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A YA novel BASED ON ACTUAL EVENTS

My name is Cassidy Connor and my parents hate me. Well, they can go to hell. After yet another fight with my manipulative lawyer father and bible thumping mother, I disappear onto Hollywood Blvd among the other street kids. Or so I thought. The cops pick me up for a BS crime I didn't commit, and Dad announces the only way I can avoid charges is to voluntarily admit myself into Oak Dale, a psych ward for crazy teens. I don't belong there my parents are the real nutjobs but it's not like I have a choice.

At Oak Dale, everyone is going on about the kid who just killed himself trying to escape. How could they dump me in a place like this? I'm thrown in with my anorexic roommate, Erin; foster care system victim, Gina; and pyromaniac Tony. Guess he likes to light em up. All of us are unwanted baggage, here against our will. I quickly learn only the strong survive Oak Dale and some of us won't make it out alive.

Against Her Will Details

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Paul says

This is one of the worst books I've ever read, and I only read half of it. I can see that it has received breathless four and five-star ratings generally, but I'll tell you why it's bad.

Here are the words used most frequently in the first half of the book: stared (14 times), scowled (11), sneered (8), snorted (5), snapped (4), glared (5), sighed (4), groaned (2), frowned (2), stomped (2), snarled (2), shot back (2), stalked away (2). This already gives you an idea of the amateurish descriptions and snotty expressions in the book.

Others that were only used once were: shot daggers, drilled, smoke came out ears, clawed, disgust, irritated, grimaced, stewed, screamed, growled, fumed, yelled, stormed, shouted, gritted and spat. Would you want to read such an exercised and hyperbolic account of ANYthing that would use those words?

Another thing I noticed: People ran their hands through their or someone else's hair six times--seven, if you count brushing one's bangs away.

The inmates of this supposed mental hospital are all hysterical, shrieking, hateful people. They are shepherded by nurses that are variously annoying or disgusting, and a psychiatrist who whispers bland nothings during sessions and whose most reliable characteristic is taking his glasses off and rubbing his eyes. He's TERRIBLE! He inflames rather than deescalates crises. He appears to have no psychiatric training that a reader can tell; he offers no insights, trenchant comments, or solutions.

I hope (but doubt) the rest of this book got better, because the half I read sounded like it was written by a rebellious 8th grader at the top of her voice, which probably got her kicked out of creative writing class.

This book has no redeeming features. Avoid it like the plague. I'm going to take an aspirin and breathe into a paper bag until I recover my equanimity.

Ann Living It Up says

I don't think I would recommend this book to anyone under the age of 18 due to mature content, unless the teen is very mature emotionally. There's a lot of emotional outbursts due to psychological traumas, and some sexual events that happen to the teenagers. It's an overall great story to read as it's based on real events, so I like that about the story. I feel inspired to know that there are strong people out there that can go through strife and come out healthy in the end. I could not put the book down, and I loved the ending.

Jennifer Jenkins says

Wow. This book hit me like a sledge hammer to the face (in an awesome way!). If you're interested in highly emotive, psychological thrillers, I recommend this book. I've never read characters that jump from the page the way these did. A stunning debut for Jo Schaffer.

Nancy says

This book was an emotional roller-coaster. Right from the get-go, you know it's not going to be what you expect, when it starts out with a kid committing suicide in a mental health facility while high.

