

Life in High Def

Kimberly Cooper Griffin

Night River Press (Jun 1, 2016)

Softcover \$15.95 (362pp)

978-0-9972190-1-2

This perceptive and sensitive novel is an inspirational reminder that the approval that matters most comes from within.

Kimberly Cooper Griffin examines how people struggle to find fulfillment in her powerful debut, *Life in High Def*.

When a shocking event sends a Hollywood actress's glamorous existence off course, she is forced to reevaluate her choices and priorities in order to make amends. The heroine's inspirational transformation demonstrates how anyone can change for the better—and that success ultimately hinges upon assuming control and taking responsibility.

Reilly Ransome enjoys a life many people would kill for. Not only does she have her pick of coveted movie roles, but her acting efforts have received award recognition. A carefully cultivated public persona keeps her in the spotlight, and an open relationship with her girlfriend means countless people seek to share her bed.

But that all changes one fateful night, and Reilly must pick up the pieces in the years to follow. The plot that unfolds doesn't shy away from portraying Hollywood's less than savory aspects.

From rampant drug use to a mother who doubles as her manager, Reilly embodies many familiar concepts. Sexual escapades, alcohol dependence, and casual cocaine use are stereotypical hallmarks of a former child star who grew up in extraordinary circumstances and never had a chance to ground herself. The frequency of scandalous exploits, however, veers into repetitious territory.

By contrast, the time Reilly spends in prison offers a fascinating, if unflinchingly brutal, glimpse into the experiences of incarcerated women. While her ability to avoid more humiliating encounters with hardened criminals may stretch believability, her fortune offers a welcome reprieve from an otherwise horrifying environment.

Although Reilly's empowering journey from Hollywood party girl to yoga-practicing former inmate reinforces the idea that money and fame cannot deliver true happiness, the paper-thin portrayal of her romantic partners weakens the message.

Girlfriend Sylvie represents the wilder aspects of celebrity culture but seems one-note and superficial, which is further bolstered by her role in the evening that changed Reilly's life. Yoga teacher Drew represents the fulfillment Reilly can achieve if she can succeed in shaking off her former image, but the speed at which the two proceed from lust to love relies on stale wish-fulfillment tropes to succeed.

On the other hand, Griffin portrays nonromantic relationships with incisive nuance. The unwavering support that Reilly receives from Hank offers a pleasant contrast from the judgment and betrayal she receives from other people in her life. The complicated relationship Reilly has with her mother echoes the struggles many people have with their parents regardless of their place in society. Her struggles to balance independence with allowing her mother into her life are among the more relatable takes in the novel.

Kimberly Cooper Griffin tackles the glitzy Hollywood lifestyle with perceptive sensitivity through an actress who discovers meaning and tranquility in the most terrible of circumstances. Even though her actions may not always be admirable, Reilly remains sympathetic throughout due to her flaws and vulnerabilities.

More importantly, *Life in High Def* highlights the significance of self-forgiveness and self-love—because even if millions of people adore you, what matters most is that you accept yourself.

VERNIEDA VERGARA (November 16, 2016)

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