



## The Way I Used to Be

By Amber Smith



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A *New York Times* bestseller!

In the tradition of *Speak*, this extraordinary debut novel shares the unforgettable story of a young woman as she struggles to find strength in the aftermath of an assault.

Eden was always good at being good. Starting high school didn't change who she was. But the night her brother's best friend rapes her, Eden's world capsizes.

What was once simple, is now complex. What Eden once loved—who she once loved—she now hates. What she thought she knew to be true, is now lies. Nothing makes sense anymore, and she knows she's supposed to tell someone what happened but she can't. So she buries it instead. And she buries the way she used to be.

Told in four parts—freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year—this provocative debut reveals the deep cuts of trauma. But it also demonstrates one young woman's strength as she navigates the disappointment and unbearable pains of adolescence, of first love and first heartbreak, of friendships broken and rebuilt, and while learning to embrace a power of survival she never knew she had hidden within her heart.

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## The Way I Used to Be By Amber Smith Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #47672 in Books
- Published on: 2016-03-22
- Released on: 2016-03-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x 1.50" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"*The Way I Used to Be* explores the aftermath of sexual assault with a precision and searing honesty that is often terrifying, sometimes eerily beautiful, and always completely true. It is The Hero's Journey through a distorted circus mirror--one girl's quest to turn desperation into courage, to become a survivor instead of a victim. Amber Smith gets it exactly right." (Amy Reed, author of *BEAUTIFUL* and *CLEAN*)

**STARRED REVIEW** "This is a poignant book that realistically looks at the lasting effects of trauma on love, relationships, and life....Teens will be reminded of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. VERDICT An important addition for every collection." (*School Library Journal*)

"A difficult, painful journey, but teens who have experienced rape and abuse will be grateful for this unvarnished and ultimately hopeful portrait. Eden's shell-shocked narrative is an excellent narrative conduit for what Smith has to say." (*Booklist February 1, 2016*)

"This is far from a feel-good read, but I can't implore how necessary it is to read a book like this one . . . As unforgettable and stirring as Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, Smith's provocative debut is best described as a survival story with hope and anger serving as prominent themes so fully explored they simmer off the page." (*The Young Folks*)

"Readers will root for her as she gathers the courage, at last, to speak up." (*B&N Teen blog*)

"*The Way I Used To Be* is an intensely gripping and raw look at secrets, silence, speaking out, and survival in the aftermath of a sexual assault. A must-have for every collection that serves teens." (*SLJ / Teen Librarian Toolbox*)

"Easily one of the hardest books to read on this list. Brutal, raw and emotional... Eden's story gets told on her terms, in her voice. An honest look at one teen's struggle to find her way back to herself, to mold herself into the survivor she is." (*FANGIRLISH*)

"THE WAY I USED TO BE promises to be meaningful, significant, and truly unforgettable." (*FIKTSHUN*)

"Don't let a book of this magnitude pass you by. Pick it up and read it because Eden's story demands to be read." (*Once Upon a Twilight*)

"With an achingly beautiful narrative and carefully crafted plot, *The Way I Used to Be* is more than just an excellent book; it's an important one." (*NOVEL NOVICE*)

"Bottom Line: powerful, emotional and raw." (*BRANDI BREATHE BOOKS*)

"Edy's exploration of the meaning of sexuality and intimacy will be thought provoking for teen readers of various experience levels, and this title is likely to find space alongside [Laurie Halse] Anderson's *Speak*." (*BCCB*)

"*The Way I Used to Be* is a beautifully told debut novel spanning four years of a rape survivor's life" (*The Bucks County Courier Times*)

“A heart-twisting, but ultimately hopeful, exploration of how pain can lead to strength.” (*The Boston Globe*)

#### About the Author

Amber Smith grew up in Buffalo, New York, and now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her two dogs. After graduating from art school with a BFA in painting, she earned her MA in art history. When she’s not writing, she is working as a curator and art consultant. She has also written on the topics of art history and modern and contemporary art. She is the author of *The Way I Used to Be* and *The Last to Let Go*. Visit her online at [AmberSmithAuthor.com](http://AmberSmithAuthor.com).

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#### The Way I Used to Be

I DON’T KNOW A LOT of things. I don’t know why I didn’t hear the door click shut. Why I didn’t lock the damn door to begin with. Or why it didn’t register that something was wrong—so mercilessly wrong—when I felt the mattress shift under his weight. Why I didn’t scream when I opened my eyes and saw him crawling between my sheets. Or why I didn’t try to fight him when I still stood a chance.

I don’t know how long I lay there afterward, telling myself: Squeeze your eyelids shut, try, just try to forget. Try to ignore all the things that didn’t feel right, all the things that felt like they would never feel right again. Ignore the taste in your mouth, the sticky dampness of the sheets, the fire radiating through your thighs, the nauseating pain—this bulletlike thing that ripped through you and got lodged in your gut somehow. No, can’t cry. Because there’s nothing to cry about. Because it was just a dream, a bad dream—a nightmare. Not real. Not real. Not real. That’s what I keep thinking: NotRealNotRealNotReal. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Like a mantra. Like a prayer.

