



The Way I Used to Be

Amber Smith

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A *New York Times* bestseller.

In the tradition of *Speak*, this extraordinary debut novel “is a poignant book that realistically looks at the lasting effects of trauma on love, relationships, and life” (*School Library Journal*, starred review).

Eden was always good at being good. Starting high school didn’t change who she was. But the night her brother’s best friend rapes her, Eden’s world capsizes.

What was once simple, is now complex. What Eden once loved—who she once loved—she now hates. What she thought she knew to be true, is now lies. Nothing makes sense anymore, and she knows she’s supposed to tell someone what happened but she can’t. So she buries it instead. And she buries the way she used to be.

Told in four parts—freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year—this provocative debut reveals the deep cuts of trauma. But it also demonstrates one young woman’s strength as she navigates the disappointment and unbearable pains of adolescence, of first love and first heartbreak, of friendships broken and rebuilt, all while learning to embrace the power of survival she never knew she had hidden within her heart.

The Way I Used to Be Details

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Author : Amber Smith

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From Reader Review The Way I Used to Be for online ebook

Jenna Major says

I loved loved LOVED this book.

I read this book in one day because I fell in love with it real fast. I connected to Eden (the main character) almost instantly as I was absorbed into the book.

The topic, the character development, the writing and feelings were expertly executed. This is an astonishing contemporary that I would recommend to everyone.

This book does have some more mature topics, but topics I believe everyone should read about, acknowledge and learn about. There is a great deal to experience, to learn from, to mourn, to excite and to cry about in this book.

Please if you get the chance to read this book, do it. If you want to know more about what it was like reading it you can comment on this review or message me, I'd love to discuss it.

Definitely one of my new favorites.

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This is the book I voted for best young adult fiction 2016. I think anyone who has a chance to read this book should.

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### Maggie says

“As the girl closes her eyes, she was thinking of him. Thinking that maybe he was thinking of her, too. But he wasn't thinking of her in that way. He was holding her in the palm of his hand, wrapping her around his fingers, one at a time, twisting and molding and bending her brain.”

Rating: 4/5 ☆

*“In the tradition of Speak, this extraordinary debut novel shares the unforgettable story of a young woman as she struggles to find strength in the aftermath of an assault.*

*Eden was always good at being good. Starting high school didn't change who she was. But the night her brother's best friend rapes her, Eden's world capsizes.*

*What was once simple, is now complex. What Eden once loved—who she once loved—she now hates. What she thought she knew to be true, is now lies. Nothing makes sense anymore, and she knows she's supposed to tell someone what happened but she can't. So she buries it instead. And she buries the way she used to be.*

*Told in four parts—freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year—this provocative debut reveals the deep cuts of trauma. But it also demonstrates one young woman's strength as she navigates the disappointment and unbearable pains of adolescence, of first love and first heartbreak, of friendships broken and rebuilt,*

*and while learning to embrace a power of survival she never knew she had hidden within her heart.”*

### **What's it about?**

The Way I Used To Be is a strong, beautifully written yet sad story that follows the story of a young girl named Eden.

She was only 14 when she was raped by her brother's best friend, at around 2 in the morning, not being able to do anything, not being able to scream, scream for help, help her own self just because she was scared.

She had a strong connection with her brother's best friend, Kevin, that night before. So maybe that was what lead to all this? Or maybe Kevin is just an asshole that likes to take fourteen year old's virginities.

Eden's life completely changes told in 4 point of views - Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and then Senior year. Every year has a different story to tell of Eden. Every year is a year where she changes, either it's a good change or a bad change.

The people she used to love, she hates, including her best friend Mara, her 'friend' Steven, her parents, and even her brother, who turns his back against her, not trying to defend her, not knowing the right thing to do until the end.

#### Freshman Year

Eden is that innocent, geek, book and band nerd like in all school's. She's the girl that loves books, her clarinet, her best friend. She's the girl with the good grades and enjoys going to her school's library to hide her thoughts and not be seen by anyone else.

That's the beginning.

#### Sophomore Year

Eden is still 14 but she's almost 15. She meets this guy, Joshua Miller, who she ends up falling in love with and well, so does he. The problem is, he's a senior, 18, and she's only 14, still a sophomore. She knew about him, he didn't know about her. That's the problem.

