



Four Three Two One

Courtney C. Stevens

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In this contemporary YA novel, a girl reunites with the three other survivors of a bus bombing that killed nineteen people, and together they face the secrets, struggles, and emotional warfare that each has been enduring.

Golden “Go” Jennings wasn’t supposed to be on Bus 21 the day it blew up in New York City. Neither was her boyfriend, Chandler. But they were. And so was Rudy, a cute stranger whom Go shared a connection with the night before. And Caroline, a girl whose silence ended up costing nineteen people their lives.

Though it’s been a year since the bombing, Go isn’t any closer to getting over what happened. Since Chan shuts down every time Go brings that day up, she decides to reach out to Rudy. Just like that, the two fall right back into their easy, deep connection. Facing the past head-on with Rudy has opened up a small window of healing Go never thought was possible. So she makes an impulsive decision: Round up the rest of the survivors and head to New York City. There they will board an art installation made of the charred remnants of Bus 21.

But things are never easy when it comes to rehashing the past. Uniting the four stirs up conflicting feelings of anger and forgiveness and shows them that, although they all survived, they may still need saving.

Four Three Two One Details

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From Reader Review Four Three Two One for online ebook

Kristie says

Life After Tragedy

"Chandler and Golden versus the world" has been the motto of Chan and Go since they were 11. As seventeen-year-olds, they're a couple, and although they're still facing life's challenges together, there's been a distance between them ever since they became two of four survivors of a horrific bus bombing in New York City. It's been a year since that bomb killed nineteen teens, and Chan and Go are back home in the Hive, the Kentucky commune where they've grown up. Chan and Go are physically okay, but they both silently carry psychological wounds and secrets that are pulling their relationship apart.

FOUR THREE TWO ONE by Courtney Stevens chronicles Go's efforts to reclaim herself in the aftermath of the tragedy. Go is a strong character, but she seems on the verge of breaking from the strain of not dealing with what happened on Bus 21. Go would like to talk about it with Chan, with her parents, or with the other survivors, but most of those closest to her refuse. This makes Go determined to revisit the scene of the bus bombing by returning to New York for the one-year anniversary of the event. An artist (who also happens to be the EMT who took care of Go at the scene) has taken the destroyed bus and turned it into a piece of art, and he's chronicled the whole process in a reality show. That show has also led to a college fund being developed for the four survivors, and that fund has allowed Go to dream of eventually escaping the Hive and leaving Kentucky for college.

Go gathers others to travel with her to New York: a reluctant Chan, the other two survivors--both of whom have stories and secrets of their own--and Becky, a friend from school who seems to be just along for the ride but is an integral part of the group.

There is so much going on in FOUR THREE TWO ONE that it's hard to give a synopsis without writing a full book report... in short, Stevens does a great job writing about broken teens who are trying to pull themselves together while managing the difficulties, both large and small, that life brings. The road trip aspect of the book keeps things moving, and some of the minor characters like Go's grandmother help keep everything grounded and "real." There are times when there is a LOT of talking, but these characters have loads of ground to cover, so that can be forgiven.

This is a book that I would love to see made into a movie. The scenes throughout are vibrant, the main characters (and a few minor ones) are people I'd like to hang out with in the flesh, and I like the world that Stevens has built. Yes, really bad things happen, but there is plenty of good, ample amounts of hope, and room for dreams. Readers can learn a lot from Go's determination to "keep living a full life with a damaged past rather than a damaged life."

My thanks to the publisher and YA Books Central for a copy of FOUR THREE TWO ONE in exchange for my honest review, and kudos to Courtney Stevens for another excellent book.

Rebecca Akins says

This book ripped my heart out and then slowly mended it. This book follows the four survivors of a bus bombing. Each of these four characters is dealing with their own form of PTSD and survivors guilt. These

four characters along with a close friend of one of the survivors take a road trip to the Grand opening of a memorial built for the victims of the bombing. At its core, this book is about healing and forgiveness. The character relationships and individual character development led to a beautifully-raw and moving story of how one event can change everything. This book is full of heartbreaking moments but is equally full of inspiring moments. I love this book, and I am so grateful to the author for writing such a magnificent book.

