



Faking Normal

Courtney C. Stevens

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Alexi Littrell hasn't told anyone what happened to her over the summer. Ashamed and embarrassed, she hides in her closet and compulsively scratches the back of her neck, trying to make the outside hurt more than the inside does.

When Bodee Lennox, the quiet and awkward boy next door, comes to live with the Littrells, Alexi discovers an unlikely friend in "the Kool-Aid Kid," who has secrets of his own. As they lean on each other for support, Alexi gives him the strength to deal with his past, and Bodee helps her find the courage to finally face the truth.

Faking Normal Details

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Author : Courtney C. Stevens

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From Reader Review Faking Normal for online ebook

Emily May says

Something is hiding in my childhood. Something *Off*.

This book literally scared me. I had foreseen Faking Normal having many possible effects on me but fear really wasn't one of them. And the worst part? This book doesn't have any monsters in the traditional sense. No demons or things that go bump in the night. Not even any serial killers or psychopaths. The scary things in this book are the memories that people forget over time. The kind of memories we push below the surface and force ourselves to hide away. What don't we remember from our early childhoods? What horrors did our minds automatically repress to shelter us from dealing with reality? Why are we like we are - could there be an answer hidden deep inside us, a long-forgotten memory that haunts us subconsciously?

There are so many books about sexual abuse in its various ugly forms. I'll be honest and say I imagined this book would be yet another poor version of *Speak*. The two do have many similarities: both are about teenage girls who feel unable to talk about their horrific experience. They both have a lot to deal with internally as well as externally and the ultimate theme of both is about gaining an understanding of why many victims feel unable to report what has happened. But, that being said, Alexi's story felt fresh and unique. The author's approach to the subject was different from Anderson's and touched upon elements of child psychology as well. The two girls' reasons for not reporting the crimes also differ.

Then there's the other part of this story.

You know, if you'd asked me to draw my perfect guy as a kid, I would have drawn you a cliché. He would have been a stereotype: tall, white (or orange crayon most likely), dark hair, good-looking in a generic way. But we learn as we get older that fantasies don't hold up in reality. We never want the person we thought we would and we never *ever* want the person who the world thinks we should. From the heavy metal-loving loner who I watched anime with in high school, to the only Pakistani guy who talked to me in English at the fast food place where I got my first job, to the nerdy guy with the glasses who gave me his copy of *Crime and Punishment* to read in college. The clichéd fantasy is never what we want or need. The person we want in the end is the one we want for all the reasons you can't draw on paper. And that's what Alexi Littrell starts to realise in this story.

I do have criticisms and the book might have got five stars otherwise. There was some casual slut-shaming that annoyed me with the character of Maggie playing the role of the throwaway "slutty" girl who is the butt of many jokes. One thought of Alexi's is: *"it's too cruel to tell Maggie her dating practices don't lead to roses"*, because she's apparently been around a bit. She also deserves to be used and her feelings are not considered. This is a conversation that's had when Heather's boyfriend cheated with Maggie:

"Maggie. But she... why would he do that?"

I give her a look. "Maggie, Heather. She was there," I say.

It was just such an unnecessary addition to an otherwise really good novel. One thing I will say and I think it's important to note, I was a little confused about the use of the word "rape" in this novel for a large part of it, but my questions were answered in the end. For once I would say stick with it if you're unsure. **This is a very real spoiler, please do not click unless you've read the book:** (view spoiler)

The term irritates me, but this novel is very much a coming-of-age tale. It's about leaving fantasy behind and facing reality. Facing the truth. Facing your fears. And growing up. There are many mysteries to be solved in this book and each revelation is like leaving a little bit of childhood behind. It's incredibly powerful. And sad. You should read it.

Keertana says

Lately, I've grown very cynical. At least when it comes to Young Adult Contemporary. It's no secret that I am constantly let down by this genre, my expectations of the reality it will expose shattered by over-used tropes, love triangles, and an ironic dose of the unreal. When *Faking Normal* fell into my hands, it was with little, or no, expectations at all that I cracked open its spine. Stevens's debut already seemed a little too familiar; the girl on the cover, the gorgeous font, the *too* damaged protagonist. And, in many ways, *Faking Normal* is not a new story. It's not meant to be, though. Instead, *Faking Normal* is the novel I've wished so many preceding titles could have been and, in my eyes, to finally tell a story the *right* way, without romanticizing a traumatic situation, is more profoundly moving than anything else.

Sadly, the first thing to stand out to me about *Faking Normal* is the fact that the main character, Alexi, and her two best friends, Liz and Heather, discuss sex. Extensively. And in a manner that is utterly nonchalant, proving how perfectly normal this occurrence is. For a novel that deals with rape and domestic abuse, it says a lot about this genre that a healthy discussion about sex with girlfriends is what stands out. Needless to say, it's a rarity in this genre, though it should not be. Stevens never shies away from the plethora of "taboo" topics that girls discuss and, frankly speaking, the friendship between these three girls is refreshing. First and foremost, it is honest and *real*, never sugar-coating the complex relationships among these teens and, most importantly, treating their hurdles as insignificant. Although Alexi, Liz, and Heather all have their own set of stereotypes associated with them, as the novel wears on and secrets are revealed, it is proven that no one – and especially no one girl – fits the label she is given *and that is okay*. I find that this is a universal theme that truly needs to be emphasized more often, especially with modern-day media selling girls as one type or another. As the layers to these three friends are slowly peeled back, the raw truth is all the more beautiful as it arrives hand-in-hand with acceptance.

Nevertheless, while friendship is certainly a strong, and prevalent theme, throughout the novel, the bulk of *Faking Normal* deals with the trauma that Alexi and the boy-next-door, Bodee, have faced. When Bodee's father murders his mother in a violent situation of domestic abuse, Alexi's parents invite Bodee to live with them, particularly as Alexi and Bodee's mother were best friends. While Alexi doesn't know what to think of the Kool-Aid Kid whose hair is a different color every day, she learns to trust him as he recognizes the scabs on the back of her neck and keeps her secret. Both Alexi and Bodee, however, are unable to own up to the darkness inside of them. For Bodee, turning his father in seems like a no-brainer, but is surprisingly difficult. And for Alexi, even accepting the fact that she was raped this past summer – by someone she knew and trusted, no less – is even harder.

It is evident, throughout the novel, that Alexi is hurting; blaming herself for the rape, feeling an immense amount of guilt, and ultimately hating her perpetrator for stealing her virginity – something that she should have had the choice to give away. With her friends, Liz and Heather, discussing their own sexual encounters and first-times, Alexi cannot help but feel even more dirty and contaminated by her circumstances. In Bodee, however, she finds a true friend. Although Alexi and Bodee never become true confidants until much later in the novel, they help each other cope with their respective traumas. Bodee, for instance, attempts to wean Alexi off of the habit of picking at the skin on her neck just as Alexi tries to help Bodee feel safe enough so that he doesn't feel the need to do pull-ups underneath the bed.

Stevens writes *Faking Normal* with such skill and poise that it is difficult to imagine this being only her first novel. Not only is her prose lilting and easy to lose yourself in, but it is sparse when needed and the words capture the raw emotions of these teenagers in a way nothing else possibly can. Although Bodee's growth and hurt is only briefly touched upon throughout the story arc, we truly manage to delve inside Alexi's head and heart, feeling her pain and sorrow and loneliness. While Alexi, unlike Bodee, still has her entire family with her, she is close with neither of them, least of all her sister Kayla whose dominating personality has always overshadowed her own. Thus, the relationship that blossoms between Bodee and Alexi, one of trust and friendship, carries so much weight throughout the novel. Moreover, the subtle romance that occurs between the two is understated, but heart-felt. For me, the best part is that the words "I love you" are never uttered – it doesn't need to be. *Faking Normal* is so much more a story about the heavy weight and comprehension of complex emotions than the words that make them up, which is beautiful.

Stevens's debut is a raw, gritty, and often brutal contemporary. None of the relationships in this novel are simple and the path towards healing is constantly a challenge, one step back for every two steps forward. It isn't a dark, or even heavy read, however. Filled with the bustle of daily high school life, flirty jocks, and even a mysterious desk-writer nicknamed "Captain Lyric," *Faking Normal* manages to be wildly entertaining, all while touching upon serious subjects in a poignant manner. I am, rarely, impressed by Contemporary YA, but this novel is worth every penny. I hardly need to say it, but if I do, then pre-order this one at once – it's going to be a definite favorite this year. I can just tell.

You can read this review and more on my blog, Ivy Book Bindings.

Faye, la Patata says

US/CAN and Philippine readers! You can win a finished copy (US/CAN) and an ARC(PH) of *Faking Normal* on the blog! Head over there to join the giveaways for a chance to win!

