

Your Next Book Club Read



“Will hit you right in the heart”
—*Bustle*

A PopSugar Best Book of Spring!

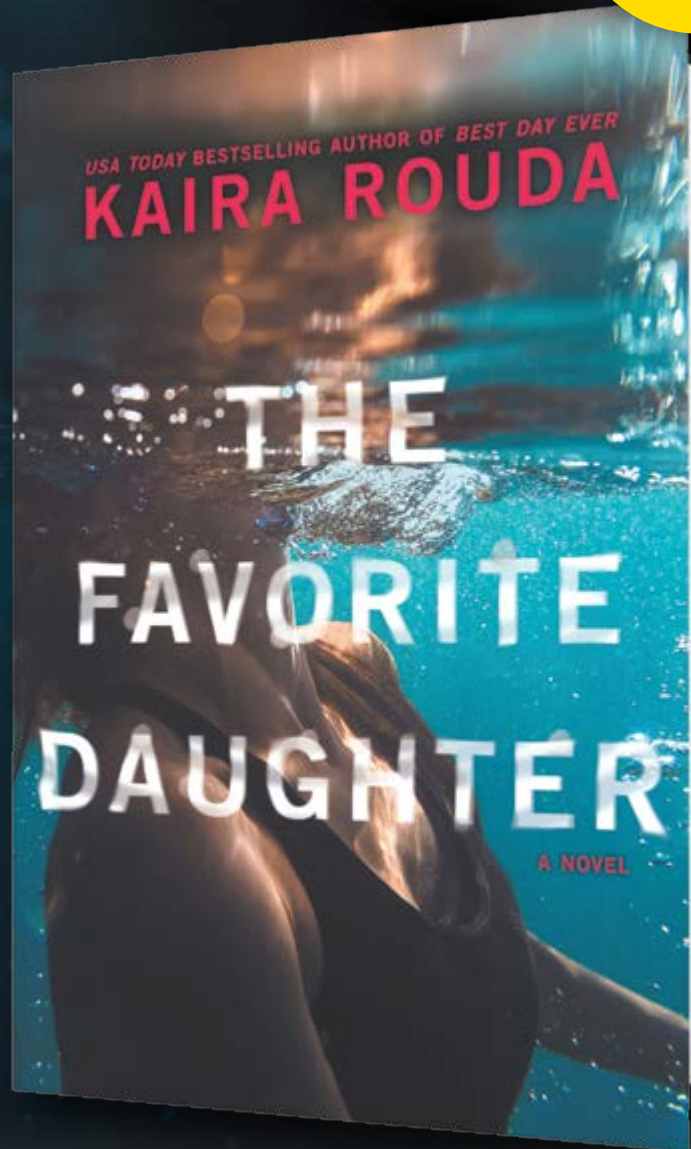
“An exceptional psychological thriller.”
—*Publishers Weekly* STARRED review

**THE PERFECT HOME.
THE PERFECT FAMILY.
THE PERFECT LIE.**

Jane Harris lives in a sparkling home in an oceanfront gated community in Orange County. It's a place that seems too beautiful to be touched by sadness. But exactly one year ago, Jane's oldest daughter, Mary, died in a tragic accident and Jane has been grief-stricken ever since. Lost in a haze of anti-depressants, she's barely even left the house. Now that's all about to change.

It's time for Jane to reclaim her life and her family. Jane's husband, David, has planned a memorial service for Mary and three days later, their youngest daughter, Betsy, graduates high school. Yet as Jane reemerges into the world, it's clear her family has changed without her. Her husband has been working long days—and nights—at the office. Her daughter seems distant, even secretive. And her beloved Mary was always such a good girl—dutiful and loving. But does someone know more about Mary, and about her last day, than they've revealed?

The bonds between mothers and daughters, and husbands and wives should never be broken. But you never know how far someone will go to keep a family together...



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Dear Reader,

Years ago, just after my family and I moved to the West Coast, I was lucky to become friends with an amazing woman, Malibu City Council member and clinical psychologist Laura Rosenthal. As you may have guessed, Laura is the inspiration for the doctor character in *THE FAVORITE DAUGHTER*. One evening Laura joined us for dinner on a night my husband and I were discussing the baffling character traits of some one we knew. We just couldn't figure this person out.