After one too many fights with her ultra religious adopted mom, Cass gets kicked out of her house. And then her adopted father calls the cops to say she stole his car, so she gets arrested. Her father, a manipulative lawyer, tells her to agree to be voluntarily committed, or he'd press charges on her and her boyfriend for statutory rape (she's 17, he's 18.)(view spoiler) So, after spending a few days in lockup, Cassidy goes to the asylum. Bad things happen here, right from the start. She meets her roommate, Erin, and accidentally narcs on her for having a sharps (pencil), which gets her on the bad side of Gina, the asylum bully. Tony, who appears to be the only male inmate (Patient?), serving because he's a pyro, immediately takes a liking to Cass, which ends poorly. So, after a lot of time denying that she needs to be there, she does eventually develop a decent relationship with Erin, even convinces her to eat (severe anorexic.) here and there. Gina keeps getting Cass busted for things like contraband, and thrown in the "quiet room" which seems to be solitary. One of the pervy guards, Thomas, comes in to proposition her one night when she's restrained in the quiet room. Eventually the group goes "on a field trip" to see a baseball game. Tony and Cass escape. They separate after Cass finds out her boyfriend Ben is banging her worst enemy Regina, and Cass goes to a former teacher's to hide out. Tony goes and gets high and eventually decides that he's in love with Cass and will do anything for her, so he sets her parents house on fire. Her little brother, Sean, gets injured in the fire, ends up in the hospital with severe burns and eventually becomes a drug addict himself. Cass gets sent back to Oak Dale and shortly after Erin dies, her favorite nurse is fired, and she is raped while drugged and detained by Thomas, all in what seems to be the span of a day. She then gets back to her room after her night in solitary and finds Erin's scissors that she'd left behind, and tries to kill herself, to be found and rescued by Gina. Gina, then leads a bit of an inmate revolt because she's sick of bad things happening, and because she figured out that the nurse, Sara, was fired for sticking up for an inmate, and that Thomas was raping and molesting the patients (not just the girls, the boy who dies in the beginning was a victim of his as well. And Gina had caught him shoving a 13 year old girls hands down his pants earlier in the book). So, things get better, Gina gets better and is eventually released, Cass figures out that Tony burned her parents house and hurt her brother, because he was batshit, and that maybe the issues with her parents aren't entirely on them, so she works with the doctor and Sara to get better. Also eventually securing her release, she moves into a halfway house and gets a job. Her mother ends up leaving her father because he's kind of a dick, and they're working to get Sean clean. Tony is sent to state because he actually gets crazier as the book goes on, he loses his shit when he finds out that Thomas attacked Cass, and beats the hell out of him, as part of the rebellion, he starts a fire in the quiet room, admits to setting Cassidy's house on fire because he loves her. He's relieved to hear he's going to state instead of Cass, because somehow in his mind that means he saved her.

It's hard not to like Cassidy, and at the same time it's hard to like her. She feels unloved and unwelcome by the people who adopted her, and wonders if her real parents are out there somewhere missing her. She really just wants to be loved and appreciated. Then bad stuff happens to her, and she blames everyone else. It's not her fault. Her dad is selfish and her mom hides in her religion, they don't love her. Sean is the perfect child that they always wanted and they tossed her aside because of him. How can she not act out. But, as all these things keep happening to her, she sort of learns to stop playing the victim (especially because there's a lot of victim blaming in this book). She tries to stay strong, but then she realizes just how weak and powerless she is over and over again. She thought she was getting ahead by getting Erin to eat more, but then she finds her nearly dead in the bed. She tries to fight back against Thomas, but then the drugs kick in and she literally

cannot do anything to stop him. She has no control over anything in her life, until she realizes this and finally works to take control. She stops blaming her parents and takes responsibility for most of her actions. She cuts off ties with her old friends because they're such a bad influence on her. She shows her strength and inspires her mom to find her own and leave her dad.

Gina seems like your average bully, until you realize that she's had it hard. She sees the ghost of the kid who died at the beginning because she blames herself for his death. She acts out against the parents who adopted(or do they just foster her? I don't remember) because all the other homes she was in were bad, no one loved her or wanted her, except one woman, who you find out slit her wrists in the tub and Gina found her. She starts to develop a grudging respect for Cass, and then when she goes to check on her after that night in the quiet room, Gina makes some realizations about herself as well. She had been repressing memories, acting out, and being haunted because a lot of bad stuff had happened to her. But once she opens up to her parents and talks about the stuff that has happened to her and the ghosts she sees, she starts to heal and is finally able to go home. She is also able to see that the parents she has love her and she is able to let them in.