He talks to her and falls in love with her, evens asks her to be his girlfriend. The reason why he was still in love with her, trying to take her on a date was because she lied to him saying she was 16. 16 is only 2 years apart, but 14 is 4...Should age really matter?

#### Junior Year

Oh Eden. The sweet, little, smart innocent Eden is no longer that Eden. She's no longer that kid. She's now this *badass and tough* girl who can be considered a... Whore? Slut? Well, she sleeps with guys she doesn't even know. She climbs into bed with them after seeing him at a party, telling him he doesn't have to talk and to just get to the point of having sex with her.

#### Senior Year

“I've been with about fifteen guys now.”

Okay Eden we get it. You're the girl who puts on make-up and looks totally different and older than she is who hooks up with any guy, smokes cigarettes, tells her parents she hates them, misses her *ex-boyfriend*, argues with her best friend and doesn't give a shit after seeing her cry at your locker as you were pretending to organize it, looking at your books and then suddenly walking away as she tried to hide her tears.

The Way I Used To Be was a strong, cute in some ways, and sad story following this girl's story. It's sad how after everything happened, once it was over, she didn't even realize it was morning and her mom was calling her, telling her breakfast is ready. She wasn't ready to get up, go to the kitchen, and then see Kevin sitting there, looking at her with that look of his like if he was about to tell her *Say something and I'll kill you. I'll fucking kill you!* Oh wait, he did!

Ever since I picked this book up and read the first page, literally the first 4 lines or so, I wanted to put it back down and not pick it up again. I can't tell if that's a bad thing, or a good thing but, I picked it back up and continued reading.

It tore me, it tore me and my small little heart knowing how nobody believed her, nobody really showed like they cared, nobody tried asking her what was really **wrong!** until finally, Josh did. Oh *Josh...* Their relationship sounded so cute even though she was 14 and he was 18, man I want a boyfriend like that not gonna lie. Well, not only having sex but like having pizza, watching movies, lying down on the floor, talking until 3 AM not even noticing what time it is and what else is happening. *wow now I'm sad...*

#### **Why 4 stars?**

Why not 5 stars? Honestly, I would've given this book a 5 star rating but the problem is, I couldn't and that won't change because this isn't a series, or this book doesn't follow another book so, here I am left with questions waiting to be answered.

(view spoiler)

Well, I guess that's what books do to you. Leave you in pain at times, in an emotional wreck, or emotional mess. Leave you with tears in your eyes. Leave you with a black hole finding it's way to tear your heart.

#### **Final and overall thoughts?**

I don't know man, but this book will be one of my favs. Even though I gave it 4 stars instead of 5, it's such a great book! I could re-read it over and over again, falling to pieces again, trying to put them back together every time I read those sad lines that just made me want to scream so loud and !!

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#### **Emma Giordano says**

I feel as if the best way to describe this book is the unforgettable experience I had listening to the last 3 hours of the audiobook at 1:30 in the morning in the pitch dark while bawling my eyes out and completely unable to breathe. It was THAT amazing.

CW: rape \*graphic\* (Additionally, there is quite a lot of -consensual- sex and substance use throughout the novel)

*The Way I Used To Be* is a fantastic portrayal of trauma. I cannot remember the last time I had such an intense, emotional response to a book, especially one that is not a part of a series that I had already been invested in. I wanted SO BADLY for Eden to tell someone what had happened to her, more than I think I have ever wanted a character to do ANYTHING. Eden's story is raw, unflinching, emotional, powerful, and so so real. This book is not for the faint of heart – it is gritty and destructive, yet moving.

As this book is told over the course of four years (a bold choice for a standalone young adult contemporary novel), I thought it was executed fabulously. Eden's voice and personality changes naturally across the four year span, transitioning from a young teenager to an almost adult woman. It was evident to me throughout the entire story that Eden was constantly growing despite having more development demanded in a shorter number of pages compared to many books, and I can only imagine how difficult that must be for an author to accomplish. I will say, this is not a very plot-heavy novel. The beginning starts off with a moment of HIGH intensity, but I found some parts of the middle of the novel to be less engaging up until the end of the story where I basically listened to the last 5 hours of the audiobook in almost one sitting. This is definitely a novel driven by characterization, which is not normally what I prefer, but it was done so well that I fell victim to it's unwavering charm. I also really enjoyed the writing style of the novel. While there were certain moments where I was somewhat unimpressed, other scenes had me blown away by the prose.

