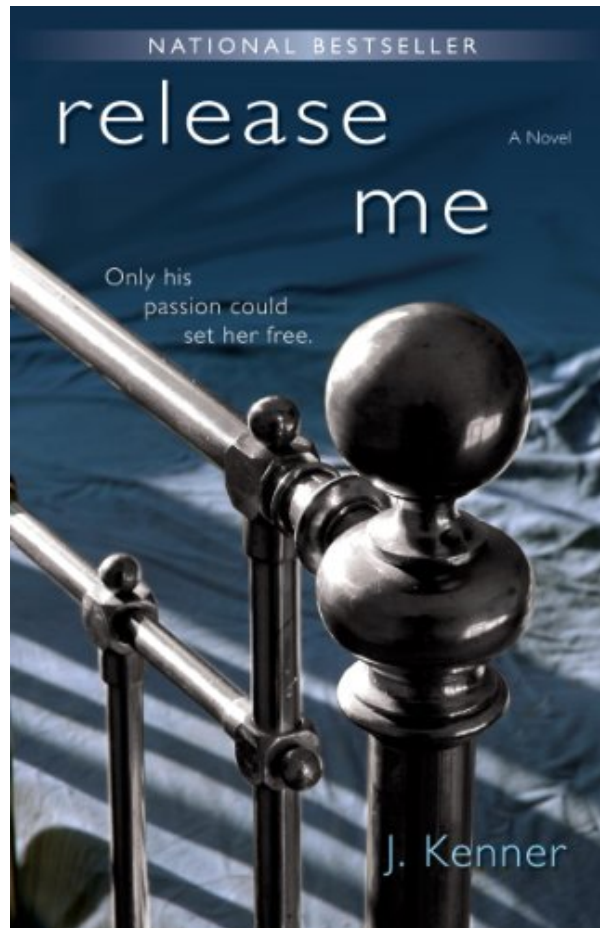
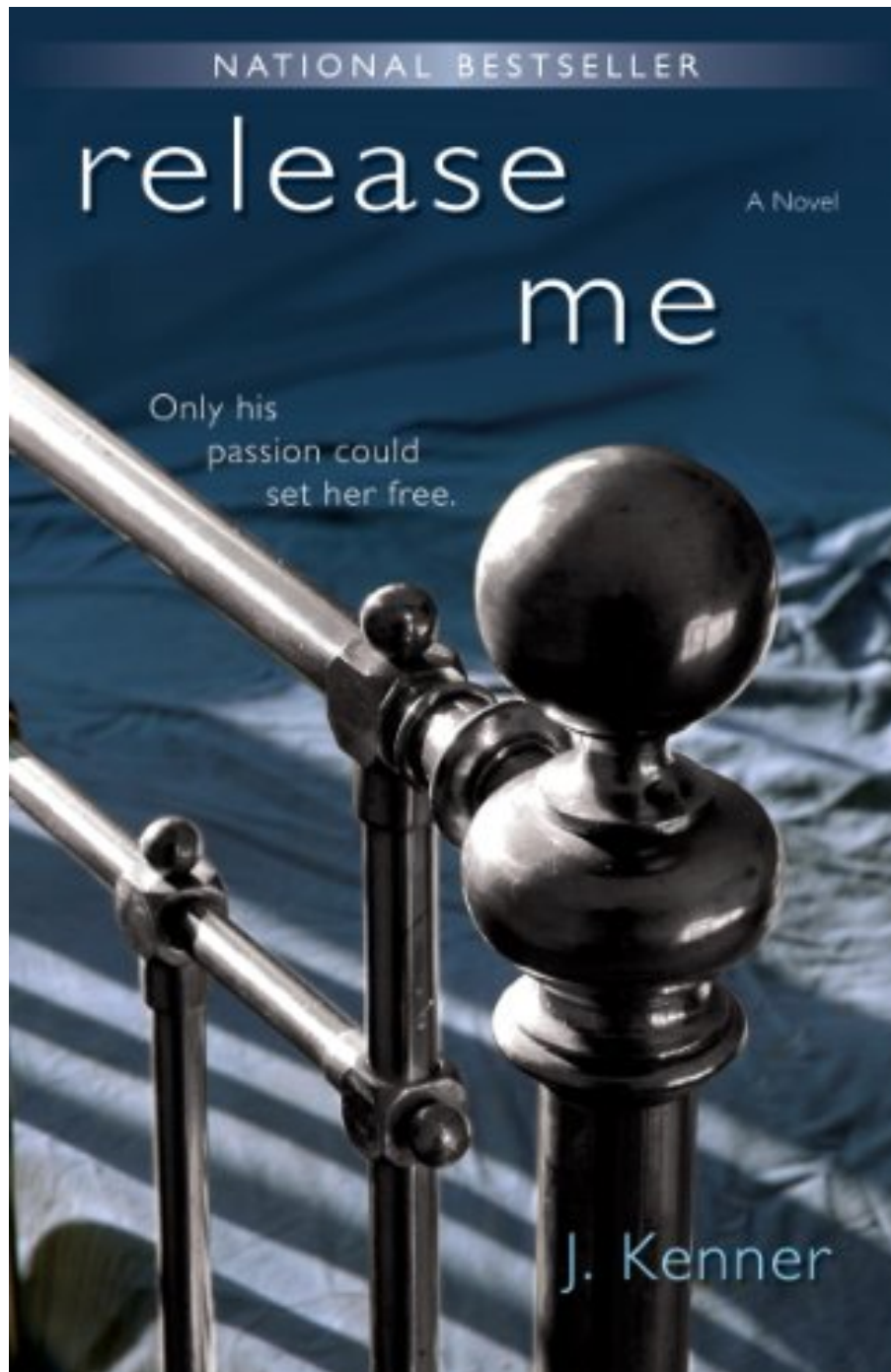


