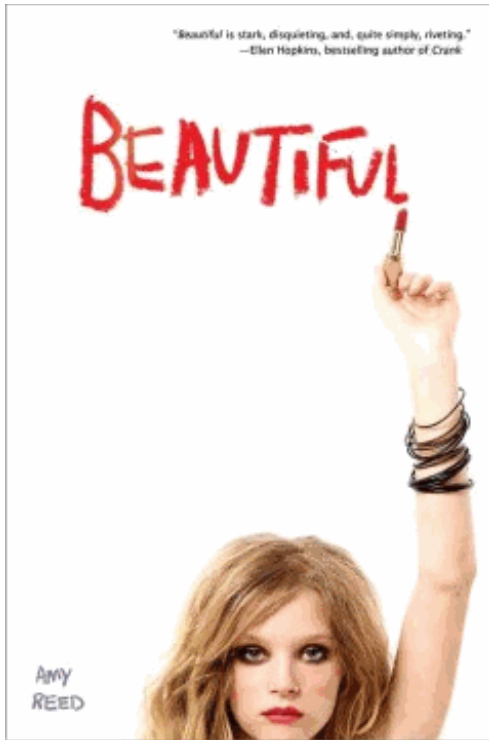


BEAUTIFUL



Young Adult

By Amy Reed

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CONTENT WARNING

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Summary of Concerns:

This book contains drug and alcohol use; explicit sexual activities; sexual nudity; and profanity.

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Not For Minors
BookLooks Review Rating

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25	<p>The walls are dripping because I am on acid. He is not yet on acid. The tab is still on his tongue, dissolving, tasting like spit wad.</p> <p>I'm thirteen and I'm on acid. He's fifteen and he will be on acid soon. I'm on his bed and under The Wall and listening to Pink Floyd.</p> <p>...He is wearing a baseball cap and I want it off his head. It makes him look like a normal boy. I want his hat off because he is not that kind of boy. I would not be on my back like this for that kind of boy.</p> <p>...He says, "stop it," and I laugh, and I do it again and he grabs it again and I think it's a game but he does not, and he says, "fucking stop it," and pins my wrist onto the bed, and I stop it. Then his tongue goes in my mouth and this is nothing like a first kiss is supposed to be.</p> <p>...Alex is on the phone talking to everyone she knows. I can feel her sitting on the desk next to the stereo blinking red and green, stop, go, and James tongue is in my mouth and it taste like something dusty, small, darting around and hitting my teeth like it's looking for a way to get inside me, a trap door, searching for something hidden and unlocked. And Alex is watching and telling everyone she knows, "Cassie is on the bed with James and they're slurping." she keeps saying "slurping" and it sounds like something ugly, and her cackle ricochets off the wall, the white bricks like the album cover, and it is too loud in here, it is too bright, and the slurping makes spit and the spit makes choking and I close my mouth and lock his tongue out and he says, "Get the fuck out, bitch," and I think he's talking to me, but Alex cackles and hangs up the phone and James says, "Turn off the lights," and she does, and "Close the door," and she does, and my teeth open and his tongue goes inside and I try to keep up but I have no idea what I'm doing and I'm scared because it's just me and him and I can't see anything but the green and red lights, and he's the only one who knows his way around here in the dark.</p> <p>There's a mouth on mine and teeth scraping and I'm thinking of cheese. I'm thinking, why does expensive cheese stink? I'm thinking of my stubbly armpits that he's touching with his big hands. The sound of a zipper unzipping. The sound of Pink Floyd.</p> <p>...And I'm wearing a white cotton bra that is not a bad-girl bra. He laughs. He says, "Is this a training bra?" and I look at the lights — red, green — and they tell me nothing about what I should answer. So I shrug as well as I can shrug with his body on top of mine and my right arm under his hot hand and my left arm not wanting to move at all and my shoulders cold and shuttering under Pink Floyd snow.</p> <p>His fingers are inside me and I am trying to make my mouth move. I feel something that feels like sickness, something all through my body, like poison slowly filling me up. I don't know if my mouth is moving because I can't feel anything except the poison. There is something running in my brain. I cannot see it but I know it is coming. I can feel the pounding of the footsteps shaking everything. I hear pants unzipping, somewhere far away, and I don't know how long this is supposed to take but I hope it is fast because I want to go home. I want this feeling to stop. I want to give him what he wants and leave.</p>
36	<p>"What does he do? "</p> <p>"Sells drugs."</p> <p>"Oh," I say. She keeps pulling my hair tighter.</p>

