



My Beautiful Failure

Janet Ruth Young

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A haunting account of a teen boy who volunteers at a suicide hotline and falls for a troubled caller.

Billy is a sophomore in high school, and twice a week, he volunteers at Listeners, a suicide hotline.

Jenney is an “incoming,” a caller, a girl on the brink.

As her life spirals out of control, Jenney’s calls become more desperate, more frequent. Billy, struggling with the deteriorating relationship with his depressed father, is the only one who understands. Through her pain, he sees hope. Through her tears, he feels her heart. And through her despair, he finds love. But is that enough?

Acclaimed author Janet Ruth Young has written a stunning and powerful story with no easy answers; it is about pain and heartbreak, reality and illusion, and finding redemption and the strength to forgive in the darkest of times.

My Beautiful Failure Details

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From Reader Review My Beautiful Failure for online ebook

Jolene Perry says

Interesting book.
Authentic teen language.
Loved the storyline.
Heartbreaking and real.

Heather Panella says

OK, so this book is getting a lot of coverage in VOYA and School Library Journal and a lot of praise from readers, but honestly, I'm a tad bit unsure as to why. The pacing is slow and I didn't really start enjoying it until the last 1/3 of the book. I didn't like Billy or anyone in his family and I was a bit annoyed with the entire cast of characters taking such a light outlook on poor mental health. It had a lot of potential, especially with all of the heavy issues woven into, but failed short of the mark for me.

Aamira Yaseen says

'She was a girl talking to me in the dark.' A beautiful and quick read. It's the novel that every teen must read. It is about love, pain, depression and HOPE and the strength to forgive in the darkest of times. Depression deprives some people of their lives while others keep struggling and continue to live. . After putting up with his father who suffered from depression a whole year, Billy joins Listeners, a suicide hotline. After that, he keeps receiving calls from a girl, Jenney whose parents had abused her in childhood. With every passing day she gets more depressed and her calls become more frequent. Will Billy be able to stop from killing herself?

Brooklyn says

This book was just so utterly heartbreaking. I really thought that at the end Jenney would live and the good guys would win, that Billy would save her life. But no. I guess that's not the way it is in real life either. This book was well written, though a little stranger for me than I'd like. I didn't enjoy the light tone of the novel in the beginning that very suddenly escalated into all seriousness. The characters also seemed a little shallow at points, and Billy's sudden love for Jenney kind of annoyed me. But as I was reading, and Billy was racing to where Jenney lived, I felt my heart racing as well—to my immense surprise. I was also surprised though, when I didn't cry at learning of Jenney's death. That may have been because of the authors blunt way of putting it; Billy merely sent a text to Pep saying that she was dead, based on the fact that she wasn't moving and wasn't speaking. She could very well have been unconscious. But either way, this book was one that made me think, made me smile, and made my heart ache. Cheers to Janet Ruth Young for creating such a piece.

BAYA Librarian says

Billy's father had a mental breakdown. A year later Billy can seem to stop himself from monitoring and analyzing his father's every move. Finally things come to a head and Billy's father suggests that it might be time for him to take on another project. Wanting to make a difference Billy starts to volunteer at Listeners, a suicide prevention hotline. Over the following weeks Billy becomes drawn to one of his regular callers an older teen named Jenney. Billy must decide what is more important the mission and rules of Listeners, or his own feelings for this lonely young woman whose world seems to be rapidly falling apart.

In this novel Young takes on the challenging issue of mental illness specifically depression. Unfortunately there was much to be desired in the execution. Perhaps the biggest flaw is was that Billy's character is difficult to like. He is a know it all who is extremely judgmental, and unforgiving. He is to self centered to reflect on his own motivations or behavior. The other problem is the books pacing, far too much time is spent on the relationship between father and son (without any clear resolution) rather than the relationship build up with Jenney and its conclusion.

FloeticFlo says

I haven't had such a reaction to a book in awhile. I am not even sure how I feel about this. Let me explain...

I started reading this book, and I didn't like it. But the chapters are short (some are only a few paragraphs or a single page) and that makes for a quick and easy read. The more I read, the more I didn't like Billy, the main character. Like, really not a fan. So much so, that I grabbed a notebook and started writing down all the things I didn't like about Billy. (I won't take up space with the list, but it is available upon request :) But, I kept reading. Because it is such a fast and easy read, I decided to stick it out. I thought that maybe this book would gain redemption at the end by Billy completing changing and turning into a character I actually liked...I mean, this all had to be going somewhere right? There is a lot of build up in this book: build up between Billy and Jenney's relationship, build up with Billy's dad. The two run parallel to each other.