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“How old are you?”

“Twenty-four.”

Evelyn nods sagely, as if my age reveals some secret about me. “You’ll be wanting a place of your own soon enough. You call me when you do and we’ll find you someplace with a view. Not as good as this one, of course, but we can manage something better than a freeway on-ramp.”

“It’s not that bad, I promise.”

“Of course it’s not,” she says in a tone that says the exact opposite. “As for views,” she continues, gesturing toward the now-dark ocean and the sky that’s starting to bloom with stars, “you’re welcome to come back anytime and share mine.”

“I might take you up on that,” I admit. “I’d love to bring a decent camera back here and take a shot or two.”

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He was the one man I couldn't avoid. And the one man I couldn't resist.

Damien Stark could have his way with any woman. He was sexy, confident, and commanding: Anything he wanted, he got. And what he wanted was me.

Our attraction was unmistakable, almost beyond control, but as much as I ached to be his, I feared the pressures of his demands. Submitting to Damien meant I had to bare the darkest truth about my past--and risk breaking us apart.

But Damien was haunted, too. And as our passion came to obsess us both, his secrets threatened to destroy him--and us--forever.

NOTE: This edition includes excerpts from J. Kenner's Claim Me and Say My Name.

Release Me is intended for mature audiences.

- Sales Rank: #7092 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-01-01
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"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

Evelyn nods sagely, as if my age reveals some secret about me. "You'll be wanting a place of your own soon enough. You call me when you do and we'll find you someplace with a view. Not as good as this one, of course, but we can manage something better than a freeway on-ramp."

"It's not that bad, I promise."

"Of course it's not," she says in a tone that says the exact opposite. "As for views," she continues, gesturing toward the now-dark ocean and the sky that's starting to bloom with stars, "you're welcome to come back anytime and share mine."

"I might take you up on that," I admit. "I'd love to bring a decent camera back here and take a shot or two."

Most helpful customer reviews

124 of 135 people found the following review helpful.

Release Me

By K. Branfield

If you are a fan of erotic novels with BDSM elements, then you are going to LOVE Release Me by J. Kenner. It is a well-executed, deliciously sensual romance between two emotionally wounded yet surprisingly well-adjusted protagonists. While there are some similarities to the Fifty Shades and Crossfire series, Release Me is much less angsty and the characters and their relationship are MUCH more realistic.

Nikki Fairchild and Damien Stark are wonderfully developed protagonists with dysfunctional pasts. Damien is a former tennis star turned bazillionaire entrepreneur. He is intense and domineering but he is also quite charming. Damien is a very private person who goes to great lengths to keep his personal life out of the limelight but he does reveal certain aspects of his past in order to maintain his relationship with Nikki.

Nikki is a delightful breath of fresh air. She is a strong character that is self-sufficient and independent. While she does have submissive tendencies, Nikki is no shrinking violet. She stands up for herself and she does not allow her relationship with Damien to interfere with her career goals.

Although the story takes place over just a few days, Nikki and Damien's relationship never feels forced or rushed. They take the time to get to know one another outside of the bedroom and there is not a creepy obsessive quality to their burgeoning relationship.

