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Rules Of Civility: A Novel



Synopsis

The New York Times best-selling novel that "enchants on first reading and only improves on the second" (The Philadelphia Inquirer). Features a sample chapter from A Gentleman in Moscow, the highly anticipated new audiobook from Amor Towles - available fall 2016. This sophisticated and entertaining first novel presents the story of a young woman whose life is on the brink of transformation. On the last night of 1937, 25-year-old Katey Kontent is in a second-rate Greenwich Village jazz bar when Tinker Grey, a handsome banker, happens to sit down at the neighboring table. This chance encounter and its startling consequences propel Katey on a yearlong journey into the upper echelons of New York society - where she will have little to rely upon other than a bracing wit and her own brand of cool nerve. With its sparkling depiction of New York's social strata, its intricate imagery and themes, and its immensely appealing characters, Rules of Civility won the hearts of readers and critics alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If a novel could win an award for best cinematography, this would take home the gold. Amor Towles's sophisticated retro-era novel of manners captures Manhattan 1938 with lucid clarity and a silvery focus on the gin and the jazz, the nightclubs and the streets, the pursuit of sensuality, and the arc of the self-made woman. The novel's preface opens in 1966, with a happily married couple attending a Walker Evans photography exhibition. An unlikely chance encounter stuns the woman, Katey--a picture of a man staring across a canyon of three decades, a photograph of an old friend.

Thus begins the flashback story of Katey's roaring twenties in the glittering 30's. Katey Kontent (Katya) is the moral center of the story, an unapologetic working girl--more a bluestocking than a blue blood-- born in Brighton Beach of Russian immigrant parents. She's an ambitious and determined statuesque beauty à la Tierney or Bacall who seeks success in the publishing industry. She works as hard by day as she plays at night. Her best friend, Eve (Evelyn) Ross, is a Midwest-born Ginger Rogers /Garbo character mix, with jazz cat spirit and a fearless, cryptic glamor. She refuses daddy's money and embraces her free spirit: "I'm willing to be under anything...as long as it isn't somebody's thumb." Katey and Eve flirt with shameless savoir-faire, and are quick with the clever repartees. They will kiss a man once that they'll never kiss twice, and glide with effortless élan among all the social classes of New York. Moreover, they can make a few dollars stretch through many a martini, charming gratis drinks from fashionable men.

Some books unfold at a leisurely pace and demand to be read in the same way -- nibbled and savored, the better to prolong the pleasure. *Rules of Civility* is one of those. It's a throwback novel, the kind in which unashamedly bright characters engage in impossibly witty conversations. The novel takes its name from the 110 rules that George Washington crafted during his teenage years. Katey Kontent eventually sees Washington's rules not as "a series of moral aspirations" but as "a primer on social advancement." They are the rules that shape a masquerade in the hope "that they will enhance one's chances at a happy ending." Ultimately *Rules of Civility* asks a serious question about Katey's observation: Are the behavioral rules that define "civility" simply a mask that people wear to conceal their true natures? Or are the rules themselves important, and the motivation for following them irrelevant? The story begins in 1966 but quickly turns back to 1938, the most eventful year in Katey's life. Katey and her friend Eve meet Tinker Grey, a charming young banker, at a jazz club on New Year's Eve. Their blossoming three-way friendship takes an unexpected turn when Eve is injured in an accident while Tinker is driving. Tinker's apparent preference for Katey shifts to Eve as she recuperates. Months later, something happens to cause a change in their relationship, giving Tinker a more important role in Katey's life. Along the way, Katey's career is leaping forward: from reliable member of a law firm's secretarial pool to secretary at a staid publishing house to gofer and then editorial assistant at a trendy magazine.

"*Rules of Civility*" written by Amor Towles is a "human interest" novel. It is the tale of the lives of several young adults during a year in 1938 when they were in their mid to late twenties. The story is narrated by one of the characters, Katey Kontent, and is written in conversational style. The Novel

begins with a prologue in 1966 about two candid pictures of one Tinker Grey, displayed at a photo showing in a museum display. The story then begins as a flashback to 1938 inspired by reminiscence about the character. The novel is written about the lives and associations of several "twenty something" young adults who meet as accidental acquaintances while enjoying the nightlife of New York City in 1938. The character engagement is replete with all the false loyalties, fierce friendships, desires and failings of young adults. The story pivots about the manipulation of Tinker Grey and his false persona that he conditions by adhering to the teachings of the novel's namesake "Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation" by George Washington. I found the book to be only of my general liking. The author did not build any particular inspiration with me about any of the characters such as to leave me considering any memorable aspects of the discourse or character development. I was initially piqued at the use of the extended hyphen to denote conversation. It felt like a finger continually poked in my eye. I did get over it, but it annoyed me for awhile. Otherwise the book is well written and the conversations natural. The descriptions of New York City and other locations were sufficiently well done in as much as the novel was about people not places. In all, the book was not memorable for me.

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