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	<p>“He has a friend who could get you a job.”</p> <p>“Doing what?”</p> <p>“Giving blow jobs.”</p> <p>I don’t tell her I still don’t know exactly what that is.</p> <p>“You don’t have to have sex with them,” she explains. “That way, you keep your self-respect.”</p> <p>“What if I’m not good at it?”</p> <p>“It doesn’t matter. Old guys would pay a fortune to have you just look at their dick.”</p> <p>“I don’t want to look at an old guys dick. I don’t want to look at anyone’s dick.”</p>
59	<p>I am tracing the outline of my lips with blood red pencil and I can see Alex behind me in the reflection. She is sitting on the toilet, peeing, and her thighs are covered with bruises.</p> <p>“What happened?” I ask her.</p> <p>“To what?” She says, wiping herself.</p> <p>“To your legs?”</p> <p>She laughs at me like I’m a stupid child. “Wes just likes it rough.”</p> <p>“Likes what rough?”</p> <p>“Sex, stupid,” she says. “But you wouldn’t know anything about that, would you? Not Cassie the sweet little virgin.”</p>
61	<p>“My half sister is moving in next week,” Alex says, her voice torn by the shot she just drank.</p> <p>“How old is she?”</p> <p>“Eighth grade.”</p> <p>“Is she cool?”</p> <p>“She’s all right.”</p> <p>“Why is she moving here?”</p> <p>“Her dad’s fucking her,” she says, and the vodka gets stuck in my throat, gagging me, pulling everything inside me out.</p>
82	<p>He knows that my underwear and bra are pink and lacy. He does not know about the old white cotton bras and underwear hidden in the back of my drawer. He does not know my face without makeup.</p> <p>He knows what it feels like to be on top of me, that I don’t move, but I am small and then and pliable, that my breasts are the perfect size for his hand.</p> <p>I am thinking, this is supposed to be special. I am thinking, everybody’s lying about this being special. I am strangely not scared. All of this seems vaguely familiar, like I’ve seen it in movies, like I’ve seen myself doing it. I wonder why I can hardly feel anything else, how I can know that it hurts but not even feel it, how I don’t even have to be here, how I can drift away to somewhere else, float up to the ceiling and watch how ridiculous we look: him thrusting into me like his life depends on it; me lying there looking like I’m wood, something hard and unbendable, when really I’m nothing, when really I’m just skin wrapped around fog.</p> <p>“Does it hurt?” He asks me.</p> <p>“Yeah,” I say. I am lying. It feels like nothing. I wish he would stop talking. I wish he would stop making me speak. It is hard to speak when I’m on the ceiling, in the</p>