The sexual relationship between Nikki and Damien is slow growing and full of exquisite anticipation. While Damien takes the dominant role he is willing to relinquish control to Nikki. The BDSM aspect is fairly light and consists of bondage, role playing, phone sex and spanking.

Release Me by J. Kenner is an entertaining romance that is quite captivating. Nikki and Damien have their share of flaws and insecurities, but their characters are three dimensional and fully fleshed out. Not all of Damien's secrets are revealed and an intriguing and vaguely threatening exchange at the end of the novel sets the stage for Claim Me, the next installment in the series.

I received a complimentary copy for review.

64 of 70 people found the following review helpful.

Incredibly frustrating

By loveless

I had a hard time trying to figure out how many stars to rate this book and after some thought I eventually decided on an one. This is the lowest I have ever scored any novel and here's why. To start the author takes a group of interesting characters and but does very little with them. There is neither depth nor growth for these characters. Whenever there is opportunity to show any sort of depth for these characters the author runs the other way. The side characters are all but forgotten due to Damien and Nikki's romance. In fact after the beginning they only ever make an appearance in the story to help with Nikki's increasing relationship with Damien.

At some point we find out Nikki's two best friends (who have been there for her countless times) end up sleeping together even though one of them is currently engaged. Afterwards we hear nothing about them because Nikki doesn't want to be caught in the middle and instead chooses to put her focus on Damien. At the very least this makes her selfish and a bad friend for ignoring something that in so many ways is a big deal.

Still even though this is annoying it is not why I gave only one star. Nikki and Damien's relationship (in my opinion it should be called a business transaction) begins when Nikki accepts Damien's proposal to do a nude painting for a million dollars. She stipulates that it must be done within a week so its fair to say the story takes place in about a week and a half. So we're clear Nikki sells herself to Damien and he makes sure that she knows he owns her. So as a reader I am supposed to be ok with two people suddenly falling in love in the course of a week given the way the basis of their relationship. This I find annoying. Damien turns out to be an uber stalker but given his looks and wealth we're supposed to overlook it. He knows things about Nikki that would never turn up in a regular background check. And when she's confronted by this with her best

friend she tells him to cut the big brother act and doesn't look any further into it. However the thing that really got me was when Damien tracks down her old boyfriend who broke her heart 5 YEARS AGO and gets him fired, Nikki is only pissed because he never told her before he did it. Not that he would even do it at all. This is a man she hasn't seen or had contact with since they broke up and she justifies Damien's actions by saying he only wanted to protect her. Her old boyfriend was not a threat so what exactly was he protecting her from? To round it all out the sex scenes are repetitive and boring and not very descriptive which wouldn't be a problem they weren't over quickly. All in all this book falls flat on soooo many accounts.

110 of 127 people found the following review helpful.

Fine, if you haven't read 50 Shades or Bared; pass otherwise

By Jonetta (Ejaygirl)

Nikki Fairchild is a recent business school graduate from Texas, now living in L. A. and working as an assistant for a successful businessman who is a rainmaker for technology innovators and he's a bit of a sleaze. Damien Stark is the head of a powerful business empire and educational foundation. When Nikki and Damien meet at a party, which is a business function for her, their first contact was emotionally charged and bizarre.

The comparisons to the 50 Shades and Crossfire trilogies by E. L. James and Sylvia Day, respectively, are unfortunately true. I deliberately didn't read any of the reviews so I could form my own, unbiased opinion and still ended up with the same conclusion. At times, I thought of the main character as Eva, the heroine in Bared to You, since the first-person narrative was almost dead on to her. If I hadn't read these two series, I might have enjoyed this book more but there was nothing new or fresh here to keep me engaged or invested in Nikki and Damien.

Putting aside the likeness to the other trilogies (and that's difficult to do), I at first found Nikki to be a potentially interesting character. She's a former participant in the beauty pageant circuit who escaped her mother's insensitive clutches to pursue her educational goals and is pretty smart in her own right. Nikki has lofty goals and is right thinking in her approach to achieving them. This all seems to fall apart when she meets Damien at the party and from there on out she seems to be in a lust-filled haze anytime she's around him. Damien was a former tennis star who was also (surprise) damaged as a young child and has transformed into a brilliant, mega-rich, beautiful, controlling business mogul. Nikki is now his focus and the story becomes a tale of both, especially Nikki, trying to unmask each other to discover their dark secrets.