Eden is a fascinating, wonderful character. I struggled so much with her in the beginning of the novel, but I feel she challenged me as a person due to this. She consistently hurts people who care for her, creates many more problems for herself, and makes so many horrible decisions as being raped begins to alter her perception of the world. I had such a difficult time loving her in the beginning because of all her harmful actions, but I had to keep reminding myself that this is an expression of trauma and while people must take responsibility for their actions, I should not pass such harsh judgement on someone who is responding to such a horrific event that will have changed her life forever. Eden's characterization is so powerful and authentic, and her development is so well constructed throughout the story that I never could have expected to love her as much as I did by the conclusion of the novel. I am so appreciative to Eden for opening my eyes to an experience unique to her and many other survivors of sexual assault and her story is not one I will forget any time soon.

I feel as if I have so few words that truly encompass how remarkable this novel is. I feel changed by Eden's story, it is one I will carry with me for an immensely long time. To my followers that love complex, dark, gritty contemporary novels, I cannot recommend this one enough.

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### **Theresa says**

A brutally honest YA novel about the lasting effects of trauma. 14 year-old, Eden wakes up in the middle of the night to find her brother's best friend, Kevin raping her. A powerful and unflinching novel from start to finish. First-time author, Amber Smith doesn't try to sugarcoat how the aftermath of being sexually assaulted changes Eden psychologically, physically, and emotionally. This novel unfolds in 4 separate sections as we follow Eden through her freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior in high school. "The Way I Used to Be" will leave you reeling. Have some tissues handy. This novel is like a sucker-punch to the gut and heart. Enjoy.

Opening line:

"I don't know a lot of things. I don't know why I didn't hear the door click shut. Why I didn't lock the damn door to begin with. Or why it didn't register that something was wrong - so mercilessly wrong - when I felt the mattress shift under his weight. Why I didn't scream when I opened my eyes and saw him crawling between my sheets. Or why I didn't try to fight him when I still stood a chance."

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### **Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

I had a hard time rating this book. I decided on three starts which still means I liked the book. I just really had a hard time with this one. I hate what Edy had to go through as a 14-year-old child. It was hard to read, it always is, it's hard to go through, it always is for the innocent one. I just really had a hard time with her not telling her mom right then, when she walked in the door that morning. So many of these kids are afraid to say anything, they don't think anyone will believe them. Especially if it's someone popular, someone in the family, a family friend, etc. But she had all of the evidence right there... right there..... I wanted to scream for her to call the cops and scream at her mom. Her parents were NOT very good to her, at least it seemed that way in the book. They weren't abusive, they just made Edy feel like her older brother was so much more important. It was the same way at school with Edy and bullies. Oh and how I loathe bullies too!

\*\*\*\*SPOILERS\*\*\*\*

--->EXCERPT<---

**I don't know a lot of things. I don't know why I didn't hear the door click shut. Why I didn't lock the damn door to begin with. Or why it didn't register that something was wrong--so mercilessly wrong--when I felt the mattress shift under his weight. Why didn't I scream when I opened my eyes and saw him crawling between my sheets. Or why didn't I try to fight him when I still stood the chance.**  
**I don't know how long I lay there afterward, telling myself: Squeeze your eyelids shut, try, just try to forget. Try to ignore all the things that didn't feel right, all the things that felt like they would never feel right again. Ignore the taste in your mouth, the sticky dampness of the sheets, the fire radiating through your thighs, the nauseating pain--this bulletlike thing that ripped through you and got lodged in your gut somehow. No, can't cry. Because there's nothing to cry about. Because it was just a dream, a bad dream--a nightmare. Not real. Not real. Not real. That's what I keep thinking: NotRealNotRealNotReal. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Like a mantra. Like a prayer.**

Right after that Edy almost told her mom when she came into her room that morning, but her mom wouldn't shut her mouth for two seconds trying to hurry Edy to the breakfast table. To the table where her brother's friend Kevin sat eating and being loved by the family. Her mother ran around the room telling Edy that sometimes this happens with your period. Was she stupid? She had blood all over the sheets and her nightgown and bruises on her body and neck. I'm sorry, but I have never bled that bad all over everything to where it looked like a crime scene, but her mom was clueless. She couldn't see her child was sitting there in shock!

