

Complete Me (The Stark Trilogy, Book 3)

By J. Kenner

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***NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER** • From J. Kenner comes the third novel in the fast-paced trilogy including *Release Me* and *Claim Me*. This sexy, emotionally charged romance continues the story of Damien Stark, the powerful multimillionaire who's never had to take "no" for an answer, and Nikki Fairchild, the Southern belle who only says "yes" on her own terms.

Our desire runs deep. But our secrets cut close.

Beautiful, strong, and commanding, Damien Stark fills a void in me that no other man can touch. His fierce cravings push me beyond the brink of bliss—and unleash a wild passion that utterly consumes us both.

Yet beneath his need for dominance, he carries the wounds of a painful past. Haunted by a legacy of dark secrets and broken trust, he seeks release in our shared ecstasy, the heat between us burning stronger each day.

Our attraction is undeniable, our obsession inevitable. Yet not even Damien can run from his ghosts, or shield us from the dangers yet to come.

BONUS: This edition includes excerpts from J. Kenner's *Wanted* and *Say My Name.*

Praise for *Complete Me*

"The conclusion of the Stark trilogy features the intense, all-consuming passion that readers have come to expect from Kenner's sensual prose and a tense, brooding narrative. . . . The revelations come fast, heightening the emotions of the series' conclusion, reaching a fever pitch."***—RT Book Reviews*** **(four stars)**

"The roller coaster events of *Complete Me* give this novel a page-turning quality. . . . Immensely satisfying."***—Heroes and Heartbreakers***

"*Complete Me* is a perfect ending to the [Stark] trilogy. . . . You won't be disappointed."***—Fresh Fiction***

***Complete Me* is intended for mature audiences.**

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Editorial Review

Review
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About the Author
J. Kenner is the author of *Release Me* and *Claim Me*. She spent more than ten years as a litigator in Southern California and central Texas, using her rare free time to indulge in her passion of writing. She lives in Texas with her husband and daughters.

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1

Fear yanks me from a deep sleep, and I sit bolt upright in a room shrouded with gray, the muted green light from a digital alarm clock announcing that it is just after midnight. My breath comes in gasps, and my eyes are wide but unseeing. The last remnant of an already forgotten nightmare brushes against me like the tattered hem of a specter’s cloak, powerful enough to fill me with terror, and yet so insubstantial that it evaporates like mist when I try to grasp it.

I do not know what frightened me. I only know that I am alone, and that I am scared.

Alone?

I turn swiftly in bed, shifting my body as I reach out to my right. But even before my fingers brush the cool, expensive sheets, I know that he is not there.

I may have fallen asleep in Damien’s arms, but once again, I have awakened alone.

At least now I know the source of the nightmare. It is the same fear I have faced every day and every night for weeks. The fear I try to hide beneath a plastic smile as I sit beside Damien day in and day out as his attorneys go over his defense in meticulous detail. As they explain the procedural ins-and-outs of a murder trial under German law. As they practically beg him to shine a light into the dark corners of his childhood because they know, as I do, that those secrets are his salvation.

But Damien remains stubbornly mute, and I am left huddled against this pervasive fear that I will lose him. That he will be taken from me.

And not just fear. I’m also fighting the damnable, overwhelming, panic-inducing knowledge that there isn’t a

goddamn thing in the world I can do. Nothing except wait and watch and hope.

But I do not like waiting, and I have never put my faith in hope. It is a cousin of fate, and both are too mercurial for my taste. What I crave is action, but the only one who can act is Damien, and he has steadfastly refused.

And that, I think, is the worst cut of all. Because while I understand the reason for his silence, I can't quell the selfish spark of anger. Because at the core of it all, it's not just himself that Damien is sacrificing. It's me. Hell, it's us.

We are running out of time. His trial will begin only a few hours from now, and unless he changes his mind about his defense, it is very likely that I will lose this man.

I squeeze my eyes shut, forcing the tears to remain at bay. I can push the fear back, but my anger is like a living thing, and I am afraid that it will explode no matter how hard I try to quell it. For that matter, I'm afraid that suppressing it will make the ultimate explosion all the more brutal.

When the indictment came through, Damien had tried to push me away, believing that he was protecting me. But he'd been wrong—and I'd flown all the way to Germany to tell him so. I've been here for over three weeks now, and there has not been a day when I have regretted coming, and I do not doubt that what he said when I arrived on his doorstep is true—he loves me.

But that knowledge doesn't diminish the sense of foreboding that has been rising within me. A trepidation that is especially potent at night when I wake alone and know that he has turned to solitude and Scotch when I want him in my arms. He loves me, yes. But at the same time I'm afraid that he is pushing me away again. Not in big steps, but in little ones.

Well, screw that.

I peel myself away from the cool comfort of our bed and stand up. I'm naked, and I bend to retrieve the white, lush robe provided by the Hotel Kempinski. Damien brushed it back off my shoulders after our shower last night, and I left it where it fell, a soft pile of cotton beside the bed.

The sash is a different story, and I have to dig in the rumpled sheets to find it. Sex with Damien is always intense, but as the trial comes closer, it has been wilder, more potent, as if by controlling me Damien can control the outcome.

Idly, I rub my wrists. They bear no marks, but that is only because Damien is careful. I can't say the same about my ass, which still tingles from the feel of his palm against my skin. I like it—both this lingering sting and the knowledge that he needs my submission as much as I need to give myself to him.