You know a book has moved you so much when you've read it months and months ago and can still remember the story and the values it imparted. You know a book has touched your life when every time you try to write a review about it, you can't produce any coherent words but simply tears. **Usually, when I finish a book, I think about it, write a review, fangirl a bit and then move on to the next one in tow. Here, though? There's that unmistakable dull ache, even after all this time.** There's a reason why I haven't written a review until now - upon finishing this book, I just found it so hard to describe the way I felt. I'm not even sure I'll be able to give it justice now.

Faking Normal follows the story of a girl named Alexi who harbors a deep, dark secret - so dark she is even afraid of it herself. One day, she befriends the "kool-aid kid next door", Bodee, a distraught boy who witnessed the death of his mother in the hands of his father. Somehow knowing both are broken from different circumstances, they find solace and comfort in each other, gradually pushing and encouraging each other to finally face their inner demons to find peace within themselves.

This book is not easy to digest and definitely not for the faint of heart. It deals with a controversial subject that never fails to make my blood boil: rape. Every day, on the news, I always see reports of women, girls or even men raped, and every time I do, my heart cries out. It's a horrible thing, and it leaves me terribly aghast to know it continues to occur in our modern times; you would have thought we as a civilization would have left such a primitive practice in the past where it belongs. And majority of the time, I see the women ashamed of that fact - that they were made powerless and taken advantage of. And these are

only the small percent who actually cried for help.

And the rest are like Alexi - victims who have lost their ability to cry out, to say no. Victims who fear coming out, who fear that everything they know will change once word of it gets out. **Its portrayal of the silent suffering victim was so real and genuine that it felt like being in her shoes, and it was such a crappy, crappy feeling.** Hurting yourself to keep the pain inside, putting on a mask pretending everything's okay to hide the truth from yourself... it made me sad and angry for her. It hit the heart so fucking hard. Nobody deserves this kind of torture, nobody. **Alexi felt like the embodiment of all the pent-up feelings victims of rape must go through and it was difficult to read. It was therefore an amazing experience seeing her finally standing up and facing the truth.** Her coming out and trusting the people around her with the things she kept inside for so long was so beautiful that I cried with her, with them.

Bodee, on the other hand, was also an amazing character. Despite being a man of a few words, he was vital to Alexi's journey as she was to his. Even though he's the kind of guy who'd tell you the things you want to know through a glance or a small gesture, his presence was strong. I loved how he was so observant, caring, and kind. **I loved how he tells a lot through his silence. It was so refreshing to finally see a male lead who speaks through his actions, who, despite having been traumatized himself, still finds the strength to support other people.** Have you ever seen such an amazing lead? A kind of guy who'd be willing to be strong for both of you if you can't be strong for yourself? That's Bodee for you.

Overall, this is truly a raw and poignant book whose painful journey will rip your heart to shreds but it is also a memorable book whose ending will leave you in tears with a smile on your face.. It's a beautiful story of a girl and boy who, in their brokenness, find themselves supporting each other; a story of the meaning of family, trust, friendship, and love - a love not only for others, but a love for oneself. It has everything you could ever ask for, and I'm telling you this is not a book to be missed.

You can also find me on Twitter!

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

? ● ⊕ **3.5 stars** . While this book was far from flawless, I can't deny it's one of the best handle of abuse issues I read lately. ⊕ ● ?

? **STEREOTYPE.** *Noun.*

? A person or thing that conforms to a widely held but oversimplified image of the class or type to which they belong.

? **Slut-shaming** - That's a shame because it was really - as usual - completely unnecessary. There's this girl, **Maggie**, who bears the cost of being neither Alexi's friend nor a main character of the story, and I must admit that I was mad at the way her behavior toward guys is portrayed. I mean, why create such character, whose only mean seems to be compared to the *pure* Alexi? Fortunately this was rare, but sentences like this : **"Maggie. She was there."** when talking about sex tend to annoy me someting fierce.

? **Unoriginal plot** : *Just look at it, okay?* Some teenager girl who's got issues since last summer - something happened during a party, near a pool, think alcohol, excitement. Well, I'm going to put this behind a spoiler

tag because I'm nice like that, but I can bet that you've already guessed what happened to her : yeah, (view spoiler). Not the most original plot possible in contemporary YA (or even in NA, for that matter), don't you think? Exactly.

? **PEEVE**. *Noun*

? A cause of annoyance

? **God says this, God thinks that** : So. I'll only say it once : **No offense to all of you who believe in God**. Seriously. But as I'm not a believer, these constant references to God irked me. Yes, that upset me when a character I love is compared to God, like here : *"I know these two weeks have been God walking right into my life like he was flesh and Kool-Aid-colored hair. The gospel according to Bodee Lennox. His safety. His protection. And love."*

Please, just don't do this. Meh. Meh. Meh. I don't want religious things in my YA. I loved Bodee. *Please*. He's not a God walking, for Pete's sake. He's an incredible BOY.

? **Alexi's personality** : I really, really, struggled to relate to her. But then, I never lived what she had to deal with, so can I really judge? I don't know.

? **SCARY**. *Adj.*

① Frightening; causing fear

② Uncannily striking or surprising

? **What says your unconscious?** : this story scared me in a weird level. Have you ever thought about what we all forget from our childhood? How many events do we lose in the meanderings of our minds? Have you ever wondered what was carefully hidden in each and every one of us? Because I have. When I take a look at my childhood, I'm always bewildered to realize that several years have just - disappeared. Completely. Nothing happened to me and I'm pretty sure I'm a balanced person enough but what happens if that's not the case? **The fact that events from childhood can influence our lives without being aware of it is plain scary to me**. Moreover, I could picture what Alexi was doing to herself. So much that it made me physically *cringe*. Hurting her neck, hiding in her closet, faking, *pretending* - I *saw* her, under her shell, under all the layers behind which she started hiding. As for Bodee, what can I say except that my teenage self might have fell in love with him? **This Kool-Aid guy, whose color hair changes every day and whose loss left him broken, but who tries to go forward whatever it takes?** I adored him.

? **REAL**. *Adj.*

① Used to emphasize the significance or seriousness of a situation.

② (Of a thing) not imitation or artificial; genuine.

But what made this book so much better than the regular New Adult which deals with similar issues is the absence of this awful twist, aka, *the healing sex/making out*. Yes Bodee and Alexi are hurting - Yes they're all kind of broken, even if for different reasons. Yes they're going to help each other. **But that's not a dumb Love heals Anything story in my opinion**.

No. Talking helps. Trusting helps. Having a friend helps. Learning to stop coping and thinking of ourselves helps. Standing for ourselves helps. At some point, I couldn't help but think **Yes, THIS is real. This is how it goes**.

So much better than a healing dick, for Pete's sake.

Right? **Because there might be romance in it, this is never the real deal. No. The real deal, that's this**

liberating moment when Alexi yells. Finally.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Christina says

I wanted a little more from the resolution of the "issue" that plagued Alexi, but I definitely can live with how it ended. It wasn't something that killed the book for me, and it's likely that the reason it bothered me is because of my own personal conflict.

I loved this so much, especially the author's prose and how much I was able to connect to the heroine. I'll post my full review closer to the pub date, but I definitely think you should put this on your TBR list. It cracked my chest wide open, but it was a story that felt real and very close to me. It won't be for everyone though because of the heavier subjects it deals with throughout the novel.

Edited for full review on November 20, 2013. (Please to be excusing my wordy, quote-hoarding ways.)

My original review for this title can be found **HERE** on The Book Hookup.

****Special Note:**** *An e-ARC of this title was provided by the publishers via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. However, that did not influence this review in any way. All thoughts, quotes, and opinions will be of this galley and not from the published version.*

♥ **Initial Thoughts and Rating: 5 glowing stars!** At one percent, I updated my status on Goodreads with this, "Oh, man. This one is going to crack my chest wide open, isn't it? *puts on a brave face*" If only I had known how true that update was going to be. This book made me run the gamut of feels and I'd like to think that I came out on the other side of *Faking Normal* with a better understanding of what it truly means to be brave. Courtney Stevens is an author whose future works I'll definitely be on the lookout for in the years to come.

TRIGGER WARNING: This book deals with quite a few heavier, more sensitive subjects. There are mentions of spousal abuse, sexual assault, and self-injury.

♥ **The Lowdown:** Alexi Littrell is in an everyday war with herself. Face forward, act normal, appear normal, be normal. After an event from the summer leaves her questioning everything she knew about safety and love, Lex gets really good at *faking* normal. She has everyone fooled except for Bodee Lennox, who is no stranger to the monsters that hide in plain sight. These two may inspire one another to face their own personal truths, but inevitably find that they had the strength to fight their own battles in themselves all along.