I don’t know that these images flashing through my mind—a movie of someone else, somewhere else—will never really go away, will never ever stop playing, will never stop haunting me. I close my eyes again, but it’s all I can see, all I can feel, all I can hear: his skin, his arms, his legs, his hands too strong, his breath on me, muscles stretching, bones cracking, body breaking, me getting weaker, fading. These things—it’s all there is.

I don’t know how many hours pass before I awake to the usual Sunday morning clamor—pots and pans clanging against the stove. Food smells seeping under my door—bacon, pancakes, Mom’s coffee. TV sounds—cold fronts and storm systems moving through the area by midday—Dad’s weather channel. Dishwasher-running sounds. Yippy yappy dog across the street yips and yaps at probably nothing, as always. And then there’s the almost imperceptible rhythm of a basketball bouncing against the dewy blacktop and the squeaky-sneaker shuffling of feet in the driveway. Our stupid, sleepy suburbia, like every other stupid, sleepy suburbia, awakens groggy, indifferent to its own inconsequence, collectively wishing for one more Saturday and dreading chores and church and to-do lists and Monday morning. Life just goes, just happens, continuing as always. Normal. And I can’t shake the knowledge that life will just keep on happening, regardless if I wake up or not. Obscenely normal.

I don’t know, as I force my eyes open, that the lies are already in motion. I try to swallow. But my throat’s raw. Feels like strep, I tell myself. I must be sick, that’s all. Must have a fever. I’m delirious. Not thinking clearly. I touch my lips. They sting. And my tongue tastes blood. But no, it couldn’t have been. Not real. So as I stare at the ceiling, I’m thinking: I must have serious issues if I’m dreaming stuff like that. Horrible stuff like that. About Kevin. Kevin. Because Kevin is my brother’s best friend, practically my brother. My parents love him like everyone does, even me, and Kevin would never—could never. Not possible. But then I try to move my legs to stand. They’re so sore—no, broken feeling. And my jaw aches like a mouthful of cavities.

I close my eyes again. Take a deep breath. Reach down and touch my body. No underwear. I sit up too fast

and my bones wail like I'm an old person. I'm scared to look. But there they are: my days-of-the-week underwear in a ball on the floor. They were my Tuesdays, even though it was Saturday, because, well, who would ever know anyway? That's what I was thinking when I put them on yesterday. And now I know, for sure, it happened. It actually happened. And this pain in the center of my body, the depths of my insides, restarts its torture as if on cue. I throw the covers off. Kneecap-shaped bruises line my arms, my hips, my thighs. And the blood—on the sheets, the comforter, my legs.

But this was supposed to be an ordinary Sunday.

I was supposed to get up, get dressed, and sit down to breakfast with my family. Then after breakfast, I would promptly go to my bedroom and finish any homework I hadn't finished Friday night, sure to pay special attention to geometry. I would practice that new song we learned in band, call my best friend, Mara, maybe go to her house later, and do dozens of other stupid, meaningless tasks.

But that's not what's going to happen today, I know, as I sit in my bed, staring at my stained skin in disbelief, my hand shaking as I press it against my mouth.

Two knocks on my bedroom door. I jump.

"Edy, you up?" My mother's voice shouts. I open my mouth, but it feels like someone poured hydrochloric acid down my throat and I might never be able to speak again. Knock, knock, knock: "Eden, breakfast!" I quickly pull my nightgown down as far as it will go, but there's blood smeared on that, too.

"Mom?" I finally call back, my voice scratchy and horrible.

She cracks the door open. As she peers in her eyes immediately go to the blood. "Oh God," she gasps, as she slips inside and quickly shuts the door behind her.

"Mom, I—" But how am I supposed say the words, the worst words, the ones I know have to be spoken?

"Oh, Edy." She sighs, turning her head at me with a sad smile. "It's okay."

"Wh—" I start to say. How can it be okay, in what world is this okay?

"This happens sometimes when you're not expecting it." She flits around my room, tidying up, barely looking at me while she explains about periods and calendars and counting the days. "It happens to everyone. That's why I told you, you need to keep track. That way you won't have to deal with these . . . surprises. You can be . . . prepared."

This is what she thinks this is.

Now, I've seen enough TV movies to know you're supposed to tell. You're just supposed to fucking tell.

"But—"

"Why don't you hop in the shower, sweetie?" she interrupts. "I'll take care of this . . . uh . . .," she begins, gesturing with her arm in a wide circle over my bed, searching for the word, "this mess."

This mess. Oh God, it's now or never. Now or never. It's now. "Mom—" I try again.

“Don’t be embarrassed,” she says with a laugh. “It’s fine, really, I promise.” She stands over me, looking taller than she ever has before, handing me my robe, oblivious of my Tuesday underwear crumpled at her feet.

“Mom, Kevin—” I start, but his name in my mouth makes me want to throw up.

“Don’t worry, Edy. He’s out back with your brother. They’re playing basketball. And your father’s glued to the TV, as usual. Nobody’ll see you. Go ahead. Put this on.”