The more I read, the more I still didn't like Billy. Then I hit the last third of the book...and I couldn't put this puppy down. Janet Ruth Young's pacing is fantastic, and the short chapters really make for a suspenseful story. I still didn't like Billy, but I was rooting for him. The end I was looking for didn't happen, in that Billy didn't undergo some amazing character growth and turn into this new and awesome person. But his perspective changed, and he was proven wrong about a lot of things.

This book brings up some, for lack of a better word, heavy things to think about. I mean, it's about a suicide hotline. But, really, it's about connections -- the importance of connecting to other people and of not taking our relationships for granted. It's about looking at other people and seeing them as they really are, not as they were or as you want to see them. It's also about taking an honest look at ourselves.

I love when a book changes my mind. I love when a book really makes me think. I love when I put a book down and can't stop thinking about. So, thank you Janet Ruth Young. And yes...I recommend this book.

See the other Book Nerds review of this book on our blog: BookNerdsAcrossAmerica.com

Hilda says

3.5 stars

She was a girl talking to me in the dark.

Billy is a new volunteer in the suicide hotline, and on the first day of his job, he receives a call from a girl named Jenny. Jenny told him that she was abused by her parents when she was a kid, and how her life went downhill after she started remembering the memories of the abuse. Billy wants desperately to help Jenny, but he is restricted by rules saying that it's prohibited to form friendship with people who call. But Billy knows that Jenny is special to him, and he doesn't hesitate to break rules and offer her his friendship. As Jenny's calls become more frequent and more desperate, Billy has to race with time if he wants to save the girl whom he knows everything but her last name and her address.

My Beautiful Failure is undeniably melancholic, but it is also infused with lots of hope and wish for better days. The author might not be very successful in creating a guy's voice, but the plots are very well-crafted and the story itself may as well happen in real life. To what extent you should push the boundaries between stranger and friend? There is a fine line between listening and being too much involved, and the main character, Billy, has problem differentiating the line.

Billy is not a character I liked instantly. With his caring personality and his obsession to become a psychologist, it shouldn't be a problem to like him the moment I met him. However, Billy is a typical teenager with senseless belief that he knows everything about people, and it was hard to connect with him when he was being such a worrywart or a smartass. Billy is obsessed in saving people, and I can't say that I don't understand the need to do something amazing when you are young. I'm so glad that events in this book mold Billy into a more mature person in the end, and when I finished the book, it's safe to say that I think of Billy as a friend.

Surprisingly, *My Beautiful Failure* is a short read and one I finished in no time. Despite my earlier difficulty to connect with Billy, I didn't have difficult time appreciating the plots, the underlying message, and the supporting characters. All in all, *My Beautiful Failure* is not a book you would like to miss if you're fans of contemporary or in need of something a little thought-provoking. The book itself is like a gentle reminder that after all, there's always light at the end of the tunnel.

I rested my hand on one of the phones as if to test myself. The job was monumental, the ultimate responsibility. The way the rules were written, someday someone might call and mine would be the last voice that person would ever hear. In a few days I would start saving lives. But only if they wanted to be saved.

Read other reviews in my blog! :)

Catch the Lune

Mark says

4.5 stars.

I finished this on the way home and...
my feelings are crazy.

I need to get my feelings straight.

Full review to come.

Chrissie says

one and a half stars

My Beautiful Failure was an incredibly frustrating read, even as it touched upon important issues.

My Beautiful Failure follows young Billy as he and his family recovers from his father's debilitating depression in the winter of last year. When his father begins painting again in an almost manic fashion, Billy is worried that this is a sign that his father is either falling into depression once more or developing bipolar disorder. His father challenges him to find a project of his own which prompts Billy to join the Listeners, a group that serves as a suicide and general chat line.

While volunteering at Listeners Billy desperately wants to save someone. In time he falls in love with an Incoming named Jenney as she calls the line regulatory and reveals more and more about herself.

My biggest obstacle in enjoying this book was that I didn't particularly like Billy as a character (or any of the others, but we'll get there). Not liking the voice that tells you the story is a big obstacle to get over, as you never get an escape from this person. Billy is extraordinarily wet behind the ears, but he thinks he has a greater purpose in life and he actively reaches for it. He is petty, immature and controlling. While it's admirable that he helped his family through his father's depression, he then begins treating Bill Sr. as a child in need of fondling. We are led to believe that he's some great listener, when in reality is un-supportive and attacks his father's dreams. If Bill Sr.'s predisposition to depression and mental disease wasn't enough to make him sick again, constantly being told that he was making a horrible mistake by a sixteen-year-old likely pushed him to the edge.

