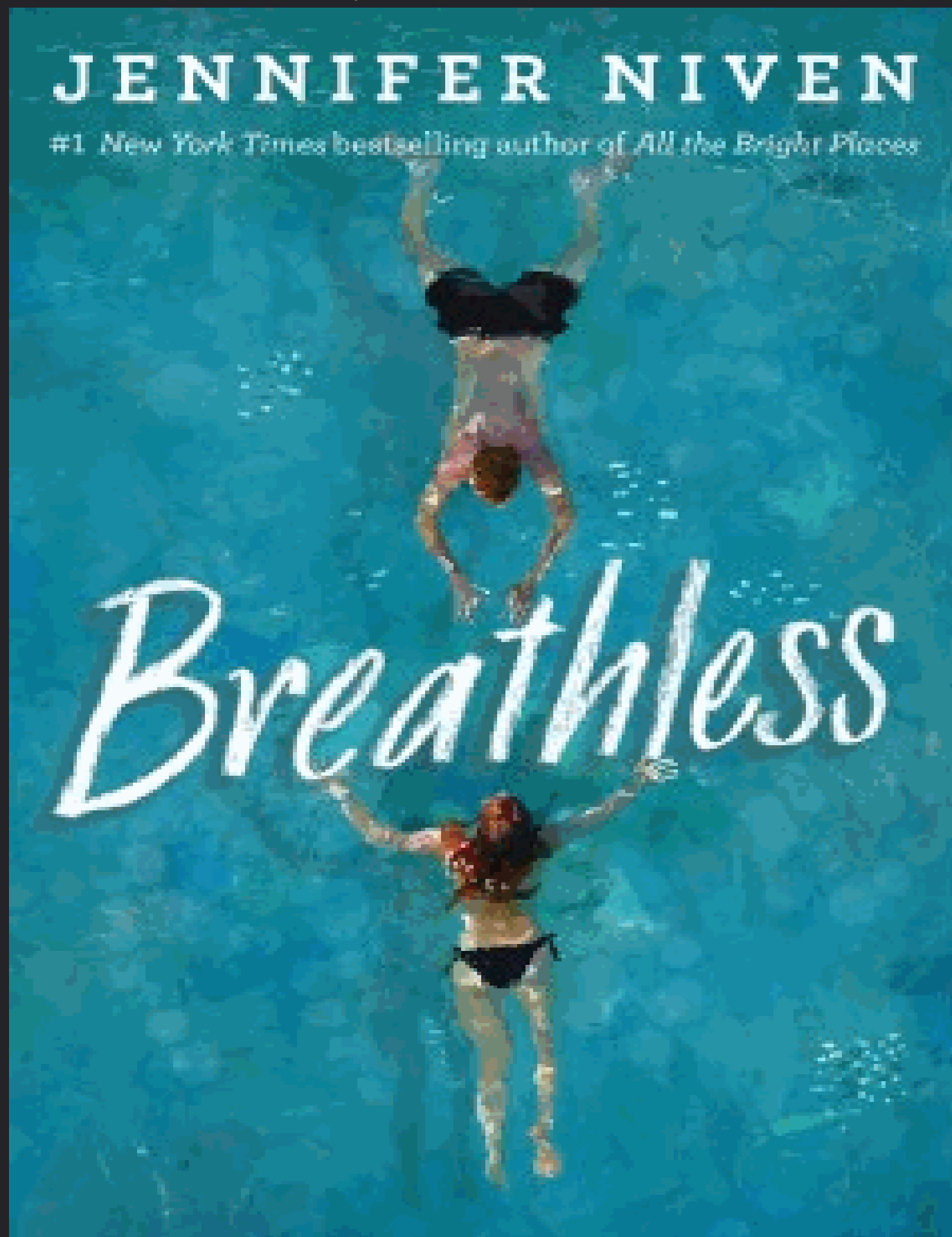


Concerns:

This book contains sexually explicit excerpts and sexual commentary.



BREATHLESS

BY JENNIFER NIVEN

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He's getting a condom. When he rolls back toward me, condom in hand, I go, "Wow. You're confident." "Not confident. Hopeful..."

...He waves at his body and gives me this cheesy grin. And then his face shifts into a genuine smile, and I can't help it, I kiss the dimples on either side of his mouth, and then he's kissing my throat, and just when I think my body might explode like a firework, it happens.

...Now he's opening the condom packet. Now he's putting the condom on...Now you can feel him. Now he's putting the condom in.

There's the surprise of him inside me, even though I'm expecting it.

...He goes, "Are you okay, Captain?" "Yeah. Of course."

...Now you can feel him—all of him. And there's the surprise again. Not pain, necessarily, but the surprise of my body registering something entirely new. I actually suck in air. A loud, gasping, hiccupping sound that makes him stop what he's doing and look at me funny. Before he can ask what the hell that was or change his mind about ever wanting to have sex with me, I kiss him. I wonder if I'm bleeding all over his couch, if my mythical hymen has actually broken. Even if it hasn't, and even if it's the most awkward, terrible sex that has ever been had on this planet, I know that technically this counts. This counts. Even though virginity is a heteronormative, patriarchal construct... Now he's moving on top of you.

And you are moving with him even though you don't know how...It's as if it knows something I don't, as if my body and his know each other and understand each other, as if they're meant to move together like this. But then, suddenly, we're done. Which means he's done.

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But first he leans down and kisses me, and I kiss him harder and more urgently to let him know it's okay...My body is wanting his. And I am burning up, head to toe, little fires everywhere. Then I can feel him. All of him.

And it hurts a little, but that's more the surprise again of having another body in your body, the getting used to something new...And he's literally in it, as in my vagina...And he pulls back and looks at me and goes, "Uh. Captain?"

...he kisses my forehead and mumbles something into my neck... There's only music and the sound of our breathing. It takes us a moment, but then we hit this rhythm...I know he feels it too because of the way he's looking at me, and then the way he's kissing me, and then the way he stops worrying about hurting me and is just moving with me and not holding back, and I tell myself not to hold back either.