Tony is psychotic. He's a pyromaniac who set a shed on fire to scare away his dad because he was beating him and his mom. And then he started using fire to solve more of his problems. Eventually, his step-dad and mom are terrified of him, so they have him committed. He seems fairly normal for much of the beginning of the book, except his parents never come to visit on family day, which he blames on his step-dad. Turns out, it wasn't his step, it was that his mom was afraid of him because he was starting to become crazy and abusive like his birth father. He immediately becomes interested in Cass, but she doesn't return the feeling, and then when they "break out" and go see Ben, she cries on his shoulder and he decides he needs to protect her by killing her parents. He also falls back into heavy drug usage, so that probably didn't help matters. Cass finds out, decides she wants nothing to do with him (as is to be expected really) and he seems to completely crack. He's busted for the fire in the quiet room and at Cass' parents house and is sent to state.

This book ends positively, but it takes a lot to get there. It's well written and completely worth the read, just keep the tissues handy. Also, there's a one-eyed rescue kitty, who loves Cass unconditionally, and actually follows her around for a few scenes in the book.

Natalie Kronz says

Excellent look into the environment associated with mental healthcare facilities. The cynicism, inner turmoil and conflict, and the relationships between patients and staff make for an interesting read. Everyone can rally behind a strong-willed and sympathetic character as well! Three stars for the predictable supporting characters and neatly tied up ending. Overall, still an enjoyable read. Also, spinoff novel on Tony?

Agustina says

It was a good book, sad to think that some kids go thru that.

Tina says

I was convinced I was going to hate this book (so why was I reading it? I don't know). But within about 10

pages I was hooked. The main character is angry and misguided and miserable. This sounds great, doesn't it? She's also pretty stupidly real. Do you know a teenager? Then you know this girl. She's nuts but in the completely average kind of way. Her life is a little more dramatic than your average girl (you'll see), but how else would there be a story written about her? This book was angry, sad, and frustrating, but it was really good too. I don't normally find angry, sad, and frustrating books good, fyi. The girl is real and her life is real but in a dramatic kind of way. Definitely a surprise. A good surprise.

Amanda says

Nope

It was good at first. The end was predictable. I finished to find out what happened to Edgar but they don't tell you

Jess says

This book is trying to be a new, modern "...Cuckoo's Nest" but failed hard. Too cliché, and fell into all the trappings about mental hospitals being full of bad people that want to hurt you. A stereotype we could do without.

Honestly, I'm not sure how it ended up in my Kindle, and I read it when I couldn't get an internet connection.

Samantha says

Overall, this was a great read. It kept my interest through the whole story. Not your typical YA read.

Jonathan Ryan says

Against Her Will is a profound exploration of lost teens that will make you think. Very rarely does YA fiction approach this kind of depth, understanding and raw power.

Kristie Noyes says

Emotional

I am a school psychologist and this book is probably the best I've read of this type. It looks into the emotions and struggles of young people with mental health issues and hospitals without trying to paint a pretty picture. Very well done.

Gabby says

Great book, but I feel like I should establish the trigger warnings.

There is a rape scene.

A scene with domestic violence/abuse.

Multiple self harm scenes.

Suicide

Attempted suicide.

And a scene with a miscarriage.

Hope this helps.

Mason Barge says

Badly written whine by the glorious victim of cardboard cutout bad parents. Just intolerable. The mental hospital comes off like a cliched bad high school, writ large. Read "Girl in Pieces" instead.

Italia Gandolfo says

A stunning debut by Jo Schaffer and bestselling author Serita Stevens. A truly riveting trip through the eyes of a group of teens caught up in an institution for "crazy" people--most there against their will. A shocking, behind the curtain look at what it's really like to live in a "throw away" place for teens when your parents don't want to deal with you anymore.