Samantha (WLABB) says

Go, Chan, Caroline, and Rudy all lost something that day on the bus. While some scars were more obvious than others, each one was harboring some pain and guilt, which was holding them back. Go was hoping that facing her fears at the exhibit would help propel her forward, but maybe she, and all the other survivors, would find the strength they needed before they arrived in New York.

- Pro: This story was emotional and painful and wonderful. Stevens did such an incredible job helping me navigate the very complicated feelings these characters were experiencing, and I loved all the feels that were passed on to me.
- Pro: Survivor stories are always interesting to me. We automatically think of how lucky they are, but I don't think one can fully understand the complex emotions at play for these people. *Four Three Two One* was such a thoughtful look at the baggage they were stuck with following the event. Each of these survivors was harboring some guilt related to the bombing, and seeing its impact on their lives was saddening.
- Pro: I thought the story was structured really well. The story was told predominately from Go's point of view in the present, but we also got some chapters from past and present Caroline, and even a little bit of Rudy's viewpoint via his written work. I felt like I got a good look in their heads, and a better understanding of what they were experiencing via this format.
- Pro: The characters were all so well drawn, super likable, and so easy to root for. I even grew to love and care for Caroline, even though she was (rightfully) angry and damaged, because she was just as well crafted as the other characters.
- Pro: There were two really great side characters: Go's grandmother and Becky. Gram was an encouraging and supportive voice, who didn't let fear force her to discourage Go's ambitions, and Becky! She was the sunshine and the cheerleader for this group of survivors. I think she was really important to the story too, because she was a non-survivor in the group, and being on the outside of it all allowed her to be objective and see things more clearly at times.
- Pro: Post explosion, the four survivors had to embrace their new futures. Things happened as a result of the event, which altered their futures, and some of them needed a little nudge to keep moving towards that new destination.

Overall: This was one fantastic non-road trip road trip. It was a beautiful story of the different ways we survive and the healing power of love, forgiveness, connection, and friendship.

*ARC provided in exchange for an honest review.

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1 STARS

Golden is in a bus bombing in NYC that leaves only three other survivors, her boyfriend Chan, Rudy and the bomber's girlfriend Caroline. A year later, an artist has recreated the bus for charity and to honor the victims. The group, minus Chan set off on a road trip to reclaim their strength.

FOUR THREE TWO ONE didn't work for me on multiple levels. First, Golden and Chandler live on a commune and I'm supposed to buy into a love that was meant to be since they were kids. He creepily gives her a promise ring in front of the commune residents (The Hive) and basically forces her into an engagement. Ick. Ick. Ick. I was rooting for her to kick him to the curb for the whole book, which I think is the opposite that Courtney C Stevens wanted.

Second, the book was boring, boring boring.

While a few good tidbits of dating violence and the different ways people experience PTSD, it's not enough for me to recommend.

Emily says

On a normal June day, twenty three people boarded Charter Bus #21 on a busy New York City street; minutes later, Charter Bus #21 exploded, killing nineteen people. Almost a year later, the four people who survived the explosion are invited to attend an art installation made from the remnants of the destroyed bus - a memorial to those who did not make it, and a testament to those who did. The four young people each have their own reasons for staying away, their own reasons they deal with the guilt of the explosion, and their own ways of coping with their survival. Go Jennings hasn't cried, and won't let anyone else fall by the wayside; Chan Clayton, Go's boyfriend, does not want to ever set foot in a city again; Rudy Guthrie invited Go on to the bus that day, and refuses to let his life be determined by what he lost; and Caroline Ascott, the girlfriend of the bomber, cannot let go of the pain she felt before the bombing or the guilt she has carried since.

I thought this book was absolutely beautiful. The characters felt incredibly real, and every reaction that each of them had to their trauma was authentic and true to who they were. Sadly, we live in a time where this kind of violence is not unbelievable, and it is important that there are stories written about those who survive them and how they cope. While each of the survivors has their flaws, you're still rooting for them to make their way through their pain and begin to heal.

*Trigger warnings for terrorism-related violence, abusive relationships and domestic violence, suicidal ideation, depiction of a bomb scene, PTSD.