"Well, that sounds like a classic narcissist," Laura said.

At that, the light bulb turned on and it has been shining brightly in both my imagination, and in real life, ever since.

Maybe you're more aware of this than I was, but narcissists are everywhere in our society. Some estimate narcissists comprise 10 percent of the population and experts believe access to social media is creating more: Selfies are a narcissist's best friend.

Although it may seem terrifying to some that I enjoy getting inside the heads of these types of people in my most recent novels, to me, it's cathartic. Since first learning about narcissists from Laura all those years ago, I've somehow become blessed with a superpower: I can spot a narcissist. I'm not sure it's a gift or a curse, but it's true.

I also enjoy writing stories with unreliable narrators, and Jane Harris, like Paul Strom in *BEST DAY EVER*, is at her core a very unreliable person, among other things. These characters are obsessed with perception. Everything they show to the world is carefully calculated to portray perfection, even in their marriages, even when their lives may be falling apart. Narcissists suffer from a self-esteem problem coupled with low empathy. Failure is unacceptable, especially with their family, where they expect unflinching loyalty and subservience. Grandiose self-worth, vanity and entitlement are the foundation of the disorder. When any of this is challenged, rage is the result.

A special, terrifying subset of narcissist are those called "malignant narcissists." Erich Fromm first coined the term in 1964 to describe the "quintessence of evil." Some of the most difficult narcissists to spot are malignant narcissists who are mothers. She often gets away with her abuse because she is unseen to all but those she controls, her children, and no one wants to imagine a mother could be the monster in her own home.

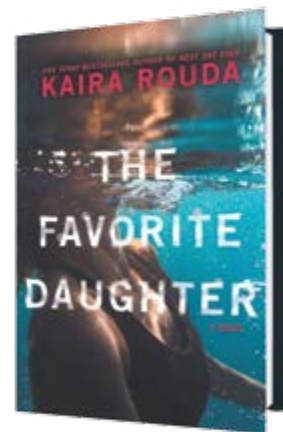
No one wants to imagine that, except as a starting point for a novel, perhaps.

I asked my friend Laura if therapy works with narcissists. Her answer: It's a pretty tough one to fix because they cannot see themselves for who they are and cannot take responsibility. When things go wrong they blame other people, so therapy is tough. They aren't motivated to change. They like themselves just the way they are.

I hope you enjoyed Jane's story. She wants you to believe she is the perfect mother, a loving wife, a connected and compassionate member of her community. Did she convince you? And who is her favorite daughter?

Thanks for reading,

Kaira



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Discussion Questions

1. We're all unreliable narrators of our personal stories, whether we're comfortable admitting it or not. For example, most of us are on social media, where we share our filtered and carefully curated version of our lives. The perfect couple. The perfect day. A perfect illusion. Is Jane Harris that much different?
2. Does Jane have a favorite daughter? Why or why not?
3. At the beginning of the story, Jane tells us she's working on being a better mother, a better spouse. Is she trying to fool you, the reader, or herself?
4. Was Elizabeth James attempting to "steal" Mary from Jane?
5. In our society, we elevate and treasure mothers, almost to a point where the ideal of what a mother should be obscures the actual reality of who she is. Do you think that's part of how Jane was able to keep her true self hidden for so long? Was it hard for you to imagine a mother who isn't what she seems?
6. Betsy is a step ahead of Jane in this story. Is she just like her mom, as Jane claims? Or has Betsy become Jane's complete opposite?
7. Do you feel at all sorry for Jane? Why?
8. Did Kylie get what she deserved?
9. What do you think of David and his relationships with women?





In **THE FAVORITE DAUGHTER**, Kaira Rouda introduces us to Delilah Jane—or just “Jane” as she’s known in her exclusive and lavish Orange County community—a mother stricken with grief in the aftermath of a tragic accident.

Jane is a big fan of this paper airplane drink. She has fond memories of tossing things like paper airplanes as a child. Sometimes she still throws a few things when she’s angry, but who can help that?!

PAPER AIRPLANE

Serves two

4 oz. Rye

2 oz. Amaro

1 oz. Aperol

$\frac{3}{4}$ oz. fresh lemon juice

Combine in an ice filled shaker and shake till frosty.
Strain into coupes. Garnish with lemon peel.

ENJOY!



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