This brings us to the years of Edy's life in high school. The book takes us through each year, through the wonderful people she met and could have been or stayed friends with, nice boyfriends she could have had

but she threw it all away. She started doing drugs, drinking and sleeping with a lot of boys with no feeling.

I hate all of this happened to Edy. If she would have only told when it happened, but we are not all the same. Some have to hide it, feel like they have to at any rate. Please don't hide this girls, call the cops, get it out. **YOU WILL NEVER BE ALONE IN THIS FIGHT!**

MY BLOG: Melissa Martin's Reading List

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**ambsreads says**

**TRIGGER WARNINGS:** rape.

*As the girl closes her eyes, she was thinking of him. Thinking that maybe he was thinking of her, too. But he wasn't thinking of her in that way. He was holding her in the palm of his hand, wrapping her around his fingers, one at a time, twisting and molding and bending her brain.*

*The Way I Used to Be* was a book that sickened me. It's been a long time since I have felt physically sick during a book and sat there, for the most part. screaming at the main character to **tell someone**. I understand that may not be easy in cases of sexual abuse, I wouldn't know, and everyone does react differently I am sure.

An accurate gif of me reading the first chapter:

Saying this book is about a rape survivor, it's in the first chapter and description. I was curious how this book would work considering it was told over the course of years of high school - the rape happening while she was a freshman and the story concluding while she is a senior. The rape throws our main character, **Eden**, completely off course with her life. She goes from the good girl to a girl who has seen the ugliest of the world and is trying to regain what she lost in all the wrong ways. Eden doesn't react in smart ways and plays with people's emotions for her gain. She is cynical, cruel and a bitch.

Now, clearly, I hated Eden for how she treated everyone around her. Though for a lot of the book I was crying for the girl. I just couldn't believe she had been warped so much into this new person who couldn't trust and saw only the negative. I also couldn't believe no one thought to ask her why she had changed, no one thought that maybe something had triggered this drastic change. Especially the people closest to her.

My biggest annoyance, however, was the open ending. I **hate** open endings, and with a topic such as this I need **closure**.

*Overall* I just have a lot of feelings regarding this book. I'm not sure I could even put into words how this book made me feel. I definitely can't formulate enough words to do a proper review which is frustrating, but I guess that's the point of this book.

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## Rose says

**Initial reaction:** Man, this book hit my heart in so many places. It's a read that definitely hurts and has many angles that hit well on its subject matter, but it's not without flaws. In my full review, I hope I can expand on this.

### Full review:

Amber Smith's "The Way I Used to Be" is an emotional experience; I can't say that there was a point that I had a dry eye upon finishing this book. One would expect something to that effect given the difficult subject matter of the book, centering on a young woman who was raped by her brother's best friend when she was a freshman then following her downward spiral through four years of silence.

Reading "The Way I Used to Be" reminds me a little of my experience reading a few of Ellen Hopkins books. No poetry here, but it's very raw and doesn't shy away from showing Eden's story in graphic detail. That means showing what happened to her during her rape and the aftermath in showing how it affects Eden's ability to relate with the people around her - from her family to friends to love interests. Suffice to say, Eden doesn't treat other people very well, let alone herself. It's a difficult spiral to watch; I'll admit there were times when I found it hard to watch Eden go to the point of no return with screwing up her relationships and trying everything she can to numb her respective pains - drugs, sex to offset her rape, pushing away all the people closest to her or even using other people as a means to end. Despite times when I wanted to throttle her or say "No, no, no!", I felt for her. Throughout the story I wanted so badly for her to overcome the spiral, even if there were moments where I felt numb by the holes she dug so deeply in her life.

The narrative does a fantastic job of showing Eden's viewpoint and psyche, though I'll admit what kept me from liking this narrative more was probably a couple of vital things that felt missing. This book takes place over four different years and for the time change, that means it'll make certain leaps in order to move forward with the story. However, it felt like there were key scenes omitted that contributed to some jarring leaps within the book. (For example, when was the point Eden started calling her parents by their first names? That's a pretty important transition that went unaddressed for the most part. While I did see moments where Eden had a falling out with her parents - their neglect at times making me rage - it didn't feel complete.)