For me, *Faking Normal* is the story about being honest with one's self and finding the courage you might not have known was hidden inside yourself at the darkest of hours and learning to confront your demons when the timing is right. But it's also about understanding that even when you feel like the entire world is against you or that no one will understand, that there is *always* someone- or maybe even a few someones- that will have your back and help you fight your battles. You are *never* alone, no matter how *lonely* you feel.

That's a forever change. I never understood how life could be so dramatically sectioned, but it can. And is. There is only after. And before.

–quote taken from my eARC of Faking Normal at 2%

♥ **My Thoughts: I WILL NOT SPOIL THIS BOOK!** I read this book three or four months ago and I have literally opened this review post no less than a hundred times since then. Yet, each time I would exit back out because I just didn't feel like I had enough words or even the right words to perfectly summarize how this book made me feel... which is nothing short of *everything*. *Faking Normal* seriously felt like it took all my emotions– happiness, hurt, love, loss, understanding, self-worth, bitterness, anger, giddiness, fear, loathing– and tossed them in the air and let them scatter and fall all around me. In the end, though, I was left with a sense of calm hopefulness, my heart filled with a love for characters like I haven't experienced after a book in quite some time.

Sadly, I know not everyone will connect to this story or even understand Alexi, and that kind of breaks my heart. They won't understand her struggle and won't quite grasp how harsh her reality is and exactly why she struggles with her secret instead of just telling. In certain situations, the line between what is right and wrong can get a little muddled, and it's not as easy for a person to see that it *is* wrong, only that it maybe *feels* wrong, especially when you're right in the middle of it. I, however, connected with her on a personal level, and I appreciated the depth and honesty in which Ms. Stevens handled hers and Bodee's situations. Often times when authors use these raw, grittier issues as a plot point in their novels, it's easy to feel like they're using a story so close to my heart as a way to sell books or for that "wow" factor. Some do it well and you can tell they've at least put in the effort to research all the ways a person can be affected by such a traumatic event, but even then, it feels like it lacks those little extra details to make me a true believer in the story they're trying to sell me. (I can spot a bullshit story a mile away, just saying.) However, Stevens gave me a novel that never felt trite, and I believe that had everything to do with her not giving us a cookie-cutter ending and trying to put pretty decorations (a steamy romance) on a crumbling cake (a girl and a boy trying to keep their head above water). She gave this story-line all the attention it required to make the heartache, conflict, and Alexi and Bodee's blossoming relationship believable.

Not only does the author give us an exemplary contemporary novel, but she writes these delicate subjects with such an elegant prose that you can't help but feel the emotions and a magnetic pull to the story. Her writing paints a picture that makes the emotions palpable and effortlessly tethers the reader to the ache at the center of the characters' pain. Here are a few examples:

“But that's too close. Too soon. Right now we're both yard sales of emotions. A penny for pain. A dime for bitterness. A quarter for grief. A dollar for silence. It binds us together, but I don't want him to pay the price for the parts of me that are used and broken. And that's what the dance would be.”

–quote taken from my eARC of Faking Normal at 24%

“The power of Bodee is in the way he reads me, sees through me, and then understands the truth behind the facade. He's the guy who can walk straight through the House of Mirrors on the first try. It's almost annoying. No one should ride tragedy like a pro surfer while I drown.”

–quote taken from my eARC of Faking Normal at 29%

♥ **Swoons:** Bodee has a way of making normal, everyday occurrences and words seem swoony, and I'm not quite sure how he does it, to be honest. There's a quiet gentleness and ease to his swoons that I'm sure only he could provide. Needless to say, I heart him.

“Because Bodee slept in his sneakers, because Bodee asked for a kiss instead of just taking it, and because he kept space between us. And he danced with two fingers until I asked for three or four... and his hand on my hip.

I know we're still broken. Both of us. But Bodee's got the glue to make us whole.

He is love.”

–quote taken from my eARC of Faking Normal at 93%

♥ **Swoony Teaser:**

“I didn't see you much today,” I say to Bodee as he climbs into the Malibu next to me.

“I saw you.”

–quote taken from my eARC of Faking Normal at 53%

♥ **Verdict:** Sure, slaying dragons and being a skilled assassin in fantasy novels are a thing to marvel over. But when a contemporary is done right, it's those with the quiet strength of facing struggles in real life every single day and fighting against them, people like Alexi and Bodee, that should be seen as heroes. Being able to face their own truths and stare down the monsters that exist among us, hidden by their camouflage of human skin, that's the strongest act of courage any person can exhibit. Because that's real life and they never get to wake up from their nightmares. Those are the people we should champion after, the real people that deserve our unwavering support. *Faking Normal* and all of its characters have mine.

If I haven't already made it perfectly clear, I'm recommending this book to people who feel like they can handle the sensitive subjects. If everything that I've said hasn't already convinced you, then perhaps I should mention that I have twelve pages of highlighted text on my kindle. Twelve. Pages. That has to stand for something, right? *Faking Normal* is a book that I've reflected on for the past few months, and one that I'm positive I'll continue to think about long from now. If you can face the challenge this book throws down, it's one you don't want to miss out on.

Also, that cover? Yeah, it'll be coming to my bookshelf just as soon as I can get my hands on it. I love it so much!

Ms. Stevens, thank you for giving me a real story of personal triumph and characters that I will always feel connected to after such an amazing read. You are a special kind of talent, and I look forward to the day that I can devour more of your words.

♥ A very special thanks to HarperTEEN and Edelweiss for providing me with an early copy of this book for an honest review.

Jesse (JesseTheReader) says

trigger warning for self-harm & rape.

This book was great. I wasn't expecting to love it as much as I did. I'm really surprised this book isn't talked about much in the booktube community. I think my favorite part of this book was the bond that developed between Alexi & Bodee. It was incredible seeing two people who have been through so much come together and help each other heal. I did have one issue, but it's kind of spoilery so I'll discuss it more in my video review for this book. Overall really enjoyed this one and will DEFINITELY be picking up more of Courtney's books in the future.

Aj the Ravenous Reader says

Another important YA contemporary that deals with mental health issues as consequences of a dark, painful event that happened in the major characters' lives. Both **Alexi** and **Bodee** carry with them a burden that's haunting and almost ruining their lives and all they had for comfort was each other. The only difference between them is Alexi's demon is an ugly, dark secret she wants to hide in her closet while Bodee's is out in the open for everyone to scrutinize.

The story is written in the POV of Alexi setting the tone of the story which oozes sadness and pain as she tries to fake normal every day in fear of becoming the object of everyone's pity or worse, judgment and at the same time, worrying that outing her secret could ruin the life of the person who ruined hers. But even though the entire narrative is laced with a general mood of sadness, the plot also gives the reader things to enjoy like the mystery behind Captain Lyric and the mystery behind the culprit that kept me as a reader wide awake.

One of the subjects of the story is how a rape victim sometimes opts to keep what happened to her a secret believing that the person who did this crime to her is inherently a good person who was only paralyzed by a moment of weakness and was later regretful of his actions. But just the fact that he did it at all means he has to answer for his crime no matter how supposedly a good person he is and no matter how much he regrets his actions.

It's a sad truth but sometimes the people you expect to protect you are the ones with the greatest potential to hurt you and there's no other way to recover from what was lost but to let them answer for what they did, to speak up against them and remind yourself that you may not be able to get back what was lost but you could try and live your life anew.

Kim at Divergent Gryffindor says

I have no idea why I didn't read this book sooner. I must be stupid or something.

This book was so, so, so FREAKING GOOD! I kind of speechless in that I don't know how to put it's amazing-ness into words. I'll probably write a review when my opinions become more coherent, or I'll just leave this as is because I might ruin it.

I want my own Bodee! Haha!

Recommend me more books like this one, please!

Arianna ♦ *SteamyReadsBlog* ♦ says

4 Stars!!

“I never understood life could be so dramatically sectioned, but it can. And is. There is only after. And before.”

“*Faking Normal*” is a young adult /realistic fiction novel with a premise I have read before. However, the execution here was quite different from other books I have previously read. It's a raw and gritty tale about a girl who's life changed irrevocably three months ago.

“Once I'm behind two closed doors, I curl into a ball and suck in the familiar smell of the closet carpet. When I can't make myself smaller, I cry and pound my fist on the floor. There's an art to crying without a sound, and I'm a master.”

If there's a way to fake normal Alexis, a 17 years old girl knows everything about it. Alexis is broken, but no one notices. She has a secret, but no one knows about it. Everyone believes she's the same Alexis, but she's not. She craves to be normal. All she wants is not to be forced (by circumstances) to fake normal or to lie her friends and family. Almost daily she harms herself to forget the terrible events that changed her life. She wants to be like her friends, a simple teenager, to be free, to forget. But how can you forget about it, when 'the villain' is a constant in your life.