There's a lot of erotica and, while well written, not particularly inventive (there is one exception involving pearls on a thong...). It does define and advance Nikki and Damien's relationship so it works in that respect. Nikki's two best friends are an important part of the story, one a big Team Damien supporter and the other not.

Nikki does quite a bit of "I can't be with him, I must be with him" angst throughout the story, especially in the first half as she struggles to not sleep with him. Damien is pretty stalker-ish and while Nikki rightly calls him out on it, she caves every time. Each time she discovers something freakish in his background, she runs and hides or runs to him and confronts and then succumbs to him. This is a repetitive theme throughout the book.

The story ends rather abruptly, which leads me to believe this book is part of a series, though I couldn't find any information to substantiate it. If you haven't read either of the two trilogies mentioned here, this will be an interesting and appealing story as it's well written and edited. I might have rated it at least 3.5 stars if I hadn't but I felt like I was reading the same stories with only the names changed and the circumstances of the characters' past slightly altered.

(I received an ARC from NetGalley)

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RELEASE ME (THE STARK TRILOGY, BOOK 1) BY J. KENNER PDF

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Review

PERFECT for fans of Fifty Shades of Grey and Bared to You. Release Me is a powerful and erotic romance novel that is sure to make adult romance readers sweat, sigh and swoon --Reading, Eating & Dreaming Blog

Release Me sucked me in from the very beginning. I started cheering for the heroine, Nikki Fairchild on the first page... An emotional roller coaster, full of tenderness, love mystery and...hot sex - Release Me is definitely one you'll want to add to your TBR list -- Scandalicious Book Reviews Blog

Release Me...just made the top of my list with Damien and Nikki...the way in which J. Kenner tells the story, how vulnerable and real Damien and Nikki feel, makes this story so good, and re-readable many times over - - In Love With Romance Blog

This is deeply sensual and the story packs an emotional punch that I really hadn't expected... If you enjoyed Fifty Shades [and] the Crossfire Books, you're definitely going to enjoy this one. It's compelling, engaging and I was thoroughly engrossed -- Sinfully Sexy Blog

I will admit, I am in the "I loved Fifty Shades" camp, but after reading Release Me, Mr Grey only scratches the surface compared to Damien Stark --Cocktails and Books Blog

I couldn't put this book down. I HAD to know what happened next... If you liked Fifty and the Crossfire series, you will love Release Me --Bungalow Books Blog

Damien Stark...belongs with some of the greatest fictional characters...what makes Release Me stands out from the crowd is the fact it has such memorable characters...it was good, very good --Book Passion for Life Blog

'It is not often when a book is so amazingly well-written that I find it hard to even begin to accurately describe it... I recommend this book to everyone who is interested in a passionate love story' -- Romancebookworm's Reviews

Along with the wave of new erotic romance novels, came this, Release Me by J. Kenner...I really wasn't expecting it to be as mind-blowing as this was. Release Me was SO MUCH MORE EMOTIONAL and DEEP and complex than I was expecting, I loved it...simply amazing -- Romance Books Forum

The story is one that will rank up with the Fifty Shades and Crossfire trilogies. I am impatiently awaiting book two! A definite read for those who enjoyed Fifty Shades and Bared to You --Incubus Publishing Blog

Release Me by J. Kenner will undress you and leave you breathless! Kenner's erotic story, brings two souls together, where a love that has been elusive is suddenly craved. The attraction between Damien and Nikki is palpable, they are two strong personalities with past demons to contend with. Release Me gives readers tantalizing pages of sensual delight, leaving us reeling as we journey with this couple and their passions are released. Release Me is a must read...! --Readaholics Anonymous

J. Kenner has written a sensually seductive storyline that catches your imagination and pulls you in --The Reading Cafe

J. Kenner's evocative writing thrillingly captures the power of physical attraction, the pull of longing, the universe-altering effect one person can have on another. She masterfully draws out the eroticism between Nikki and Damien... Claim Me has the emotional depth to back up the sex... Every scene is infused with both erotic tension, and the tension of wondering what lies beneath Damien's veneer - and how and when it will be revealed --Heroes and Heartbreakers

Claim Me by J. Kenner is an erotic, sexy and exciting ride. The story between Damien and Nikki is amazing and written beautifully. The intimate and detailed sex scenes will leave you fanning yourself to cool down. With the writing style of Ms Kenner you almost feel like you are there in the story riding along the emotional rollercoaster with Damien and Nikki --Fresh Fiction

About the Author

J. Kenner spent more than ten years as a litigator in Southern California and Central Texas, using her rare free time to indulge her passion for writing. California born, she now lives—and writes—in Texas, with her husband and daughters.