I find the sash shoved down near the foot of the bed. Last night, it had bound my wrists behind my back. Now, I tie it around my waist and tug it tight, relishing the luxurious comfort after waking so violently. The room itself is equally soothing, every detail done to perfection. Every piece of wood polished, every tiny knickknack and artistic addition thoughtfully arranged. Right now, however, I am oblivious to the room's charms. I only want to find Damien.

The bedroom connects to an oversized dressing area and a stunning bathroom. I check briefly in both, though I do not expect to find him, then continue through to the living area. The space is large and also well-

appointed with comfortable seating and a round worktable that is now covered with sheafs of papers and folders representing both the business that Damien continues to run despite the world collapsing around our ears, and the various legal documents that his attorney, Charles Maynard, has ordered Damien to study.

I let the robe drop where I stand and pull on the stunning trompe l'oeil patterned sheath that Damien cavalierly tossed over the arm of a chair after peeling it off me last night. We've spent a few hours escaping reality by shopping on Munich's famous Maximilianstrasse, and I have acquired so many shoes and dresses I could open my own boutique.

I run my fingers through my hair as I cross the room to the phone by the bar. I force myself not to go into the bathroom to primp and freshen the makeup that has surely rubbed off. It's more challenging than it sounds; the mantra that a lady doesn't go out unfinished has been beaten into my head since birth. But with Damien at my side I have thumbed my nose at many of the tribulations of my youth, and right now I am more concerned with finding him than with applying fresh lipstick.

I pick up the receiver and dial zero. Almost immediately there is an accented voice on the other end. "Good evening, Ms. Fairchild."

"He's in the bar?" I do not need to explain who "he" is.

"He is. Shall I have a phone brought to his table?"

"No, that's all right. I'll come down."

"Sehr gut. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you." I'm about to hang up when I realize there is something. "Wait!" I catch him before he clicks off, then enlist his help with my plan to distract Damien from his demons.

Despite the age of the building and the elegance of the interior, the hotel boasts a modern ambiance, and I have come to feel at home within these walls. I wait impatiently for the elevator, and then even more impatiently once I'm in the car. The descent seems to take forever, and when the doors finally open to reveal the opulent lobby, I aim myself straight for the Old English–style bar.

Though it's late on a Sunday, the Jahreszeiten Bar is bustling. A woman stands by the piano softly singing to the gathered crowd. I barely pay her any heed. I don't expect to find Damien among the listeners.

Instead, I wander through the wood and red leather interior, shaking off the help of a waiter who wants to seat me. I pause for a moment, standing idly beside a blond woman about my age who is sipping champagne and laughing with a man who might be her father, but I'm betting is not.

I turn slowly, taking in the room around me. Damien is not with the group at the piano, nor is he sitting at the bar. And he does not occupy any of the red leather chairs that are evenly spaced around the tables.

I'm starting to worry that perhaps he was leaving as I was coming. Then I take a step to the left and realize that what I thought was a solid wall is actually an optical illusion created by a pillar. Now I can see the rest of the room, including the flames leaping in the fireplace set into the opposite wall. There is a small love seat and two chairs surrounding the hearth. And, yes, there is Damien.

I immediately exhale, my relief so intense I almost use the blonde's shoulder to steady myself. Damien is seated in one of the chairs, his back to the room as he faces the flames. His shoulders are broad and straight, and more than capable of bearing the weight of the world upon them. I wish, however, that they didn't have to.

I move toward him, the sound of my approach muffled by both the thick carpet and the din of conversation. I pause a few feet behind him, already feeling the familiar pull I experience whenever I am near Damien. The singer is now crooning "Since I Fell for You," her voice cutting sharp and clear across the room. Her voice is so mournful that I'm afraid it is going to unleash a flood of tears along with all of the stress of the last few weeks.

No. I'm here to comfort Damien, not the other way around, and I continue toward him with renewed resolve. When I finally reach him, I press my hand to his shoulder and bend down, my lips brushing his ear. "Is this a private party, or can anyone join in?"

I hear rather than see his answering smile. "That depends on who's asking." He doesn't turn to face me, but he lifts his arm so that his hand is held up in a silent invitation. I close my hand in his, and he guides me gently around the chair until I am standing in front of him. I know every line of this man's face. Every angle, every curve. I know his lips, his expressions. I can close my own eyes and picture his, dark with desire, bright with laughter. I have only to look at his midnight-colored hair to imagine the soft, thick locks between my fingers. There is nothing about him that is not intimately familiar to me, and yet every glance at him hits me like a shock, reverberating through me with enough power to knock me to my knees.

Empirically, he is gorgeous. But it is not simply his looks that overwhelm. It is the whole package. The power, the confidence, the bone-deep sensuality that he couldn't shake even if he tried.

"Damien," I whisper, because I can't wait any longer to feel his name on my lips.

That wide, spectacular mouth curves into a slow smile. He tugs my hand, pulling me onto his lap. His thighs are firm and athletic, and I settle there eagerly, but I don't lean against him. I want to sit back enough that I can see his face.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I know what his answer will be, and yet I hold my breath, praying that I am wrong.

"No," he says. "I just want to hold you."

I smile as if his words are sweetly romantic, refusing to let him see how much they chill me. I need his touch, yes. But I need the man more.

I stroke his cheek. He hasn't shaved since yesterday, and the stubble of his beard is rough against my palm. The shock of our connection rumbles through me, and my chest feels tight, my breath uneven. Will there ever come a time when I can be near him without yearning for him? Without craving the touch of his skin against my own?

Users Review

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