

Dazzled: A Nikki Easton Mystery

Maxine Nunes

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Actress Nikki Easton makes for a tenacious and admirable heroine in this suspenseful page-turner—readers will root for her from start to finish.

Maxine Nunes crafts an outstanding tale of friendship, murder, love, and betrayal in her impressive debut, *Dazzled*. Enough action and suspense to sustain reader interest and a tenacious and relatable heroine results in a page-turner readers won't want to miss.

Nikki's life has never been easy, starting with a difficult childhood that caused her to leave home at fifteen. She's worked hard to make a good life for herself but trust doesn't always come easily. Nikki feels lucky to have made some lasting friendships, particularly with Darla, a beautiful, talented young actress on the verge of making it big. When Darla is discovered among the victims of a drug-related homicide, Nikki is compelled to find out what really happened to her friend. Her mission leads her through the darker underbelly of Los Angeles and into a world where prominent figures can find themselves embroiled in scandal, and the lure of drugs and money can change even those who seem untouchable.

Dazzled is skillfully written from the compelling opening to the surprising ending. Through Nikki, the narrative flows naturally, building suspense at a fast but comfortable pace. The plot is credible and well-realized, as are character relationships. Dialogue is natural and smooth, filled with enough nuance to emphasize each character's personality.

Nunes shines most brightly in characterization, particularly her creation of a heroine worth rooting for. Like her friends, Nikki pursues an acting career and achieves some small success, but unlike many, she is not willing to compromise. She refuses to make physical changes and often seems blasé about the business, habitually missing acting classes and auditions. Readers soon learn that Nikki is a strong young woman who knows her own mind and has a firm handle on what's important to her. When Darla is murdered, Nikki's career falls by the wayside as she gets drawn deeply into the investigation. Even falling for a handsome cop or finding herself on the wrong end of a gun doesn't throw her off course, and readers are sure to enjoy such a gutsy and resilient heroine.

Nunes' writing is top-notch from start to finish, and the increasingly suspenseful plot comes together with meticulous precision, keeping readers invested in the outcome.

A freelance writer who has written for television and for the *Los Angeles Times*, Nunes is also a winner of the Pen USA West International Imitation Hemingway Competition. *Dazzled* is a highly satisfying read and a solid debut, and Nunes is definitely a writer to watch.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (Fall 2013)

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