Looking up at her, I feel so small. And Kevin’s voice moves like a tornado through my mind, whispering—his breath on my face—No one will ever believe you. You know that. No one. Not ever.

Then my mom shakes the robe at me, offering me a lie I didn’t even need to think up. She starts getting that look in her eye—that impatient, it’s-the-holidays-and-I-don’t-have-time-for-this look. Clearly, it was time for me to get going so she could deal with this mess. And clearly, nobody was going to hear me. Nobody was going to see me—he knew that. He had been around long enough to know how things work here.

I try to stand without looking like everything is broken. I kick the Tuesdays under the bed so she won’t find them and wonder. I take my robe. Take the lie. And as I look back at my mother, watching her collect the soiled sheets in her arms—the evidence—I know somehow if it’s not now, it has to be never. Because he was right, no one would ever believe me. Of course they wouldn’t. Not ever.



In the bathroom, I carefully peel off my nightgown, holding it at arm’s length as I ball it up and stuff it in the garbage can under the sink. I adjust my glasses and examine myself more closely. There are a few faint marks on my throat in the shape of his fingers. But they’re minor, really, in comparison to the ones on my body. No bruises on my face. Only the two-inch scar above my left eye from my bike accident two summers ago. My hair is slightly more disastrous than usual, but essentially I look the same—I can pass.

By the time I get out of the shower—still dirty, after scrubbing my body raw, thinking I could maybe wash the bruises off—there he is. Sitting at my kitchen table in my dining room with my brother, my father, my mother, sipping my orange juice from my glass—his mouth on a glass I would have to use someday. On a fork that would soon be undifferentiated from all the other forks. His fingerprints not only all over every inch of me, but all over everything: this house, my life, the world—infected with him.

Caelin raises his head and narrows his eyes at me as I cautiously approach the dining room. He can see it. I knew he would see it right away. If anyone was going to notice—if I could count on anyone—it would be my big brother. “Okay, you’re being really weird and intense right now,” he announces. He could tell because he always knew me even better than I knew myself.

So I stand there and wait for him to do something about this. For him to set his fork down, stand up and pull me aside, take me out to the backyard by the arm, and demand to know what’s wrong with me, demand to know what happened. Then I’d tell him what Kevin did to me and he’d give me one of his big brother-isms, like, Don’t worry, Edy, I’ll take care of it. The way he did whenever anyone was picking on me. And then he’d run back inside the house and stab Kevin to death with his own butter knife.

But that’s not what happens.

What happens is he just sits there. Watching me. Then slowly his mouth contorts into one of his smirks—our inside-joke grin—waiting for me to reciprocate, to give him a sign, or just start laughing like maybe I'm trying to secretly make fun of our parents. He's waiting to get it. But he doesn't get it. So he just shrugs, looks back down at his plate, and lops off a big slice of pancake. The bullet lodges itself a little deeper in my stomach as I stand there, frozen in the hallway.

“Seriously, what are you staring at?” he mumbles with his mouth full of pancake, in that familiar brotherly, you're-the-stupidest-person-on-the-face-of-the-earth tone he had perfected over the years.

Meanwhile, Kevin barely even glances up. No threatening looks. No gestures of warning, nothing. As if nothing had even happened. The same cool disregard he always used with me. Like I'm still just Caelin's dorky little sister with bad hair and freckles, freshman band-geek nobody, tagging along behind them, clarinet case in tow. But I'm not her anymore. I don't even want to be her anymore. That girl who was so naive and stupid—the kind of girl who could let something like this happen to her.

“Come on, Minnie,” Dad says to me, using my pet name. Minnie as in Mouse, because I was so quiet. He gestured at the food on the table. “Sit down. Everything's getting cold.”

As I stand in front of them—their Mousegirl—crooked glasses sliding down the bridge of my nose, stripped before eight scrutinizing eyes waiting for me to play my part, I finally realize what it's all been about. The previous fourteen years had merely been dress rehearsal, preparation for knowing how to properly shut up now. And Kevin had told me, with his lips almost touching mine he whispered the words: You're gonna keep your mouth shut. Last night it was an order, a command, but today it's just the truth.

I push my glasses up. And with a sickness in my stomach—something like stage fright—I move slowly, cautiously. Try to act like every part of my body, inside and out, isn't throbbing and pulsing. I sit down in the seat next to Kevin like I had at countless family meals. Because we considered him part of our family, Mom was always saying it, over and over. He was always welcome. Always.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Evelyn Nielson:**

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open as well as read a book called The Way I Used to Be? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

#### **Rosalie Cox:**

What do you think about book? It is just for students because they are still students or it for all people in the world, the actual best subject for that? Merely you can be answered for that concern above. Every person has diverse personality and hobby for every other. Don't to be obligated someone or something that they don't need do that. You must know how great along with important the book The Way I Used to Be. All type of

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**Laurie Cales:**

The Way I Used to Be can be one of your starter books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to get every word into pleasure arrangement in writing The Way I Used to Be but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource information that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial pondering.

**Christina Almonte:**

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