Billy's motivation for joining Listeners wasn't so much about a desire to help people and make his society a better place, but for the gratification he would personally feel by saving a Likely (suicidal person). In fact, he shows little concern to his Incomings minus Jenney. Billy eventually places his own feelings and thoughts above Jenney, unnecessarily burdening her with his problems in her time of need. In the end, a Likely is all he actually desires.

Billy's family was another frustration. Billy's father's treatment of him and his obvious preference of Linda made him unlikable. He showed little regard for his own well being, and his own thirst for greatness overshadows his feelings on everything else. Billy's mother serves as a prop and does nothing besides acting as a tool for the family to have a stable income and the person that Billy occasionally whines to. Even though her husband is working himself to exhaustion she doesn't even bat an eyelash at the situation.

The Listeners as an organization is a shoddy one. Any help hotline that will limit a call for help to five minutes, or ten "in a real emergency", is a horrible one and shouldn't be reviving any sorts of funds whatsoever. Young manages to make their interactions a neat formula that doesn't line up with real life.

Jenney is the most engaging character in the novel. Her voice comes across as pure and strong, up to the last. True, she's very likely an unreliable narrator, but so is Billy. She has flaws and her struggles, but I truly enjoyed being there as she attempted to work through them.

The plot was a decent pass, though a lot didn't happen and the last 50 pages or so was a bit of a let down. Additionally, Billy didn't seem to really learn anything or grow beyond being forced to acknowledge that his

dad's artwork wasn't the embarrassment that he thought it would be.

Elisée says

Spoiler alert: some novels just give everything away in their title.

It was a "beautiful" story concept--teenage boy befriends female caller at suicide hotline--but the main character just "failed" to live up to his role entirely.

No offense to the author, but I felt like Janet Young made a mockery of this type of subject matter by turning it into a really bad soap opera, in writing:

1) the chapters were so short that I felt I was being deprived of depth, more insight into Jenney's situation, which is the main premise. Instead, all I got was useless fillers that strayed from it.

2) the characters were poorly written. There were so many of them, all given names, and thrown in just about anywhere to "fill" a scene.

3) This book is all TELL, and no SHOW. The only part that makes some sense is their multiple phone conversations.

4) Our protagonist, Billy, believes it's okay to be selfish and put all his focus on his lack of a romantic relationship, and dare to seek one out through a suicide hotline of all places. Um, hello??

You don't just take on this kind of job because you see it as your own personal "project" and then drop out whenever you feel like it! You had one job, Billy. And it wasn't to let Jenney die.

5) The novel ends with (view spoiler)

Some(pessimistic yet insightful) words of advice: "Don't depend too much on anyone in this world for even your own shadow leaves you when you are in darkness" -Ibn Taymiyyah

Zemira (Kylo Ren fangirl) Warner says

The main problem I had with this novel is that I just couldn't feel anything. I tried. I truly did but there was just something missing. Maybe it was the writing itself. I don't know.

Billy is a sophomore in highschool and he is having some problems with school after his father had a hard year. He was battling depression. Billy couldn't bring friends home because of his dad and he also couldn't confide with his best friend even though his mother died, so he is not totally clueless when it comes to dealing with pain.

But now that his father is busy and happy (or is he?) with painting which he loved doing before Billy and his sister came in the picture. But B(let's shorten his already short name)is still worried he will be end up disappointed and will return to his old problems so he questions everything the poor man does. After his parents tell him he needs to find a hobby he decides to join Listeners- a support hotline for potential suiciders. There he spends time talking to Jenney who is just now dealing with repressed memories of her parents abusing her when she was a small child.

My Beautiful Failure could have been so much better. I just can't explain it. There were some things that usually work like a charm with me, like a lot of B's inner thoughts, dark and difficult subjects but in the end it just didn't quite leave an impression.

Also the book was rather slow until the last 20% which didn't increase the chance of me liking it very much. I could say a few things that bothered me about the ending but I don't want to spoil the novel.

Overall, I would be so much happier if we got to see more sides of other characters and more of those calls from crazy people. That part was interesting.

2.8 out of 5

Rose says

Let me start off by saying this was the most amazing first book of 2013 I could read! I liked it almost as much as I liked the Fault In Our Stars by John Green! Contemporary is my favourite genre but to be honest they are either love or hate books. This was a OMGTHISBOOKISBEAUTIFUL kind of book. Maybe I'm overreacting but it is my honest opinion. The main character Billy had some troubles with his father being bipolar the previous winter. Troubles is an understatement, it must have been so hard and I have to say I admired Billy for being so strong through all of it. You get short flashbacks to that winter throughout the story just so you can see what Billy, his mother, sister and father have been through.

