



2019

Unleaving

Taylor Nelson

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Book Review

Unleaving

Author

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Reviewer

Taylor Nelson

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Young Adult

Pages

304

Year

2019

ISBN

9781250132819

Publisher

Feiwel & Friends

Nineteen-year-old Maggie survives a sexual assault at an off-campus party. When she reports the crime, the perpetrators—popular athletes on the football team—are expelled, but Carlton sports fans are outraged, and Maggie is ostracized and harassed. Tired of the shame and victim-blaming, and still trying to come to terms with her trauma, Maggie escapes Carlton to go live with her Aunt Wren, an eccentric sculptor and artist who lives in an isolated cabin. As time goes on, Maggie begins to slowly heal, in part due to her blossoming friendship with Linnie, a young woman with troubles of her own and a feisty five-year-old daughter, as well as her correspondence with Jane, another victim of rape on Maggie’s campus. As new and unexpected friendships develop, Maggie learns more about her aunt and mother’s own history, discovering along the way a strength inside herself that she never knew she had.

This book deals with hard and emotionally traumatic topics in a thoughtful and expressive way. The trauma Maggie experienced is explored through PTSD flashbacks, which are not graphic or overly descriptive but are highly emotive nonetheless. The sole focus of the book is on Maggie and her recovery—there is absolutely no romance in the book, which is refreshing given the “love solves everything” trope in young adult literature. The story is entirely character-driven, and every character is developed wonderfully, with their own complex histories and struggles that have shaped who they are. The support system that develops around Maggie feels real and authentic, especially since each character is battling their own demons. At times the pacing feels a bit off, with some parts rushed that should have been explored in detail, but overall Unleaving is an incredible healing journey that shows just how important love, support, and understanding can be.

*Contains mild violence, moderate language, and mild sexual content.