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1

A cool ocean breeze caresses my bare shoulders, and I shiver, wishing I'd taken my roommate's advice and brought a shawl with me tonight. I arrived in Los Angeles only four days ago, and I haven't yet adjusted to the concept of summer temperatures changing with the setting of the sun. In Dallas, June is hot, July is hotter, and August is hell.

Not so in California, at least not by the beach. LA Lesson Number One: Always carry a sweater if you'll be out after dark.

Of course, I could leave the balcony and go back inside to the party. Mingle with the millionaires. Chat up the celebrities. Gaze dutifully at the paintings. It is a gala art opening, after all, and my boss brought me here to meet and greet and charm and chat. Not to lust over the panorama that is coming alive in front of me. Bloodred clouds bursting against the pale orange sky. Blue- gray waves shimmering with dappled gold.

I press my hands against the balcony rail and lean forward, drawn to the intense, unreachable beauty of the setting sun. I regret that I didn't bring the battered Nikon I've had since high school. Not that it would have fit in my itty-bitty beaded purse. And a bulky camera bag paired with a little black dress is a big, fat fashion no-no.

But this is my very first Pacific Ocean sunset, and I'm determined to document the moment. I pull out my

iPhone and snap a picture.

“Almost makes the paintings inside seem redundant, doesn’t it?” I recognize the throaty, feminine voice and turn to face Evelyn Dodge, retired actress turned agent turned patron of the arts—and my hostess for the evening.

“I’m so sorry. I know I must look like a giddy tourist, but we don’t have sunsets like that in Dallas.”

“Don’t apologize,” she says. “I pay for that view every month when I write the mortgage check. It damn well better be spectacular.”

I laugh, immediately more at ease.

“Hiding out?”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re Carl’s new assistant, right?” she asks, referring to my boss of three days.

“Nikki Fairchild.”

“I remember now. Nikki from Texas.” She looks me up and down, and I wonder if she’s disappointed that I don’t have big hair and cowboy boots. “So who does he want you to charm?”

“Charm?” I repeat, as if I don’t know exactly what she means.

She cocks a single brow. “Honey, the man would rather walk on burning coals than come to an art show. He’s fishing for investors and you’re the bait.” She makes a rough noise in the back of her throat. “Don’t worry. I won’t press you to tell me who. And I don’t blame you for hiding out. Carl’s brilliant, but he’s a bit of a prick.”

“It’s the brilliant part I signed on for,” I say, and she barks out a laugh.

The truth is that she’s right about me being the bait. “Wear a cocktail dress,” Carl had said. “Something flirty.”

Seriously? I mean, Seriously?

I should have told him to wear his own damn cocktail dress. But I didn’t. Because I want this job. I fought to get this job. Carl’s company, C-Squared Technologies, successfully launched three web-based products in the last eighteen months. That track record had caught the industry’s eye, and Carl had been hailed as a man to watch.

More important from my perspective, that meant he was a man to learn from, and I’d prepared for the job interview with an intensity bordering on obsession. Landing the position had been a huge coup for me. So what if he wanted me to wear something flirty? It was a small price to pay.

Shit.

“I need to get back to being the bait,” I say.

“Oh, hell. Now I’ve gone and made you feel either guilty or self-conscious. Don’t be. Let them get liquored up in there first. You catch more flies with alcohol anyway. Trust me. I know.”

She’s holding a pack of cigarettes, and now she taps one out, then extends the pack to me. I shake my head. I love the smell of tobacco—it reminds me of my grandfather—but actually inhaling the smoke does nothing for me.

“I’m too old and set in my ways to quit,” she says. “But God forbid I smoke in my own damn house. I swear, the mob would burn me in effigy. You’re not going to start lecturing me on the dangers of secondhand smoke, are you?”

“No,” I promise.

“Then how about a light?”

I hold up the itty-bitty purse. “One lipstick, a credit card, my driver’s license, and my phone.”

“No condom?”

“I didn’t think it was that kind of party,” I say dryly.

“I knew I liked you.” She glances around the balcony. “What the hell kind of party am I throwing if I don’t even have one goddamn candle on one goddamn table? Well, fuck it.” She puts the unlit cigarette to her mouth and inhales, her eyes closed and her expression rapturous. I can’t help but like her. She wears hardly any makeup, in stark contrast to all the other women here tonight, myself included, and her dress is more of a caftan, the batik pattern as interesting as the woman herself.