Everything Alexis does is fake. Even her smiles are fake. Until she properly meets Bodee, the 'Kool-Aid Kid' who's life was shattered by his own father.

After some tragic events Bodee comes to live with Alexis's family. He is different from other boys. He actually cares about Alexis, about what she thinks and feels.

“...his face is not expressionless the way I once thought. That slight twitch of lips, a little half

grin, says more than Heather does in a week. But the full-teeth smile, the one I saw today at his house, is like a work of Tolstoy."

As the story unfolds, Alexis and Bodee become best friends and maybe something more, trying to heal each other and to give each other hope.

"Something is hiding in my childhood. Something off."

This story was emotional, poignant, well written and overall I enjoyed it! I think what I liked the most here was the character development. Both main characters are very well portrayed and their voices felt so real and honest. These characters had depth, were relatable and I felt deeply for both of them.

My heart broke for Alexis from the beginning. She was such a damaged character. The psychological aspect of herstory was done really well. You can actually feel how traumatized she is, how much shame she feels for what happened to her. Bodee was pure and simple perfect. He was such a kind boy. I loved how mature he was at times, how caring and affectionate he was with Alexis, but what I loved the most about him was his protectiveness. The way he was with this girl who suffered and still suffers so much melt my heart. I really felt these two characters were good for each other. Their attempts to heal each other were heartwarming and together they were simply lovely.

"If a heart can smile, mine does.

"Bodee, thanks," I say, though I know he doesn't need it. "I'm sorry you lost her."

"At least I found you," he says."

The cast of supportive character were also great and entertaining. I really enjoyed the bond between Alexis and her girlfriends. The relationship between these girls was portrayed in such a realistic way. I really liked it.

Overall, a great young adult realistic novel!

Louisa says

Quietly powerful writing, but ultimately I was left uncomfortable at the occasional slut-shaming and Alexi in general. I don't quite see what the positive reviews are on about.

Books like these always leave an impact on me - Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* made me fear walking home alone at night for a while, when my country is as safe as a six-ton steel bank vault. *Faking Normal* on the other hand? While I appreciate the serious subject matter, I highly dislike the way it unfolded and how rape was defined. I think this review more or less summarises my views, more succinctly than I could manage now.

Rose says

Initial reaction: This book had its share of flaws, but I still thought it was a powerful story for what it offered. Definitely shook me in places as I read it.

Full review:

I think Courtney C. Stevens's "Faking Normal" surprised me in terms of how powerful it turned out to be, especially for the way approached the experiences of its main character. I think part of what made this narrative stand out was the great audio reading by Emma Galvin. **Galvin's voice and emotional resonance tend to compliment teen books very well from the experiences I've had with her readings before, and this was no exception. I think she especially provided a raw honesty for Alexi's character that stuck with me. It was part of the reason why I liked this narrative as much as I did.**

It's not a secret that this book focuses on the horrific experiences that Alexi endured over a long stretch of time, but most notably over one summer that changed everything. It's not until after she ends up colliding with Bodee's particular situation that she actually starts confronting the reality. I'll admit I came into this book with varying degrees of skepticism, but decided to see where it would take me.

Alexi's going through a number of different transitions in the course of "Faking Normal". Her sister's getting married to a long term fiance, she's struggling with an incident that happened over the summer that changed her views of relationships entirely (**it's not hard to figure out what it is and I think the suspension in the narrative is more of a reflection of the character trying to come to terms with that reality, rather than a measure to keep the reader in suspense**), and she's having to bring into her family a classmate who recently experienced a horrific ordeal of his own (Bodee - his father murdered his mother and he's having to testify against his father's crime and long term abuse. He ends up staying with Alexi and her family for a time.).

Alexi is a character who has many insecurities and that showed very much in the narrative in terms of her voice and her interactions with the other characters. I saw her flaws through her voice - internal musings as well as external. That's not to say that she was the easiest character to follow (there were times when her judgments regarding other characters drove me up the wall). But the insecurities and the walls she puts up with respect to the inner turmoil she has is very realistic, palpable, and consistent. I think that was the thing that made me invested in her character and want to know how she eventually comes to terms with everything going on around her.

I was struck by how realistic Alexi's cycle of denial was from a psychological standpoint. Granted, you kind of get that impression considering this book's called "Faking Normal" and what meaning that takes on. She has a hard time speaking up for what she wants because of this idea that she has to accept what's done to her (rationale being due to fear, anguish, not wanting to upset the balance of those surrounding her, maybe even hoping that somehow faking it will help her ease into some sense of normality), that she doesn't have a voice, that it doesn't matter what she wants. **For victims of trauma who are in this kind of denial/self-blame, those are not uncommon musings and I think Stevens does a decent job of showing this.**

However, I have some bones to pick. I think "Faking Normal" could've done a better job with the measure of showing/defining dubious consent, sexual assault, and rape. Stevens touches on these measures in variant capacities in the narrative, but she doesn't really do a good job of defining them via a coming to terms for Alexi as Alexi struggles to make sense of her experiences. For a narrative tackling such

subjects as these, that's extremely important, especially for teens to be able to know (Heck, if it's hard for adults to be able to define in some measures and discuss, think about how this comes across to a younger audience for the shaping.) **I think while this narrative did a fine job of showing the anguish that Alexi went through and the emotions behind Alexi's ordeals, it didn't do a very good job of shaping the definition of these experiences and prompting further serious, formal discussion of these ordeals. Which is why I debated my rating for this book for a while after I read it.**

This book also touches on the cliched "love heals trauma" measure I see in many New Adult novels, though I would say that it didn't bother me as much in this book as others I've picked up (that may be a personal thing - I could definitely see some readers taking issue with that in this novel because there are shades of it here). Bodee is a boy with some seriously heavy burdens - they're given weight in the narrative (and Alexi does actually call him out in some measures for his denial/reluctance to testify against his father). Do I think Bodee's experiences could've been expounded upon more? Absolutely YES. I felt like there wasn't enough of a balance given to both of their coming to terms and there was more of a leaning where it seems like he's helping her come to terms more than she's helping him, and there's a significant reliance on the affection rather than the issue being dealt with. **That's a problem that I think more YA/NA authors need to be mindful of. There shouldn't be such a heavy leaning on significant others helping another character to heal via the "power of love" (more often than not, a male "healing" a female character) because people truly coming to terms with trauma or serious issues doesn't work in that single dimension. More often than not, that particular focus can undermine the pain/ experience and coming to terms the afflicted character goes through.** For "Faking Normal" - I never got a sense that the sentiments were anything less than genuine or some kind of narrative ploy, so maybe it didn't bother me for that reason, but it was still a problematic leaning I noticed in thinking about the narrative after the read.

I will say that this book gripped me with its scheme of events - Stevens's writing is immersive and focused - giving me access to how Alexi thought/felt and how she gradually came to terms with what happened to her as well as handled the relationships around her. The slow burn didn't bother me (matter in point, I actually liked it because it gave me a chance to see the characters interact/react over time).

The climax of the novel tugged at my heartstrings - I couldn't look away from it and I was glad that Alexi had her chance to rise against her rapist in the scheme of the novel.

Overall, I think this book is worth reading for the experience and to serve as a conversation starter. I liked the investment in the difficult subjects it chose to show, even if I thought it could've provided better definitions and discussions surrounding the measure.

Overall score: 3.5/5 stars.

Aimee ♥ | Aimee, Always says

As you guys know, I'm a HUGE fan of this book, and I need you guys to read it. If you haven't yet, US readers can win **a signed copy of Faking Normal** on the blog, courtesy of the amazing Courtney Stevens!

I don't read a lot of novels that deal with serious issues because they make me question my faith in humanity. But then I saw some **raving reviews** for this one from reviewers I trust, and I couldn't help but add it to my wishlist. I picked it up as soon as I found it in the bookstore.

After reading this one, I think it'll be **one of those books that just sticks with you for a while**. The **emotional and powerful writing** will really draw you in. And once you've been lured into the book, you'll be surprised at how **well-developed the characters** are--each story they share has depth and much meaning.

I'll admit: I went into this one expecting a damaged girl to be comforted by a cute and lovable guy. While that idea was present in the story, what I got was so much more. Both characters had their own stories to tell, lives to fix and problems to deal with. They were both damaged and scarred, and they needed each other.

Alexi was a wonderful heroine. Now, that doesn't mean she's perfect. She was quite the opposite, actually. She tore at her skin to mask the emotional pain she felt and closed her mind and heart to basically everyone. **But she was very considerate of everyone, no matter how much they've hurt her, despised her or made her life harder**. She was broken in more ways than one, but she accepted it. She tried her best to move on, even if she knows that it's emotionally impossible.

Normally, I have issues about girls not immediately voicing out their abuses, but Alexi's ways of dealing and reasons for keeping to herself were just so realistic that **I didn't have a problem with her silence**.