Billy is smart, funny, kind, inspiring and wants to get away from his Father's crazy problems. So he joins Listeners. Overall I thought he was an amazing character and he has inspired me a lot. Not many characters have done that before. At Listeners, he keeps getting calls from Jenny. You never actually meet Jenny but her stories and troubles were just so terrible. Although you could feel her getting weaker, she remained so strong and even cracked a few jokes. I fell in love with the love that Billy had for Jenny. It was beautiful. There are a few other characters like Billy's sister, her best friend, Gordon, people who worked at Listeners and Billy's parents. I loved all of them, Billy's father's crazy ways surprised me and annoyed me but in the end I understood him. Billy's sister and her best friend made me laugh and Billy's best friend (Gordon) was truly one of the bestest best friends you could have. Every character just added to the story.

I have to say the ending annoyed me because it's not how I wanted it to end but that is what would have happened in reality and I understand. The storyline was a genius and I loved the idea of "Listeners", it's very unique. The writing style was beautiful, honestly I cannot say enough about this book. I cried not only at the end but in the middle because this book has genuinely opened my eyes. Janet Ruth Young, well done! I need to read more of her books and I hope she is writing more! I could not recommend this book enough, please just read it.

Tee loves Kyle Jacobson says

My Beautiful Failure is an EPIC story that all teens should read. I have to say that it took me a day and a half to read because I had to put it down. This is a haunting tale of love, loss and finding your way through tragedy.

Billy is a 16 year old boy who has been through a lot. His father is suffering from depression and even

though he is some what okay Billy fears for his father everyday. So when his father decides he is going to start painting again Billy is scared. He does not want his father to suffer like he did in the recent past and he does not want his mother or sister to have to live through this pain again.

So Billy decides to tell his best friend Gordon what is going on with his father and Gordon suggests he volunteer at The Listener's which is a volunteer suicide hotline in town. At first Billy is like no way am I going to do that but as he watches the video and hears the people helping out he knows he will be a good listener. He applies and gets the volunteer position. AT first he is excited but the excitement comes to a screeching halt when Billy gets a call from Jenney.

Jenney is a tormented soul who is in therapy for abuse at the hands of her parents. With her therapist she is uncovering long lost buried secrets and Jenney's life spirals out of control. But as talks to Billy she forms a friendship with him. This is forbidden but Billy and Jenney share things they are not supposed to and soon Billy relays on Jenney and Jenney relays on Billy. But when she uncovers her secrets one secret in particular it drives her over the edge. Will Billy be able to save her or will she die? What will happen to Billy? What will happen to Billy's family if his father falls apart?

This is a **MUST READ** for all teenagers who have thought about suicide or even attempted it. There is always a better way out of the turmoil you're in.

Wisteriouswoman says

The reason I liked this book was that it was so different from other teen novels I've read recently. There is a quirkiness in the way it is written: the short chapters, the back and forth between the present and the future, and the dialog on the phone at the Listening center.

I didn't like whiney Jennie at all but could see why Billy might be drawn in by her and want to be her savior. On one hand he seems like a normal immature teen boy who is full of himself. On the other hand, he sounds like an adult especially in the way he wants to control everything. It was a bit unbelievable.

That said, it was the adult dialog that I thought would be helpful for teenagers. So I guess one of the main draws of the book was that it discusses mental illness and how to help people. The fact that Billy is taught to listen and repeat back what someone is telling him is a good skill. He really walks the reader through the whole 'Hotline' experience. It might encourage readers to volunteer for something similar in their community. In my own experience I could have used some pointers when my brother showed up on my doorstep totally deluded. I had no idea how to deal with it. Accepting that someone believes a certain thing and acknowledging it without agreeing is a hard thing to learn to do.

The book also talks about the impact of dealing with a family member that has a mental illness. Teens that are familiar with depression in their own family might be able to relate to Billy's flashbacks to the time he had to be the strong one and help out while putting his own life on hold. Personally I think he should have had festering rage about this but you never get the feeling that he hates his Dad and the illness that possesses him. He doesn't even hate his Mom who seems very unsupportive.

It appears that Billy's father is going through a manic phase with a spurt of insightful creativity. That is the great plus side of a bipolar disorder. I was glad the book brought that out. Many famous artists have had to cope with a mental/emotional imbalance. Seeing that through Billy's eyes may help a teen be aware of the problem when someone close to them goes over the deep end.

Most of the characters didn't strike me as particularly likeable. Billy was admirable for his desire to help people. I liked that about him.

Kyle says

[Billy's dad being bi-polar (hide spoiler)]