She’s what my mother would call a brassy broad—loud, large, opinionated, and self-confident. My mother would hate her. I think she’s awesome.

She drops the unlit cigarette onto the tile and grinds it with the toe of her shoe. Then she signals to one of the catering staff, a girl dressed all in black and carrying a tray of champagne glasses.

The girl fumbles for a minute with the sliding door that opens onto the balcony, and I imagine those flutes tumbling off, breaking against the hard tile, the scattered shards glittering like a wash of diamonds.

I picture myself bending to snatch up a broken stem. I see the raw edge cutting into the soft flesh at the base of my thumb as I squeeze. I watch myself clutching it tighter, drawing strength from the pain, the way some people might try to extract luck from a rabbit’s foot.

The fantasy blurs with memory, jarring me with its potency. It’s fast and powerful, and a little disturbing because I haven’t needed the pain in a long time, and I don’t understand why I’m thinking about it now, when I feel steady and in control.

I am fine, I think. I am fine, I am fine, I am fine.

“Take one, honey,” Evelyn says easily, holding a flute out to me.

I hesitate, searching her face for signs that my mask has slipped and she's caught a glimpse of my rawness. But her face is clear and genial.

"No, don't you argue," she adds, misinterpreting my hesitation. "I bought a dozen cases and I hate to see good alcohol go to waste. Hell no," she adds when the girl tries to hand her a flute. "I hate the stuff. Get me a vodka. Straight up. Chilled. Four olives. Hurry up, now. Do you want me to dry up like a leaf and float away?"

The girl shakes her head, looking a bit like a twitchy, frightened rabbit. Possibly one that had sacrificed his foot for someone else's good luck.

Evelyn's attention returns to me. "So how do you like LA? What have you seen? Where have you been? Have you bought a map of the stars yet? Dear God, tell me you're not getting sucked into all that tourist bullshit."

"Mostly I've seen miles of freeway and the inside of my apartment."

"Well, that's just sad. Makes me even more glad that Carl dragged your skinny ass all the way out here tonight."

I've put on fifteen welcome pounds since the years when my mother monitored every tiny thing that went in my mouth, and while I'm perfectly happy with my size-eight ass, I wouldn't describe it as skinny. I know Evelyn means it as a compliment, though, and so I smile. "I'm glad he brought me, too. The paintings really are amazing."

"Now don't do that—don't you go sliding into the polite-conversation routine. No, no," she says before I can protest. "I'm sure you mean it. Hell, the paintings are wonderful. But you're getting the flat-eyed look of a girl on her best behavior, and we can't have that. Not when I was getting to know the real you."

"Sorry," I say. "I swear I'm not fading away on you."

Because I genuinely like her, I don't tell her that she's wrong—she hasn't met the real Nikki Fairchild. She's met Social Nikki who, much like Malibu Barbie, comes with a complete set of accessories. In my case, it's not a bikini and a convertible. Instead, I have the Elizabeth Fairchild Guide for Social Gatherings.

My mother's big on rules. She claims it's her Southern upbringing. In my weaker moments, I agree. Mostly, I just think she's a controlling bitch. Since the first time she took me for tea at the Mansion at Turtle Creek in Dallas at age three, I have had the rules drilled into my head. How to walk, how to talk, how to dress. What to eat, how much to drink, what kinds of jokes to tell.

I have it all down, every trick, every nuance, and I wear my practiced pageant smile like armor against the world. The result being that I don't think I could truly be myself at a party even if my life depended on it.

This, however, is not something Evelyn needs to know.

"Where exactly are you living?" she asks.

"Studio City. I'm sharing a condo with my best friend from high school."

“Straight down the 101 for work and then back home again. No wonder you’ve only seen concrete. Didn’t anyone tell you that you should have taken an apartment on the Westside?”

“Too pricey to go it alone,” I admit, and I can tell that my admission surprises her. When I make the effort—like when I’m Social Nikki—I can’t help but look like I come from money. Probably because I do. Come from it, that is. But that doesn’t mean I brought it with me.

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-four.”

Evelyn nods sagely, as if my age reveals some secret about me. “You’ll be wanting a place of your own soon enough. You call me when you do and we’ll find you someplace with a view. Not as good as this one, of course, but we can manage something better than a freeway on-ramp.”

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