

Kaity's Catch

J.J. Sommers

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Kaity's Catch is a promising series opener with strong viewpoints about the invigorating power of women's support and friendship.

An insecure Midwestern divorcée renews her confidence through dance—and meets a photographer—in J. J. Sommers's contemporary romance novel *Kaity's Catch*.

When Kaity's friend Annabelle convinces her to join a fitness class at Snapdragon, a pole-dancing studio, she's hesitant yet eager to find out if she can reconnect with herself. After all, her ex-husband's beratements made her unsure about herself. Meanwhile, Gabe, a wedding photographer, longs to diversify his work. As he takes artistic portraits of the class members, he runs into Kaity.

Their connection is furthered through alternating perspectives, in which each reveals their curiosity about the other. Then Gabe, who's drawn to Kaity's Pre-Raphaelite looks, invites Kaity to participate in a new photo series. Breezy conversations reveal how they're hampered by other people's opinions. Gabe is in conflict with his stepmother, who disapproves of his work; Kaity's job making instructional modules has a new, inconvenient employee—her catty ex-sister-in-law.

These everyday circumstances underscore how hope for relationships thrives even when it seems most inconvenient. But the pair's decision to pretend to date each other—so as to impress the people they worry about—is somewhat predictable, blurring the lines between lighthearted role-playing and real expectations. And some familiar tropes, such as painting Kaity as a woman who is beautiful but who doesn't realize it, shortcut fresher characterizations. Still, anticipation grows around how the two might secure an honest future.

Between Gabe's and Kaity's sharing, Kaity's class progresses. Details reveal intricate dance steps, athleticism, "slinky" choreography, and camaraderie. And Annabelle's companionship laces heartfelt affirmations with banter. Other women at the studio prompt Kaity to let go of some of her initial concerns about not measuring up to others: she's neither as clumsy as she feared nor as out of place.

The couple's dates lead to tension: Kaity hesitates to get too involved and Gabe believes that he's not looking for a meaningful relationship. Their doubts are realistic, if they also make it tougher to invest in their outcome. When their encounters intensify, their passion exists in stark contrast to the rest of the text.

Working toward a hopeful conclusion, the romance novel *Kaity's Catch* follows two adults at a crossroads who find respite in each other.

KAREN RIGBY (April 14, 2023)

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