Then we have the **freaking amazing Bodee**. Trust me, this is one character **you'll need in your life**. Despite having his own problems that he needed to deal with, he supported Alexi whenever he could, however he could. He was the best friend anyone could ever ask for. He stood up for her and constantly thought about what would be best for her. **He was like this huge teddy bear that you could tell all your problems to without it judging you!**

The romance was just so fantastic. It was **slow, and there was so much room for development** that was all filled up nicely. They went from being strangers, to friends, to best friends, and then to something much more. It was sweet and just absolutely lovely to read about.

This part of the review may contain minor spoilers. **The only reason I didn't give this one five stars was probably because of how rushed the "coming out" seemed to me**. I thought the dealt to quickly with the problem and let the culprit (who was an easy guess, honestly) just, well, go. I get why they probably don't want to harm him, but still. He was an ass and he deserves some jail time.

Overall, this was such a powerful read that brought out so many emotions: "kilig," as we Filipinos would say, love, strength, hatred, frustration and basically all of the other emotions out there. **I would recommend it to almost anyone looking for a read that will crawl its way into your heart**.

Giselle says

Rape books are numerous, at least I've read my fair share. They come in all shapes and sizes, giving us tragic stories of broken lives and emotionally crippled victims. Faking Normal may be one of the bunch, but it's one that stands out in its importance in showing one of the worst faces of rape: the one that goes wrongfully blamed, the one with circumstances that make the victim think it's excusable. He was hurt, he said. Lonely, he said. Since she didn't straight up say no, does it make it okay? Did Alexi "let it happen", making it her fault? Even though she obviously was not saying yes? For months, now, Alexi has been punishing herself, justifying the abuse that has been haunting her ever since. Haunting her to the point of self-harm and sleepless nights filled with compulsive behavior. Not only is this story incredibly well written and poignant, but it sheds some light on one of the most misunderstood and controversial of crimes.

Unsurprisingly when we meet Alexi she's a mess. She's psychologically traumatized, feeling ashamed and

dirty for having *let* that happen to her. I found this saddening and incredibly frustrating as this is an all-too-common scenario. It made me truly feel for Alexi, wishing she would stop, but also understanding her state of mind. The characterization is excellent, which is so important in these kinds of novels. Every character is crafted with a strong personality, allowing them distinct voices. Alexi, even with a fractured interior, is peppered with your normal teenage romantic fantasies and snort-worthy commentaries. Bodee is undeniably top book boyfriend material. He's equally broken but so kind, so generous, so real. I fell in love with his Kool-Aid hair and protective nature. I also welcomed the largely present girlfriend characters that add friendship to the many positive elements this book holds - like family and music, the latter playing an especially important role in Alexi's ability to find strength.

The plot itself, along with the emotional baggage, involves unraveling the details of the secret Alexi is keeping locked tight. I did suspect who her abuser was fairly early on, seeing right through the tactics used to try and sway us into another direction. But guessing it wasn't a disappointment, exactly, as this is not the kind of book written for epic twists - that's not what this is about. On the happier side, we have another mystery regarding the identity of Captain Lyrics who's been conversing with Alexi through lyrics on a school desk, often perfectly matching her mood. This person, through these lyrics, becomes a kind of psychological sanctuary for Alexi. Another happy note is the romance which makes its presence known throughout the book, but not overwhelmingly so. It's a very sweet romance that grows between two unlikely people who give each other the strength and courage they need.

A story of abuse and recovery; *Faking Normal* is a gripping and emotionally stirring read about a victim who's wrongfully blaming herself. It is not, however, an emotional abyss of a read. It's actually very well-balanced. Most importantly, it's stories like this that help in changing the often misconstrued way of thinking that rape is ever justifiable.

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An advance copy was provided by the publisher for review.

For more of my reviews, visit my blog at [Xpresso Reads](#)

Chelsea ♥Peril Please♥ says

****Just as good-if not better-than the first time****

Re-reading all my absolute favorites from 2015!!! Now it's time for Bodee <3 <3

Now there are tears in my eyes. "I'll make you a promise, Bodee. Long as you're with my family, you won't run out of Kool-Aid."

He blinks up at me. "And I promise you, I'll stop whoever's hurting you."

This book was perfection. I didn't know what I wanted, but somehow this book always went exactly in that right direction-it went where I didn't even realize I wanted to go, and that, to me, is amazing. Just wow. **Perfectly perfect-** It's not often I find myself grinning like a deranged loon in the dark back drop of our bedroom after the lights go out.

I mean, lots of books make me happy, everyone knows that, but it's rare to feel such strong, giddy feels that you can't contain a **smile too big for your face**. Those moments are unheard of, fleeting, almost non-existent. And I guess it's even more surprising because of the content of this novel. It wasn't light or fluffy or full of rainbows (well, I lie, Bodee's hair was a myriad of colors throughout the book), yet it made me feel happy all throughout. And I think that's the making of a true author-**turning something horrible into something hopeful**.

Me: a girl who was raped. Him: a boy whose dad killed his mom.

Us: a girl and boy who survive.

Last Friday I was on the search for a book that would help me get through the moments where I haven't had time to read my lengthier novels lately. I already had decided I was taking a break from the series I was on, seeing as I was ruining the epicness of it, and wanted something that was more like what I had been obsessed with throughout the summer. I don't know how to say this without sounding ridiculous, but, I've been in the mood for books that aren't....quite....right? For instance, my absolute favorites this year have been all over the board-Like I Hunt Killers, to realistic drama such as Some Girls Are, all the way to realistic fiction centered around mental health (I know, it sounds so bad spelled out like that) like this book here, or My Heart and Other Black Holes. Things like that. And don't even get me started on my dystopian and fantasy favs this year-we'll be here all day. *Anyway*, I knew I needed a good book...I just didn't know what.

If only I could make the outside hurt more than the inside.

I was scrolling through the feed and saw someone reading this-it was a book I had passed up a year ago, or who knows how long, and all of a sudden **I was curious**. My tastes have changed quite a bit, even from September 2014-September 2015. It's so funny to me how you just *know* what you love and then all of a sudden you are reading completely different things and rolling your eyes at what you used to love. I am so fickle. But, as it is, I am obsessed with this new and interesting genre (for me it's new) and don't see myself giving it up too easily. It almost always **touches me deeply** in ways I never imagined possible, and there is always **so much heart**. These books have depth that is so hard to find these days..and I can't get enough of them.

A wad of crime scene tape, meant for the trash. Left behind.

My mind wraps the same yellow tape around the pool in our backyard.

What if I had called the police? What if everyone knew a crime had been committed?

Everything would be different. Everything is different-even without the yellow tape.

I didn't know if I'd love this or not...but I had a good feeling, you know? It popped up on my feed and it just *felt* right. This is the story of **a girl who has a secret**. A girl who, despite her front, is broken. She goes through day to day life, smiling and nodding and acting as if nothing in the world is wrong....when, in reality,

everything is. Something happened to her over the summer, something that irrevocably **changed her life forever**, aging her beyond her years. She longs to be normal, to not want to continually cause herself harm to repress the horrible recounts of that fateful night...but, really, she just wants to move on and *forget* .

Once I'm behind two closed doors, I curl into a ball and suck in the familiar smell of the closet carpet. When I can't make myself smaller, I cry and pound my fist on the floor. There's an art to crying without a sound, and I'm a master.

If you don't like books where the main character causes **harm to themselves** or where **rape** is a factor in the story, **this won't be for you**. I've never had to deal with these issues, nor have I ever met anyone who does, but I felt the pain, the deep hurt, our MC felt on every single page-That fear of other men and the self loathing that came with the doubt of her resolve-or lack thereof-in the matter. She blames herself for not saying no and for letting it happen....but what she doesn't realize is **it's not her fault, it was never her fault**, and it **never will be her fault**. And I guess I'll never know if the author handled it correctly, but, to me, it all seemed right.

Something is hiding in my childhood. Something off.

Keeping this monumental secret is taking a huge toll on her. She doesn't smile without it being forced, her neck is in shreds (secretly), and she walks through the halls with no sense of purpose, just going through the motions. I didn't know what role her friends would really play in this-they seemed almost like the type to cause problems, in the beginning-but as the story progressed, you could see how much they cared for her, how they **would do anything to keep her happy**, and how they *noticed*....but didn't know how deeply her hurt went. They have their flaws, but what person doesn't?

The rape has devastated places in me that even Bodee's magic can't fix. If he were to put his heart in my hand, he might never find it again. And I'm not cruel enough to let him break while he tries to heal the impossible.