I also realize that this is just one narrative that expounds upon an individual experience of rape and how it can negatively effect not only the person but their various relationships of different measures, but I feel like there could've been a better recognition of Eden's issues with using sex as a means to an end, a measure to fill the void left from her rape and struggles to be "normal". It caused so much conflict among her family relationships and friends, but was there really no one to tell her why that was wrong besides people choosing to cut her out of their lives? The narrative does give good insight on topics discussing sexual shaming (which I appreciated and wanted to hug Eden as she struggled with not only being the target of those attacks, but also struggling with her own negative self-labels). Maybe my mind is reaching beyond the context of this narrative's intention, but I feel like the moment Eden has her moment of recognition, the book ends too soon and abrupt - like we see many moments of her spirals downward, but don't see enough of her (very emotional and jarring) coming to terms - and that's one of the main points where it really got me. I think that's something that bothered me in the end, though the narrative ends with the note of things progressing further along in her recovery that we don't see as readers.

Even with those qualms, I still appreciated what this story had to offer. I still think this is a narrative worth perusing because it shows some hard fought battles and an eye to horrifying experiences that happen far more often than not with experiences with rape/SA. But I would also argue that it's important for people (teens and adults) to realize that survivors of rape are not all-encompassed by the terms "broken" or "damaged" - nor are they shaped by that experience alone. This is something that I feel many YA and NA books need to recognize and expand upon, and I feel like "The Way I Used to Be" could've had further expansion to make it hit home that much more.

Overall score: 3.5/5 stars.

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### **Paige (Illegal in 3 Countries) says**

[It looks like I get to be the black sheep yet again.

I'm mad. *Really* mad. The book is Eden's downward spiral into a girl who sleeps around trying to forget the trauma of her rape and replace that touch with someone else's touch. I have no problems with that and I am 100% there for Eden as someone who has been the victim of a sexual crime (mine was abuse inste

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### **Emily May says**

#### **I seem to be in the minority on this one.**

There are many thoughts running around in my head about this book and it's hard to decide how to write a review without sounding completely insensitive. If this were a real life account of a rape survivor, then things would be different. Every survivor has their own story to tell, each equally valid, and they don't owe anyone an interesting, convincing account of it. Fiction, though, is a little bit different.

I've read many books about teenage girls who were raped, from the classic Speak, to last year's harrowing tale of how a girl is let down by everyone around her - All the Rage, to the recent book about a girl with a strong support network - Exit, Pursued by a Bear. These books are incredibly important for fostering discussion about rape, its aftermath, and the way we treat rape victims. The Way I Used to Be, however, adds nothing but more paper to the pile.

It's about another white girl living in a white world, who is raped and proceeds on a downward spiral towards sex, drugs and self-hatred. The novel's major selling point is that it looks at the aftereffects of rape over four years - freshman year, sophomore year, etc. - and yet **this opportunity is wasted on a story lacking any real depth.**

Though it promises a look at a rape survivor over time, it instead skips important plot points that shows the gradual downslide (like when Eden started calling her parents by their names and not "Mom" and "Dad"), preferring to skip to the angst.

Rose wrote a great positive review for this book and I just wanted to borrow her comparison to Ellen Hopkins. Hopkins is a much-loved author, but after liking one of her books, I soon started seeing them as **torture porn**. And I still think Hopkins's stories and characters do not have any depth, do not explore new

areas or challenge you to think - they are one long misery ride through increasingly atrocious events (rape followed by drug abuse followed by their mom dying...). This book is a bit like that.

The Way I Used to Be is four years, 380 pages, of one unfortunate event after another. Eden is raped, her parents give her shit, her brother turns against her, she constantly freezes and break downs, her friends just don't get it, she starts sleeping around to distract herself, she gets called a slut and whore...

And here is where I risk sounding insensitive. Because how dare I suggest that Eden goes through too much negative shit? Shouldn't this book show the horrible reality? Yes! Absolutely, yes! It should. **But a series of terrible events does not make a good book.**

It honestly felt quite emotionless. Eden exists in a vacuum of her own thoughts (understandable, but it might have made a better third person story) and no other character is developed. Her relationships with her family and friends are one-dimensional and those characters all blend into the background.