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	<p>corner. It makes me have to come back down, feel his weight on top of me, feel him hard inside me, punching my insides. I come down long enough to see what he wants to hear, then float away again. It is not difficult, this flying from place to place. It is like I was born knowing how to do it.</p> <p>"Oh, shit, I'm gonna come," he says, and I hear him and my ears bring me back to the bed just in time to feel him shutter, hear him grown. He holds his breath in the world pauses and I feel like I'm holding the whole thing up with my skinny arms and bent knees, my legs spread wide open, then everything let's go and he falls on top of me and I think into the mattress until I am nothing.</p> <p>He lies like that for a while, like he's dead, and I think for a moment that he is. I would not be traumatized if he died on top of me, his shrinking, shriveling dick still inside of me. Anything could happen and it would not matter. He rolls over and digs through the pockets of his pants on the floor. He puts a cigarette in his mouth, gives me one. I open the window, light some incense and put the jar I use as an ashtray on the bed between us. I lie back down next to him, cornered between the wall in the ashtray. We barely fit. I feel too naked. He rolls onto his side and faces me, puts his arm around me. He kisses my shoulder, my neck, my jaw, my ear, making annoying cooing noises as he does it. I want him to stop. I want to crush my cigarette on his eyelid. I would rather he keep fucking me for the rest of the night then lie here staring at me and tracing my ribs with his fingertips, acting like what happened meant something.</p> <p>"It's okay," I say.</p> <p>"Does it feel good?" He asks me.</p>
88	<p>"You're my girl, right?" He says softly.</p> <p>"Right," I say. What else would I be? You are the most popular guy at school and I'm nobody. I will keep letting you fuck me until you get tired of it, until you find someone better to fuck.</p>
109	<p>"Do you want to know what he did to me?" she asks.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>"Yes," I say.</p> <p>"The social workers told me. I don't really remember."</p> <p>"Okay." I can smell her breath. I can smell alcohol and pot roast and cigarettes. It smells disgusting but I want to breathe it in. I want it inside me.</p> <p>"They say he'd been raping me since I was little."</p> <p>"Oh, God," I say. Her face is blank, like she's possessed, like someone's put this information in her and she's simply reporting it, a machine, with no feeling. The "I" and the "me" could be anybody.</p> <p>"They said doctors could tell from the scars."</p> <p>"Stop."</p> <p>"Scars can tell you how old a wound is."</p> <p>"Stop."</p> <p>"When I stopped going to school, they came and found me. They found my in the closet."</p>
134	<p>He looks at me with his squinty eyes and leans over and whispers even though there's nobody around here, just me and him and the memory of drool bubbles, and pills in my pocket and erection in his.</p>

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	<p>“What do you mean?” He says, and his breath smells like beef jerky. I say, “Anything.” I am leaning closer, pressing my breasts against his shoulder. “Anything you want.” He thinks for a moment. His mouth opens slightly, then closes. Finally, he looks at me. Finally, he leans over and whispers, “I want to touch you.” He snuffles. “I want to touch you down there.” “Okay,” I say. This is easy. This is nothing. He is shaking and he flinches at the sound of the zipper. He flinches when I grab his wrist and lead his hand down into the sexy underwear I only wear when I know I have a date with Ethan. He lets his hand lie there for a while, not moving at all, and his eyes are closed and his nostrils flare with heavy, wheezy, snotty breaths, like this is the most important thing that’s ever happened to him. His hand is lying there so gentle and scared and I want to slap him. Just do it, I want to say. I want to slap him. “You are so pretty,” he says. “Fuck pretty,” I say. “Why are you so angry?” He says. “Fuck you,” I say. His fingers move a little. He stops breathing. His face is red and still and he smells like mildew, like eggs and toast, like computers, and the bell rings, and I want to slap him even more, not just slap but punch and kick and bite until he bleeds and jump on his ribs until they are all broken. His eyes shoot up like he’s heard the thoughts inside my head, and he takes back his hand and runs off without his backpack, holding his hand to his chest as if it is broken, running like a boy with asthma runs, trailing dirty boy smells behind him, smells of mildew, smells of something musty from myself. I zip up my pants and smoke a cigarette even though I am already late for class.</p>
139	<p>“No,” I say. I have not been hungry in weeks. Usually Sunday is the day I eat. I take a bunch of sleeping pills the night before and spend all day on the couch drinking coffee and eating everything I can find, taking periodic breaks to go to my room to smoke pot and cigarettes. Ethan does not know this. Nobody knows this. But he has been saying things lately, like he can see my ribs poking out, like he can feel my pelvic bones stabbing him when he fucks me. I just shrug and bat my eyes and kiss him. We had an assembly at school about eating disorders that I skipped to smoke pot behind the gym. Since then, he has been trying to explain to me that guys don't like skinny girls, that he misses my curves.</p>
143	<p>He lies on the bed. He says, “Come here,” and I do. I let him undress me. I move my arms when it is time to take my shirt off. I move my hips and legs when it is time for my pants. I do this with the sleepy lidded eyes I know he likes, even though I haven’t taken a pill since lunchtime, even though I can see my purse across the room, holding what I need to feel good. I could get up now and go get it. I could tell him to stop and say I have to pee. But I don’t. I know this will not take long. I know he will be dozy afterward and he will not question my need to go to the bathroom. He fucks me and I lay there looking at this new ceiling that looks like every other ceiling I’ve seen – white, bumpy, blank, neutral. I rub my hands on his back so it</p>