And I think it goes without saying that I loved a boy in this story, hmm? His name is **Bodee**, and he was perfect-literally. He was perfect. I have not one complaint with this caring boy-**He was beautiful, inside and out**. But, he has his own personal tragedy-his mother was murdered by his father, and it weighs on him every single day. At the start of the book, we open with Bodee's mother's funeral. Lexi's parents, being good friends of his mother, offer to let him stay at their house since he really doesn't have anywhere else to go, making Bodee and Lexi closer than they ever could have imagined.

"She'll take Collie back, so....be careful."

"Thanks, Lex, but my sights aren't on Heather."

"You have sights?"

"Every guy with a heartbeat has sights," he says.

"Who's in yours?" My heartbeat betrays my calm voice, and this close, I know Bodee can feel it spike.

"Well, now"-he flashes me the coy grin that I love and rarely see-"you have your secrets, and I have mine."

I think what I liked most about their relationship, though, was how they both did their best to try and help the other heal. And, even more than that, Bodee was an outcast at school-'Kool-Aid Kid', as they call him, and had no friends-it was utterly **heart-breaking** and soul -wrenching seeing him explore his new found friendship with Lexi-and Heather and Liz, by default. Even more than that, though, I loved seeing his **protectiveness** of Lexi-his best (and sometimes only) friend. It was absolutely adorable. I wanted to reach in the book and steal him for myself, hug him until all his pain went away....but now I'm getting creepy, and that just won't do. So...moving on.

"Alexi...I know...I don't know you well enough to ask, but....could you, I mean, would you maybe...help me with something on the way to your house?"

The starts and stops, the painstaking precision of words, and the sheer length of time it takes him to ask make it clear that this boy never asks anyone for help.

Bring out the dull knitting needles, stabbing my heart, again.

They aren't perfect-far from it-but they are trying to move forward with their lives-Or, in Lexi's case, to forget-and are doing it together. **Two souls who lost themselves along the way**...guiding each other back to the light. I know a lot of people hate the 'love cures all' trope, but I don't know that that was the case here. I think it was more of a **guidance** and **healing** type venture, and it was utterly heart-warming to **see how they grew**, each giving the other strength where they couldn't gather it themselves. **I fell in love with them together as well as when they were apart**...their story is one I can say I won't forget quickly, like I do with a lot of books. I really and truly fell in love with them-permanently.

If a heart can smile, mine does.

"Bodee, thanks," I say, though I know he doesn't need it. "I'm sorry you lost her."

"At least I found you," he says.

I think it goes without saying, though, that there was plenty I had a problem with. Well, one thing, really: Kayla, her sister. What a bitch. I'm sorry, but no sister should *ever* come at their sibling like that. It was disgusting, vile, and **completely uncalled for**. I must admit, though, I liked what the sour taste added to the story-I'm not sure why. Maybe I liked the diversity. Maybe I liked that things were that much more

complicated, or maybe it's because I got to see Bodee, **the knight in shining armor**....either way, I loved it.

Bodee Lennox is never really anything. I'll bet most kids in our class didn't know his name before the murder. And yet his face is not expressionless the way I once thought. That slight twitch of lips, a little half grin, says more than Heather does in a week. But the full-teeth smile, the one I saw today at his house, is like a work of Tolstoy.

And then finally, the **Captain Lyrics** angle. I loved this. Not necessarily the lyrics, per se, but the idea of who was behind it. Yeah yeah, there's really only two or three people it could be, but don't you love a little side of mystery to go along with your story? I mean, a predictable mystery, but, mystery nonetheless-knowing you know who it is but still wanting to play along anyway...it was too cute. Gah I already want to re-read this!

Faking normal is a skill I learned seventy-seven days ago, but tonight it's going to require everything I have.

So, anyway, that's all. There was a ton I wanted to say even though I really didn't know how to say it. I think my long intros have a lot to do with me stalling and trying to find the right ways to express how much I really and truly loved something. I'm not perfect, my review isn't perfect, but **I loved this book** and I wanted to do it up right for Bodee and Lexi. I hope you all can find something you like about this review that will make you want to give this one a try. And if not...oh well, I did my best.

**...5 hours of tortuous wait until I could finally read
...4 interruptions once I started
...3 (million) giggles and sighs
...2 hours of lost sleep I'll never get back so I could finish this at any cost
...1 brilliant story...and a very happy Chelsea**

I never understood life could be so dramatically sectioned, but it can. And is. There is only after. And before.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

This was me when I finished last night. My smile was so big it hurt. Oh yes, fall in love with book, I did. Read other books by author, I will. Of that I am certain.

Review to come.

Mandy says

I wanted to connect with this book, I did not want my head to implode, I did not want to turn against a victim, but...

This was a tough story to get through, and not because rape is the topic at hand, but because of the angle from which it is approached. Instead of exploring the social complexities and honest emotional aftermath of her rape, the narrator, Alexis stages the first TWO-THIRDS of her story as an agonizing WHODUNIT—complete with misdirection and red-herrings. This gimmicky plot device does not do the crime of rape justice—especially when Alexis has breezy, nonchalant social encounters with her rapist after the fact. Sure, the story is called Faking Normal, but that implies everything looks okay on the outside while inside there is emotional chaos. But in all these scenes with her attacker we never get ANY emotional indication that she is freaking out over having to endure his presence—that's because the gimmick of the story is to keep us guessing WHO he is. This much Alexis will tell the reader about her rapist: he's on the football team, he has a girlfriend who is close to Alexis, and she, Alexis, didn't exactly tell him NO. In fact, she admits that she didn't put up any fight or give him any indication that what he was doing wasn't okay with her (other than silent tears—but the guy was crying, too, presumably because they were cheating on someone they both care about). What?!

To make matters worse, Alexis's inability to say NO is not an isolated innocent. After her rape, she goes to a dance with another football player, Hayden, and, though she KNOWS he's been drinking and could be more trouble, she follows him alone out to his car and willingly allows him (again, never even whispers the word NO) to aggressively do whatever he pleases with her—that is until her knight-in-shining-Kool-Aid (aka Bodee) shows up and beats him up. Sure, Hayden is a scumbag, but Alexis even admits that had Bodee not shown up (like she was passively waiting for him to do), she would have let her 'attacker' go ALL THE WAY. Really? Can we even call him an attacker at this point, and what are we to make of her claim of being raped? Would she have accused Hayden of the same if Bodee hadn't shown up? Alexis's introspection points to yes.

Context is everything in this story, and by the time Alexis is ready to give us honest narration she's become neck-scratchingly impossible to like.

Okay, this would be a good time for me to point out that my review of this fictional story is in no way meant to discredit or disregard the pain and struggles faced by real life victims. In fact, a part of me worries that light-handed stories such as this cheapen those struggles.

But there's a question this story presents (and fails to adequately answer): WHY is it impossible for Alexis to

say NO?

Side note: it's hard to believe that Alexis is perfectly at ease with Bodee (who now lives with her since his dad killed his mom) showing up bare-chested in her bedroom in the middle of the night to watch her sleep (not to mention actually hiding under her bed at one point). I get that he is supposed to be her charming confidant and guardian, but this seems a little stalkerific/creepy and the mixed-message this presents for young readers is truly astounding since all other males in the story are presented as lurking predators (except for THE lurking predator, of course). At least put on a t-shirt, Kool-Aid.

(SPOILERS:)

Alexis's rapist is Craig, her sister's 27-year-old fiancé.

So, yes, it was STATUTORY rape, which I believe is a very serious crime—but a completely different animal than date-rape, or not-saying-NO-to-a-pushy-teenage-boy-rape, which is how she alludes to it throughout. Her parents were right there in the house by the pool where she was raped. Had she reminded Craig that they didn't want to betray her sister, had she fought, screamed, or simply said NO, I believe that Craig, based on all he had to lose, would likely have balked, backpedaled, apologized and NOT have raped her. There is a lot of talk about him taking the time to put on a condom and kiss her all over and slowly remove her swimsuit and lay her down, implying that he had plenty of time to do the right thing—but this also means Alexis had plenty of time to say NO (in a million possible ways). Yes, Craig was her 'best-buddy' and her hero, and what he did was an abuse of adult power, but if my hero/sister's boyfriend/coach/anyone ever tried to push themselves on me I (and I hope most young girls) would instantly see him in a darker light, shoot him down, scream for help, run away, fight, anything but lie there and allow it. So what makes Alexis silent and compliant?

Here's the answer we're given: when she was an impressionable child of six, Alexis caught her sister and Craig having (consensual) sex in the den while they were babysitting her. To keep her from telling her parents the two of them say that Craig (her 'best-buddy') will be sent away if she tells, and that she must always keep their secret if she wants to keep the family whole. That's it. But Alexis implies so much more damage was done. The misconceptions about sex here are horrendous. Yes, they were scum for threatening a six-year-old, yes it sucks that a six-year-old had to glimpse teen sex-capades, but Alexis likens this moment in her life to the proverbial molester-uncle forever threatening her not to tell...and it's just not. The reality seems to be this: two (fairly typical) teenagers got caught messing around and didn't want to be punished. Their threat to her would likely have been the same had Alexis walked in while they were raiding the liquor cabinet. And ultimately this only speaks to why she doesn't TELL on Craig—it says nothing about why she allowed him to take her virginity.

