 'Forgetting the Girl'

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OCTOBER 10, 2013 | 06:14PM PT

First-time director Nate Taylor skillfully evokes a clammy sense of dread in this stealthily suspenseful indie thriller.

It may seem counterintuitive to describe a psychosexual thriller as a pleasant surprise, but "Forgetting the Girl" really is the sort of small-budget gem that belies the familiarity of its logline and impresses with its polished professionalism. First-time feature helmer Nate Taylor, working from an adroitly constructed screenplay by Peter Moore Smith, skillfully evokes a clammy sense of dread in this stealthily suspenseful indie about a New York photographer obsessed with shifting his focus from past and present unpleasantness. Limited theatrical play could help elevate the pic's profile and enhance prospects in home-screen formats.

This story first appeared in the October 15, 2013 issue of Variety. Subscribe today.

Right from the start, as photog Kevin Wolfe (Christopher Denham) videotapes a portentously confessional monologue, viewers are primed to suspect the character's customary affability is more apparent than real. But as "Forgetting the Girl" progresses, one cannot help suspecting that this first impression is a shrewdly planted fakeout. Indeed, Taylor and Smith continually play on their audience's awareness of other thrillers, raising expectations of predictable "surprises" — which, of course, makes it all the easier for them to upend those expectations, and all the more difficult to provide any sort of spoiler-free plot synopsis.

Kevin, a studio shutterbug who specializes in headshots of actresses and models, had developed a radical way to deal with a childhood trauma: Through sheer force of will, he simply forgets anything (or anyone) that troubles or embarrasses him. This talent proves very handy in his line of work because — largely due to his emotional neediness — he repeatedly tries too hard, and fails too dismally, while trying to connect, romantically or otherwise, with women he photographs.

Trouble is, Kevin spends so much time reaching out to these women, and then erasing his burdensome memories, that he doesn't seem to fully appreciate two things the audience can't help noticing: Tanner (Paul Sparks), his porn-loving landlord, is quite a creepy fellow, and Jamie (Lindsay Beamish), his goth-chick assistant, wants to be considerably more than just a reliable employee.

Denham hits all the right notes to sustain the unsettling ambiguity of his character, while Beamish is adeptly affecting and, in one key scene near the end, ineffably heartbreaking. Sparks gets one of the pic's biggest laughs, for reasons that cannot be revealed here. It should be noted, though, that his character's online surfing preferences likely explain the shout-out to YouPorn in the closing credits.

Nimbly atmospheric lensing by Mark Pugh and deftly emphatic editing by Victoria Lesiw are standout elements in a first-rate technical package.

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Reviewed on DVD, Houston, Oct. 8, 2013. (In WorldFest/Houston Film Festival.) Running time: **85 MIN.**

Production

A RAM Releasing release of a Full Stealth Films production. Produced by Brian Gonsar, Victor Reyes, Camiren Romero, Nate Taylor. Executive producer, Dennis Wallestad. Co-producers, Christopher Denham, Varun Shah.

Crew

Directed by Nate Taylor. Screenplay, Peter Moore Smith. Camera (color), Mark Pugh; editor, Victoria Lesiw; music, Robert Miller; music supervisor, Jackie Mulhearn; production designer, Nadya Gurevich; art director, Thorstein "Thor" Foss; costume designer, Naomi Wolff; special effects supervisor, Ian Glaum; sound, Carmine Picarello; associate producers, Rebecca Heineman, Bliss Holloway, Talya Taylor; assistant director, Bethanie Schwartz; casting, Ann Goulder, Gayle Keller, Anne Teutschel.

With

Christopher Denham, Lindsay Beamish, Elizabeth Rice, Paul Sparks, Anna Camp, Phyllis Somerville.

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