Ruthsicc says

Warnings: depiction of bomb blast, abusive relationship (including domestic violence), suicidal ideation, self-harm

A story of letting go of guilt, moving on, and finding something to live for, *Four Three Two One* takes place a year after a fatal bombing attack and the effect it had on its four survivors. Told mostly through the point of view of Go Jennings, one of the teens, and partly through Caroline, another survivor and the ex of the suicide bomber, the story is heartfelt, and heart-breaking in equal measure.

Approaching the first anniversary of the attack, Go has been trying to overcome her fear of buses, and when one of the medics who saved the teens invites them all for an unveiling of the memorial he has rebuilt for the survivors and victims of the bombing, she wants to go back there and prove to herself that she can move on. Her boyfriend Chan, (another survivor) and she have been living in a commune all their lives, and he is reluctant to leave the safety of their home town again. So she decides to go collect the other two survivors - Rudy, and Caroline - on her own. Along with her for the long journey from Kentucky to New York is her friend, Becky, who she slowly gives insight of the incident, as well as the aftermath. Their friendship and the developing romantic relationships are wonderfully written.

Sharing music was like sharing a diary. When you tell someone, "I love this song," you're giving a piece of your story to the person.

The first half of the story drags in its pacing, constantly circling around the love triangle of Rudy, Go and Chan. Go and Chan haven't had a good year in the aftermath of the bombing, and she is frustrated by his refusal to talk about the incident and them surviving it, so she has been stewing in the guilt of it being her fault that they were on the bus, and the fact that she has been feeling closer to Rudy. Towards the middle of the book, though, it starts to lead into the central plotline. Rudy has been dealing in his own way - having lost function of his legs, and dealing with people's reactions to him being in a wheelchair - by writing about the incident as a book. Caroline, meanwhile, has been bullied, as well as harming herself, because she has a lot of guilt over helping her abusive ex with the bomb (she didn't know at the time what it would be used for) and being the catalyst for the aggression that led to the bombing. So basically, when they get together, you are seeing a complex soup of emotions, and how they manifest in their interactions with each other. Slowly, it is also piecing together the story of the events leading up to the bombing, and each of their supposed roles, and why they feel guilt over it.

Nightmares have the legs of Olympic sprinters. They chased me all night long; they caught me around three.

Overall, it is a beautifully written story, with complex characterization that brings out the various aspects of grief, guilt and healing, in the aftermath of a tragedy.

Friendship could be such a fast thing when it wanted to be.

Is it diverse? One (POV) main character is bisexual, and a secondary character is w/w. Another secondary character is a wheelchair user. Main character has PTSD-like condition.

Received an advance reader copy in exchange for a fair review from Harper Teen, via Edelweiss.

Jane says

3.5 stars. This was very emotional and will definitely impact readers, but I also had some issues (pacing, plotting, trying to fit too much into one story) that lessened my overall rating. However, I'd still recommend it, especially if you enjoyed Dress Codes for Small Towns.

Shannon (It Starts At Midnight) says

You can find the full review and all the fancy and/or randomness that accompanies it at *It Starts at Midnight*

I haven't been so enamored with a book in quite some time. This was such a freaking *amazing* book, and one I hadn't expected to hit me as hard as it did. And truth be told, I don't think that anything I can say will fully do it justice. **Have you ever read a book and it just exuded a certain feeling? Drew you in, made you fall in love with the whole damn thing? Well, that's where we are here.** So I am going to tell you a bunch of junk I liked about the book, while trying to explain that it is even more than the sum of these positives. Okay, here we go!

•**Female friendship that is just... everything I want in a girl bond.** The relationship that Go had with Becky was just authentic as hell. Sure, it was messy sometimes, and complicated, but Becky was going to be there for Go no matter what. Go learned so much about herself and others from her relationship with Becky, and it was just healthy and a great representation of what friendships are really all about.

•**Loads of family stuff.** Go's relationship with her parents was complicated at best. But also really realistic feeling, and full of love. But the best, *the best* relationship was the one Go had with her grandma. Gran reminded me of a combination of both of my grandmothers, who I love and adore more than just about anyone, so seeing her have this incredible relationship with hers was so freaking heartwarming.