Incidentally, to mirror Alexis's inaction, Bodee is also given an extreme moment of paralysis—while his dad is choking his mother to death. A full grown teenager with strong arms and an ax to grind against his abusive father (and who has no trouble ripping boys out of cars when they are making out with girls he likes) just hid under the porch and let his father MURDER his beloved mother. Didn't try to go to the neighbors right next door, didn't call 911, just let it happen. WHY?

They WHYS are the catalyst of this story, the WHYS are what the entire story (not just the last third) should have been attempting to answer. But no depth of thought is ever really given to this matter. Indeed, it is basically implied that children are victimized simply because they are clueless and helpless and scared. Fine, accept that and you would expect there to be a MAJOR punishment laid down on Craig.

Nope. Doesn't happen.

To quote Bodee, 'It doesn't come with a bow on it, but God will tie it up'. Alexis interprets this to mean that

things will be alright, just not overnight. Except in this book they are.

Because once the sight of a free bird at her window tritely convinces Alexis to finally tell on Craig (I'm serious, a bird is all it takes after ALL this) everything gets wrapped up in sparkly, happy, glory-filled bows. Her sister (despite being a notoriously unforgiving bitch who loves to point fingers and play the victim) immediately forgives and sympathizes with Alexis, breaks up with Craig, and demands he quit coaching the football team and leave town forever. And that's it. Their new (and fully damaged) family dynamics are completely breezed over, and Craig, despite being declared a capital-R rapist (one step below a murderer in my book) is never brought to actual justice, the cops are never called, he's never labeled a sex offender and is presumably free to rape other girls in his new town. And Alexis and Bodee: they live happily ever after—in her bed, literally. The End.

Yeah, my head imploded.

Alyssa says

Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog

Faking Normal by Courtney C. Stevens

Publisher: HarperTeen

Publication Date: February 25, 2014

Rating: 2 stars

Source: eARC from Edelweiss

Summary (from Goodreads):

An edgy, realistic, and utterly captivating novel from an exciting new voice in teen fiction.

Alexi Littrell hasn't told anyone what happened to her over the summer. Ashamed and embarrassed, she hides in her closet and compulsively scratches the back of her neck, trying to make the outside hurt more than the inside does.

When Bodee Lennox, the quiet and awkward boy next door, comes to live with the Littrells, Alexi discovers an unlikely friend in "the Kool-Aid Kid," who has secrets of his own. As they lean on each other for support, Alexi gives him the strength to deal with his past, and Bodee helps her find the courage to finally face the truth.

A searing, poignant book, Faking Normal is the extraordinary debut novel from an exciting new author—Courtney C. Stevens.

What I Liked:

I know, I know. I'm as shocked as you are, when looking at the rating. I was so sure that this one would blow me away. I love Courtney - she's amazing and super sweet - and I have been looking forward to reading this one. I don't read too many tough-issue books, so it has to sound pretty good for me to decide to read it. Right?

In this book, we have Alexi, who was raped by someone (we don't find out definitely until the end, but the astute will pick it up from the beginning, it was super obvious to me), and Bodee, whose mother died (it's

more complicated than that). Bodee comes to live with Alexi's family (his mother and Alexi's mother were good friends). Throughout the book, the pair help each other battle their demons and heal.

But neither teen's road is straight and narrow. Alexi struggles physically and mentally, by harshly scraping her nails down her neck to make herself bleed, and by shutting out everything about the rape. She blames herself for not stopping him. Bodee blames himself for watching his mother die. He is quiet and serious, but no where near as twisted and messed up as Alexi (in my opinion).

I really like how Stevens brings about Alexi and Bodee's relationship. That is a truly progressive and meaningful relationship. It starts with an understanding between the two, but then develops into friendship, then trust, then love. That was well done by Stevens.

I really, really like Bodee. Stevens didn't make him out to be a sex demon on legs, like most YA heroes seem to be these days. He's a teen boy who seems awkward and quiet and dyes his hair different colors. I really, really like him. Somehow, he understands, he empathizes, and he KNOWS. He's a genuinely good guy, an old soul, a decent person. I wish I knew a guy like that.

Bodee is basically why this book got two stars, and not one star. BUT, not in the way you're thinking. Read above. He's a well-rounded character, well-developed, and truly likable.

What I Did Not Like:

On to the difficult part. I hate writing in this section when I know that this book could be a perfectly amazing read for someone else. Like, it's probably just me who didn't enjoy these things! I mentioned that I don't read a lot of tough-issue books - well, this book features some of the reasons why I don't read them.

Let me preface this by saying that I am in NO WAY ridiculing the act of rape. I sympathize with rape victim, and I would never ask that on anyone, to be raped. No woman deserves that, ever.

For example (exhibit A, etc.), I really, really dislike Alexi's excuses. It's utter bulls*** (oh, you thought I was finished with the bulls*** reviews? Nope. You were wrong. I don't think this is first one of 2014 though!). She blames herself for getting raped, because not at any point did she try to stop him, and neither he nor she was drunk. WELL, GIRL. SEX DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN. IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT OCCURS IN 10 SECONDS. Especially the way the author described it - the dude massaged her shoulders. He touched her. He put on a condom. THESE THINGS TAKE TIME. HOW THE HECK DO YOU NOT FEEL UNSAFE. There is a part in your brain that detects when you feel unsafe - that's what makes the hairs on your neck stand, or whatever. FOLLOW YOUR INSTINCTS.

And at no point during the rape did she cry out or scream or tell him to stop or anything. She CRIED, and even that was silent. According to the book, she ran out of words. REALLY?! That's such bulls***, in my opinion. You're about to have a traumatic experience, and you don't think to, I don't know, FIGHT BACK, OR SCREAM, OR SAY GET AWAY FROM ME?! That's utter bulls***. Girls these days no better, ESPECIALLY if they are sober or not under any influences, and ESPECIALLY if the guy is sober and not under any influences as well.

So, I think Alexi is full of s*** and excuses. She didn't want to tell anyone, because she blamed herself. Okay, wow. THAT makes sense. Yes, you didn't fight back or scream. But that doesn't mean you didn't get RAPED. That doesn't justify the fact that something bad happened. Oh, and get this: she didn't want to say anything not just because she blamed herself, but because she didn't want to ruin his life. OH MY GOSH YOU ARE SOOOO SMART, ALEXI. I'd want to ruin his life just as badly as he ruined mine. He'd be serving some serious jail time, or worse. I wouldn't be sparing him because I want him to have a good life! Are you f***ing kidding me?!

And even in the end! What was that?! Did he get life in prison?! NO. I'm not going to say what his punishment was, but it wasn't enough. It was NOWHERE NEAR ENOUGH. He got off with a slap on the wrist, basically.

Ugh, the ending. It was so hunky dory. Miraculously, Alexi's relationship with her sister is cut and pasted back together. Everything just happens to fall into place for Alexi. Everything works out. You know what gave Alexi the courage to speak up? A bird. A bird flew past her and she was like, oh, freedom, I want that. WELL IT TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH. And goodness, there are birds EVERYWHERE. NOW, you conveniently see one and decide to spill. THAT makes sense.

Also? Someone please explain to me why cutting yourself (or scraping your fingernails against the back of your neck, like Alexi does) makes sense. Tell me how that makes things better. Tell me how physical pain makes emotional or mental pain go away. It. Does. Not. This is more of a general thing, than something to do with the book. I know it is a response that victims of crimes have, but it really makes no sense to me.

Anyway. I don't deal well with excuses and bulls***, and Alexi is full of both. And when you have a problem with the main character, and the book is written in first person, then you have serious problems with the entire book. Sad life.

Would I Recommend It:

This is tricky. If you're anything like me, then no, don't waste your time with this one. Tough-issue books are definitely NOT meant for everyone, but that doesn't mean that I don't enjoy one every now and then. I thought this one would be different, but alas, it wasn't for me.

However, I know that this book is a much-anticipated read for many people. And to them, I say, READ IT! Go for it! Don't NOT read it because I didn't like it! Because chances are, you'll love it! This is an excellent book... for those who deal with the things I hated.

Rating:

2 stars. I totally understand why most readers will LOVE this book, but it just was NOT for me.

Rashika (is tired) says

****This review has also been posted on **Tangled in Pages***

“I’m fresh out of happy”

Aren't we all? With my philosophical thought of the day out of the way, I can focus more seriously on this review. Which is going to be hard when all I want to do is NOT write this review. Am I allowed to post my incomprehensible notes and call it a day? I am not whining or lazing off, I just have no idea how to write a review for this book.