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	<p>seems like I'm paying attention. He finishes, falls on top of me with a sigh, rolls over next to me. I wait a few seconds and start to get up, sure that he's nodded off.</p> <p>"Wait," he says pulling me close to him.</p> <p>"What?" I say.</p> <p>He pauses for a moment. He looks at me with his droopy eyes. "Do you like it?" He says.</p> <p>"Like what?" I say.</p> <p>"Like sex," he says. "Do you like sex with me?"</p> <p>"Of course I do, baby." I kiss him.</p> <p>"But you just lie there," he says. "You don't even move. It seems like you don't like it."</p> <p>"I do," I say. "I really like it."</p> <p>"Do you...?"</p> <p>"What?" I am losing my patience. There are pills in my purse waiting for me.</p> <p>"You don't have an orgasm," he says.</p> <p>What are you talking about? Is what I want to say. Girls don't have orgasms, I want to say, but I already know I have no idea what I'm talking about. These are not things I know, not things I've thought about. They are things I've accepted by not thinking about them. I vaguely remember reading something about them. I vaguely remember reading something about orgasms in the book Mom gave me, something about the best feeling in the world. But all I care about is getting out of here and getting to my bag and getting those pills in my throat and feeling the only best feeling in the world I know.</p>
172	<p>"How have you been?" he says.</p> <p>"Fine," I say I can feel my lungs closing up</p> <p>"You look really great," he says. "You're a beautiful girl, Cassie. Do you know that?"</p> <p>I don't say anything. I feel dizzy. My skin starts to itch.</p> <p>"Because you should know how beautiful you are. A girl should always know how beautiful she is."</p> <p>I can feel him looking at me even though I am looking at the floor. I am trying to focus on a space the size of a penny. I am trying to keep it still while the rest of the floor swirls around it. If I can only keep that one space still, I will be okay.</p> <p>"Can I have a hug?" Charlie says. I keep looking at the piece of floor. It is the only thing that is mine.</p> <p>I feel his arms around me, my face pressed against his chest, his legs against my legs. He puts his hands on my back and pulls me against him.</p> <p>"We should go skiing sometime, he says. "I could take you. Have you ever been skiing?" He is kissing the top of my head and rubbing my back and my eyes are open and all I can see is snow.</p> <p>I need to move and I am moving and I am pushing him out of my way. My eyes are open, but all I can see is white. I feel my body squeeze between his soft body in the hard wall. I feel the door knob and I feel my hand turning and pulling and I feel open space. There is white and there is more white. I feel the walls on both sides in the carpet under my feet and another door and another door knob. I feel the button and I hear it lock. I feel the sink and counter and a drop off. Air.</p>

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	<p>Smooth, cold porcelain and the poison coming out. My eyes watering and the poison coming out. My nose burning, my knees drilling into the linoleum, my hands on cool porcelain. The door locked and everything is cool and everything okay. Everything out of me and I am empty. Safe.</p> <p>Someone knocking. If I am quiet, no one will know I'm here.</p> <p>"Cassie."</p> <p>It is my mom's voice, dull and metallic like the inside of a tin can.</p> <p>"Cassie, are you sick?"</p> <p>My mom will not hurt me.</p> <p>"Uncle Charlie said you're sick."</p>
188	<p>We will go to parties full of people I don't know. We will go to Ethan's house and watch the boys play video games. We will drive to the park and snort coke, and Alex will give Wes head in the front seat while Ethan fucks me in the back, and I will go to class and smell Justin all day long sitting next to me, feel his knotty finger inside me, and I will think of letting him do it again if it means I don't have to think or feel anything.</p>