•**Trials and tribulations of the aftermath of a trauma, but also of just life and growing up.** So this is twofold, because each of these things on its own is awesome, but also when you add them together it's incredibly profound. Obviously, the ramifications of the bombing are numerous. You have survivor's guilt, regular guilt, trying to move on after, and so on. The story develops a lot as the friends travel on, and you get a lot of insight into the baggage that everyone is carrying. But, it's also about growing up in its own right. Growing apart from people you love, finding new people to love, and figuring out who and what you want to be. **Obviously, navigating these two dynamics together makes for some powerful storytelling.**

•**The writing is simply lovely.** I highlighted just a *ton* of passages. Some were beautiful, some were poignant, some were light-hearted and fun, but overall I found the writing to be such a huge plus in this book.

•**I cared for every single character.** Even the more minor ones, everyone in the story truly served a purpose.

Bottom Line: Like I said, this is just the tip of the iceberg of awesomeness. It's just a story that you feel so deeply, one that I wholeheartedly recommend.

Ainslee || Jest and Hearts says

<https://jestandhearts.wordpress.com/2...>

Right, well this is going to be a hard review to write and its not because I disliked it or really enjoy it, its because I can't say anything about it without completely ruining the story for you.

Four Three Two One is an emotional roller coast following four teens dealing with the aftermath of trauma, a bus bombing. The story is is full of trauma, guilt, grief, friendships, family, trust, adventure and taking those giant leaps to overcome your fears.

The story follows Golden "Go" Jennings as she tries to deal with her life a year after the incident. Go was involved in a bombing that killed 19 people leaving her and three other people as the only survivors. The story is told from Go's POV for the majority of the book, there are a few chapters told from Caroline's (another survivors) POV that give us insight into what happened leading up to the bombing.

Go finds herself on a road trip heading to an art instillation, a recreation of the bus, in NYC. She manages to convince the three other survivors and new friend Becky to come along on this journey with her. Go believes talking about what happened and seeing this instillation with the other survivors will help her and the others move on with their lives.

I real enjoyed this book while it deals with some pretty heaving, heart wrenching topics such as: bombings, abusive relationships, selfharm and suicide Courtney Stevens manages to add some levity and humour to the story making it lighthearted at times.

Four Three Two One shows the different ways survivors deal with trauma, the different ways they grieve, feel survivors guilt or feel responsible for the incident. All of the characters are very likeable for the most part and we get to see how each of the survivors deals with their trauma and grief differently.

The friendships made and lost throughout this book was probably one of my favourite aspects. Go finds herself leaning on a new formed friendship with Becky who is a classmate and someone she would never have thought to be friends with. Go's family situation is very real and believable unlike some we see in YA. She has a pretty complicated and strained relationship with her parents and they are the type of family that just want to sweep things under the rug and never talk about the again. Although she has a strained relationship with her parents she has an amazing one with her Gram. Her Gram is supportive, loving, pushes Go to do things she's not sure about and is always there for her.

The only negative thing I have to say about this book is the pacing was a tad slow for my taste and there was A LOT going on all the time.

If you like hard hitting contemporary stories with characters you can connect to and wonderful writing I'd

give Four Three Two One a shot.

Taylor Wilson says

This was such a great book. All the characters were wonderful. I loved how close the relationships were and all the family love. You can see how much the characters grow and develop throughout the story. The writing was done very well, simple and easy to depict. I feel like all the stuff that happened in the book helped the characters mature and appreciate their relationships more. I enjoyed reading this book very much and would love to read more from this author.

Madison says

Take an author who is excellent at writing powerful stories about heartbreaking situations. Add a plot line about a bombing, abusive relationships, recovery journeys and the power of human togetherness. Drop in five character: four survivors and one along for the ride. Stir together and shake a little. With that recipe it's no wonder that Four Three Two One is an incredibly powerful and emotive story of surviving, overcoming insurmountable odds, and forgiving yourself.