I don't know where to start.

Should I start with the highlight of this book or the main character? Or perhaps the one drawback of this book as a whole.

I went into this book with a very vague idea about what I should expect. I hadn't read any of the reviews and even when this book tempted to read them, I didn't give in. I marched on and well I think it was for the best since it gave me the opportunity to read without any sort of bias.

This book opened on a very touching note. It opened not with the main character as the centre of attention but someone else who was dealing with the aftermath of a heart wrenching tragedy. The main character who understands what it's like to lose something, understands pain is the one who walks up to offer comfort to the said person. She doesn't push him, she doesn't say anything, she just comforts him with her presence and that's scene was just touching.

The main character, as you can guess, was raped and this book's focus is on her healing process. She hides her pain and her misery so as to save her family and friends the pain it would bring them. She blames herself for what happened and she has no outlet for all this pain so she scratches her neck. She hides in the closet and tires to count vents or anything to take her mind off of what happened, anything that will let her get some sort of sleep. Anything. Alexi is not a completely likeable character. Her actions are understandable, you sympathize with her but it's hard to admire her all the time because she is so afraid. She cannot bring herself to openly admit what happened (she hates using the 'r' word to describe her rapist), she sympathizes with her rapist and she refuses to tell anyone. However, unlike some of the other female protagonists I've encountered in similar situations, she doesn't close herself off from family and friends; she is still social to a certain extent. Her story is just heartbreaking. It closes a fist around your heart and makes it hard to breathe because of the amount of sadness rolling off the pages.

Bodee is the highlight of this book. WITHOUT A DOUBT. He is one of the most unique male leads I've encountered and I may or may not have fallen in insta-love with him. I don't know how to say anything about him. I don't. He is just the most wonderful person ever. He never pushes Alexi but supports her in his own way. He is heartbroken about what happened with his mother yet he still has the ability to stay strong for Alexi. He is not ultra-hot, nor bulging with muscles. He isn't the Goth kid. He is just the kid no one really cares about and sticks a label on (his was Kool-aid kid) and as you get to know him better, you cannot help but fall head over heels for him.

Captain Lyric also held an important part in Alexi's healing journey. He remains anonymous for the most part but his identity wasn't a secret to me. It was blaringly obvious and I don't think I've ever been happier about being right. I loved his reasons for doing what he did because without him Alexi would be lost. She wouldn't have survived. She needed something to look forward to and he gave her that and I just love his role in her journey.

The romance, as everyone can imagine was sweet and slow to develop and just all around wonderful. I just wish I could hug these two individuals and take their pain away. I love how they were supportive of each other and always gave the other a shoulder to lean on and their journey from acquaintances to friends to something more was beautiful.

The one thing that really nagged on me was the identity of the rapist. I guessed it at one point but it wasn't because of some subtle hint. It was because of what I know from other rape cases. It was almost random. I felt like the author chose that individual for the emotional impact it would have on the reader and it bothered me. There weren't enough hints and the attitude of the individual was not consistent in the two halves of the book. I get what she's trying to do here, she is trying to tell us that a person isn't always a monster, things aren't so black and white but in my world, they kind of are. My heart broke for the family and not the individual. The individual was in the wrong and that is that. I don't really care about whether they are good or bad, when you do what they did, there are no fucking excuses.

In the end though, this book was so emotionally powerful. It was touching. It was heart wrenching. And it was just beautiful.

This is a story about finding yourself; about putting back the pieces after life strikes at you and about healing and I would definitely recommend this to fans of What Happens Next or people just looking for a story that doesn't completely mess up with such a touchy issue.

l a i n e y says

For the first time in eighty-one days I am not tired from a restless, dream-filled night. But I have to wonder: ten years from now, will I still measure time by the number of days since it happened?

My heart aches.

And this will not be a review: I won't talk about plot simply because I can't. I would more than anything LOVE to talk about BODEE, and maybe I will come back to do that later on, but right now, I simply can't. **The only thing you need to know is I will always always cherish him and my girl Alexi. Always.**

Now what I need to talk about:

To have your big sister believes that "*There's always been something between you*", you meaning **her longtime boyfriend/fiancé and you, her own little sister**, is truly horrendous. You'd think the blind jealousy is absurd enough since as readers we can see clearly that they aren't romantically-linked, but **not as absurd as the fact that HER BOYFRIEND is A DECADE OLDER than her 16 year old sister - if she really believes this, which she does, why the hell didn't she do something?!** How the hell can you still be lovey-lovey with him for all these years?? Like huh???

If an adult stranger starts flirting with my 16 year old little cousin, I would want to punch him in the face. Let alone my own effing boyfriend! I'm so mad at this. At the awfulness and selfishness of Kayla.

For me, when this kind of 'betrayal', comes from your own immediate family, it's just plain unacceptable. I don't care what your excuses are, you don't do this to your own family, be it blood-related or otherwise, period. **take a breath to calm myself down**

Meanwhile my girl, being raised in a household with this as prominent thinking:

(view spoiler)

I'm crying for you Lexi girl. I really am.

I would not have been able to keep my sanity in that house, if I went through the same thing she did.

Alexi Littrell: unimaginably strong since July.

(view spoiler) **pat self in the back**

Whitney Atkinson says

Trigger warnings for this book: rape, self-harm

I almost put this book down, and I'm so happy that I didn't. Although I mentioned it's very similar to *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, I like this one a little bit more. Toward the beginning of the book, I was annoyed with Alexi because she had so many opportunities to come clean to her friends and family, but didn't. Then I realized: that's the point of this book. To show the fear and the feeling of being trapped between keeping secrets and being sexually abused. Only a few times was I annoyed with Alexi, and that was when 1) she defended her friend's ex for cheating and 2) she started to get an attitude for revenge near the end of the book, and I think that was a really unhealthy way to portray coping with feelings during recovery. Nevertheless, I think the entire friendship arc between Bodee and Alexi is the best I've read in a long time. Bodee was an AMAZING character and the way that the two supported each other and taught each other to cope was extremely realistic, heart-warming, and well written. Overall I really enjoyed this book and though the writing wasn't anything special, nothing in it was sugar-coated and it's a very frustrating yet realistic look on a topic that's sometimes hard for me to read about.

bibliophile (Romance Addict) says

FIVE STARS!

Although I've read many 'abuse' books, this really stuck out between the pile. It was different, and I loved every part of this very great novel. This book follows Alexi, a high school student who is really good at her studies, and has good friends. However, this girl is hiding so many secrets, and in her room, she hides her wounds and memories that haunts her.

On the other hand, Bodee is the Kool-Aid kid. He isn't popular, and his life isn't normal either. When tragedy strikes, he becomes the pity-object of the town, and his life changes forever.

“Right now we're both yard sales of emotions. A penny for pain. A dime for bitterness. A quarter for grief. A dollar for silence. It binds us together, but I don't want him to pay the price for the parts of me that are used and broken.”

The **characters** in this book were very cute, especially Bodee, and I liked most of them. I had to hate someone though and if you finished reading this book, you would know who. I was actually very surprised

that (view spoiler) Kayla was a bit hard to like, but she grew on me. Alexi on the other hand is VERY likable, and I liked the fact that she was drama free with her friends. Heather was ok, I guess.

“He's opening a door, but he already knows I won't walk through. The power of Bodee is in the way he reads me, sees through me, and then understands the truth behind the facade. He's the guy who can walk straight through the House of Mirrors on the first try. It's almost annoying. No one should ride tragedy like a pro surfer while I drown.”

I love Bodee & Alexi's relationship and how they are both each other's strength. I also like the fact that their love grew slowly, and escalated to something bigger.

Favortie Part: I had many favorite parts in this book, and one of them was when Bodee (view spoiler) Another one is when (view spoiler) I also love the song writing part, and I was curious to know who it actually was.

What could've been better? I would love it if this book had more pages, so I could see what happened next. If only there's a novella that happened after Faking Normal, I would totally read it. I want to know what happened to Alexi * Bodee! At least, we deserved an epilogue after this journey.

I **Liked** the character development both characters went through, and how they grew up.

“Every song deserves lyrics. Deserves a story to tell.”

“And more than that, Bodee left me with hope. For love. For wanting someone to touch me again and to lie with me without fear as my first response. Because Bodee slept in his sneakers, because Bodee asked for a kiss instead of just taking it, and because he kept space between us. He danced with two fingers until I asked for three or four... and his hand on my hip. I know we're both still broken. Both of us. But Bodee's got the glue to make us whole. He is love.” “Bravery comes one day at a time.”

I **recommend** this book to YA contemporary reader!!