I just don't think this book does anything new, or offers a different and interesting perspective. And, given that there are many rape survivor experiences out there still waiting to be told, it's a little disappointing to read this. Many books do what this book does... but better.

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### Alice Cai says

[First of all the storyline of this book was a complete shock to me. Eden's actions in thi

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### Wendy Darling says

**A single act can change your life forever.** In Eden's case, the five minutes in which she was raped send her into a spiral of desperation and despair, so that there are times when she doesn't even recognize herself anymore.

This book is divided into four sections, each one following a different school year. Freshman year, which shows the crime and immediate aftermath, is the most well-written one. While the pages kept turning because I wanted to find out what happened to Eden, the later sections don't feel quite as satisfying or complete, either plot-wise or on an emotional level.

Still, I'd recommend this one because it effectively puts you into the immediacy of Eden's emotions--the **pain, shame, and fear**, as well as the feeling that you've been damaged beyond repair. And that you are unworthy, undeserving, and unlikely to ever be treated with respect and tenderness.

***Whatever he thinks that I am, I'm not. And whatever he thinks my body is, it isn't. My body is a torture chamber. It's a fucking crime scene.***

This story also touches on other **important aspects of sexual violence**: how it affects more than the people directly involved, how it changes the way you relate to everyone around you, and how it perpetuates until it

is stopped. And perhaps most importantly, stories like these are a reminder that we rarely know what's happened in other people's lives, and what has driven them to drink, to sleep around, or to betray friendships. I hope boys especially are encouraged to read this, and that the book helps to reshape the dialogue about trying to understand--and being compassionate about--those around us, even if and especially when they're behaving in ways that are hard to understand. (Eden endures a shit ton of slut-shaming, both casual and threatening.) **Anger, acting out, promiscuity, and changes in behavior are often triggered by traumatic events**, and seeing the warning signs and trying to act upon them might help someone in desperate need of kindness.

Two last things:

1. While there were a fair number of loose ends and some plot threads that could have been better developed (I don't need everything tied up, btw, some aspects were just crying out to be further explored) I appreciated that the story does not end (view spoiler).
2. I'll echo the author's resource note at the end and include the free hotline for the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network: 1-800-656-HOPE. If you need someone, please know help is available and confidential.

**3.5 stars** Bumped up in stars because it's an important subject and portrays some things very well. It's not a perfect book, but it's well worth reading.

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### **Alison says**

4.5

If you think, like i thought, that this is a book about getting over being raped, you are wrong. Because how could anyone ever get over it? They don't, they just continue living with it. That's what this book is about. It's about the ugliness that comes after. The depression and anxiety and mostly emptiness. The desire to control emotions and feel something you didn't have control over. I don't know where exactly my tears began and when they stopped because this wasn't a beautiful book. It was messy and emotional and aggravating, because that's how it feels.

These characters were so real and this was such a great portrayal of the ugly side of being a victim after rape as a teen. I loved seeing the progression from year to year and how dark Eden was becoming (also, i didn't fail to notice the name significance here, also nice apple add in there).

This is the only time i wish a book hadn't been written so vividly because it killed me inside to relive Eden's nightmare over and over.

I would have to say that if you have been raped, this book will either destroy you or make you feel less alone, but it may be a trigger so please read at your own risk.

This book doesn't show "getting over it," because you never can. And sometimes you can't cope, and sometimes things get messy and fucked up. But you live, and you work through it, and you survive.

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### **?Erynn says**

3/5

Unlike my other book reviews, I had to give myself some time to figure out a proper rating with this one.

Normally, as soon as I finish reading, I know exactly what I'm going to rate the novel. Not with this one. This one was trickier, for many reasons.

The first three chapters (or so) of *The Way I Used To Be* hooked my unlike any YA novel I've read. To begin the novel at Eden's rape scene was shattering — but also gripping, because I was *waiting* for her to tell someone what'd happened (after all, her mother came in soon after!). And did she? Of course not. There wouldn't be a book if she had.

