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The Way I Used to Be

Abigail Packard

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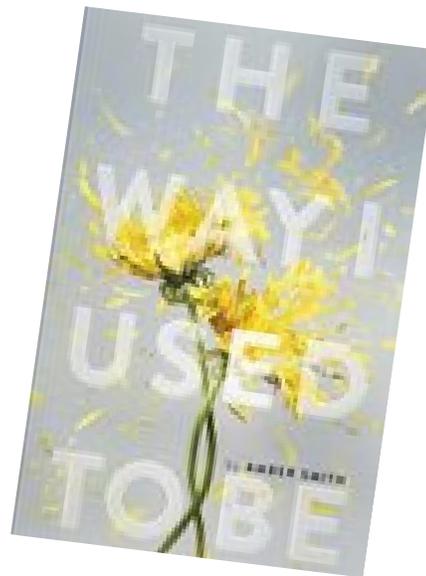
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Book Review

Title: The Way I Used to Be
Author: Amber Smith
Reviewer: Abigail Packard
Publisher: Margaret K. McElderry Book
Year: 2016
ISBN: 9781481449359
Pages: 384
Interest Level: Young Adult
Rating: Cannot Recommend



Review

Eden, a fourteen year old just beginning her freshman year, is a good girl. But her entire world collapses one night when her older brother's best friend, Kevin, rapes her. She knows she supposed to tell someone—her mom, her dad, her brother, her best friend—but she can't bring herself to say anything. And so her world begins adapting to the trauma she's experienced. Eden finds love in a senior basketball star named Josh, but can't bring herself to tell him her true feelings. Rumors begin to circulate around the school about Eden's loose morals. And after a series of parties, these rumors begin to be true as Eden tries to drown her memories and escape through sex. By senior year, Eden has pushed everyone close to her away. And just when it looks like Eden will be stuck on the path that began that fateful night, Kevin's girlfriend and sister come forward and tell their own secrets: they are also victims of Kevin's sexual assault. Eden finally finds courage to tell someone about her own experiences.

Amber Smith's novel is brutal, raw, depressing, and over-exaggerated. Eden is a hyperbolic trauma victim. She can't manage to tell anyone about this terrible secret which is a very real characteristic, but she spirals so far down into parties, alcohol, smoking, swearing, and detached sex that she quickly loses credibility as a realistic and relatable character. The reader is forced to watch with no hope until the last chapter in which a pin prick of light is offered to the reader as a consolation prize for finishing. Eden's parents, brother, and best friend act as vague background characters with superficial relationships to Eden. Smith's word choice is littered with every profanity imaginable including a ridiculously exaggerated overuse of the f-word that does nothing to enhance the story, but instead makes reading the book extremely uncomfortable. Overall, Smith's novel does little to add to the conversation about trauma and rape, but goes out of its way to depress and desensitize the reader.

*Contains severe language, severe sexual content, teen partying, drug use, and alcohol consumption.