As the novel continues through Eden's 4 years of high school, it subtly (and not so subtly) shows how the rape changed her forever. Now, obviously, anyone would be a different person after such a traumatic event. That being said, it doesn't mean I have to *like* the changed person afterwards. My example being: Eden. I thought she was fine in the beginning, but the person she turned into was terrible and heartbreaking. I didn't like her at all. Not only that, but alongside her terrible character, I noticed that some of the chapters were not nearly as good as the others—noticeably so.

Asides from Eden and the shifting chapters, a character I really enjoyed was Josh—even if I didn't understand why he put up with Eden's crap; though I guess that's what love does to you. Still. He was a real sweetheart to her when no one else was. I mean, the way he agreed to meet up with Eden (after they'd been broken up for years), because she "needed to see him" was beyond me. No guy would do that nowadays, without at least some explanation (at least, I don't think so). Then again, like my mom always tells me: "It's not reality; you're reading a book! Stop confusing the two!"

**Overall**, this novel tackles a very difficult subject matter by displaying the after-affects someone might go through after being raped. It shows how rape does not only effect the person raped, but that it also effects the people near to them, too.

So, even though I read through this book rather quickly, there were many things that bothered me: the writing, the oblivious parents, Eden, Mara, etc. Therefore, this was average—maybe even slightly below average—but because it is about a sensitive subject matter that many people don't write about well, I will leave it as "average."

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I read the first chapter of this online and *oh my gosh* it grabbed my attention unlike anything else. I can't wait until I get this in 2 days.

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### **Laurie Flynn says**

It's not often that I'm at a loss for words, because, well, I'm a writer, and usually I have too many words for any given situation. But after finishing this book, my heart was pounding and I couldn't find words big enough to describe how brilliant, beautiful, and powerful it is. Those words just don't seem to do it justice. None do.

Amber Smith's talent is immense. Her writing is searing, raw, courageous, deep. Her words cut, pound, take away your air supply, make you realize you're not breathing. Eden's story is not an easy one to read. After her brother's best friend—someone she thought she trusted, someone she once thought she loved—rapes her, Eden buries the truth, along with the person she used to be. The whole time I was reading, it wasn't like I

was reading a character—it was like Eden was a real person. And in many ways, she is. She is a girl carrying around the weight of something horrible, something unimaginable, and trying desperately to show to the outside world that it never happened, that she simply doesn't want to go back to the way that she used to be, not that she can't go back. Eden's hurt is palpable. It radiated off the pages and so many times, I wanted to hug her and tell her she's worthy of love, she's worthy of good things, that people will believe her if she tells them the truth. I thought, on so many occasions, how many girls we know in real life are carrying around truths they want to forget? How can we help them?

This book also deals with slut-shaming, which was handled in such a heartbreakingly true-to-life way. Nobody knew what Eden was going through, so they slapped labels on her, because it was easier that way. But in doing so, they made those labels something Eden could slip into, a way she could distance herself from the girl she used to be. People don't realize that words not only cause permanent damage, but they can alter the course of a person's life.

The fact that Eden's story was told in four parts—one for each year of high school—allowed the reader to see that nothing goes away. Trauma and pain and anger and regret and sadness don't just retreat to be buried by other feelings. They simmer right under the surface like a second pulse. What happened to Eden doesn't fade as she gets older. It takes on new shapes, ones with sharp edges, ones that cut and flay and destroy any sense of confidence she might have had.

Stories like Eden's need to be told. They need to be told more than once. Books like this need to exist. And stories like this, stories this sensitive and courageous and breathtaking, need to be told by authors as tremendously talented as Amber Smith, authors who aren't afraid to channel all of the emotions, all of the devastation, authors who can be both fragile and bold.

By far one of the best books I've read this year. By far, one of the books I won't stop thinking about.

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### **Mari says**

THIS BOOK.

I wasn't expecting to love it as much as I did and what a welcome surprise.  
I'm so freaking glad this book exists.

*"You're drunk, Edy. You're really drunk and that guy was trying to take advantage of you! You're lucky I came in when I did," he says, dead serious, as if getting taken advantage of would be the worst thing that could happen, as if that wasn't something that happens to girls on a daily basis.*

Powerful writing that sucks you in? Yes.

Round main character with a strong personality? You got that.

Fucking crude reality exposed as it should always be? YES

Will you cry (and shiver) while reading this? Oh yeah.

*He needed to make her feel worthless, needed to control her, needed to hurt her, needed to leave her powerless.*

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