Golden Jennings is one of four survivors of a bus bombing. While she is eager to unpack the emotions and fallout from that fateful day in New York, her boyfriend, another survivor, won't mention it at all. When one of the attending paramedics reconstructs the bus and creates a memorial for those who died in the blast, Golden decides to make the trip to New York again. With a new-found friend and the two other survivors, Golden begins a journey towards making new memories, facing old ones and maybe even find some form of healing.

I absolutely adore Courtney Stevens' writing and novels. Time and time again she produces stories that grip me as a reader, delight me as a librarian because I know this too will be a book that will be handed from reader to eager reader, and make me proud to be human.

The majority of Four Three Two One is written from Golden's perspective, after the bombing. There are a few extra sections written from fellow bomb survivor, Caroline. These additions offer insight into what happened before the bomb and after and Caroline's tumultuous feelings and current state of mind. It is through Caroline that we readers also gain insight into the bomber himself and the damage he caused that reached far beyond the bus bombing.

While terribly sad and traumatic, in true Courtney Stevens style, Four Three Two One is an uplifting and often humorous novel. It is superbly written, scattering enough details throughout the story to keep readers totally engaged, but leaving some pretty big reveals for the conclusion.

Family, relationships and romance all play their part in Four Three Two One. Diverse and complex characters, topical themes and stunning writing come together to make a novel that is a must-read YA contemporary and a must-have for all library shelves.

The publishers provided an advanced readers copy of this book for reviewing purposes. All opinions are my own.

Find more reviews, reading age guides, content advisory, and recommendations on my blog [Madison's Library](#)

Vicki says

An interesting look at teenage decision-making in the aftermath of trauma.

Katie says

More like a 4.5, I loved this one! Full review to come closer to release date.

Shannon (It Starts At Midnight) says

That was one of the best books I've read in a long time.

Caeley says

Four Three Two One is a YA, contemporary and fictional 'memoir' of the survivors of the bombing of Bus #21. It is mainly told in Golden Jennings' perspective as she embarks on her journey towards recovery, overcoming her fear of buses, and finding out what really caused the bombing on board the bus that fateful day. A prominent event that brings the remaining 4 survivors together throughout the book is the Accelerant Orange. This is a art exhibit held/made by Carter Stockton in order to honor the lives lost on that bus as well as a fund for the 4 survivors to continue on with their lives and hopefully go to college one day.

My favorite excerpt from this book is found near the end of the story as Rudy (one of the survivors who had lost his legs during the explosion) describes himself as he finally come to terms with his faults and fears, encouraging others to do the same.

“Terrorism isn’t a bomb; terrorism is being afraid there will always be a bomb.

“I know terror.”

“I do not know the white-hot rage of revenge that lines a vest with dynamite and screws and nails. I cannot imagine standing in front of a man, any man, and zipping a death shirt from waist to Adam’s apple like a mother puts a coat on a child in the morning before school. I will never know the explosions that occur in a bomber’s brain before he acts. I cannot fathom pressing a trigger to cause the end of the world.

“For these things, I am thankful. I would rather die thousands of times than be one who kills senselessly.

“Pain isn’t a bomb; pain is being afraid no one understands your pain.

“I know pain. I’m intimately acquainted with the loneliness of believing I am the only one who understands pain like mine.

“Blame isn’t a bomb; blame is a single arrow I shoot at myself.

“I know blame.

“Fear isn’t a bomb; fear is a friend I greet every morning like a spouse on the other side of my bed.

“I know fear. Fear reminds me that the world takes what it wants, and it probably wants me.

“Fear whispers, Today could be your last day. Fear is my tattoo, the one on my face, the one strangers see at first glance and think, My God, boy, what happened to you?”

“There were days I wanted to be done with terror, pain, blame, and fear. I planned to kill the bad emotions like they were monsters. But it’s hard to kill the monster that lives inside you.

“Today, I’m exorcising the monster.

“There is no way to know in advance if I have the strength. I won’t know until I touch Bus Twenty-One and look at my friends and say, ‘I’m ready.’ I won’t know until I allow them to lift my chair onto the very bus that stole my legs. But if a man can be ready to be ready, I am that man.”

-From Rudy's journal

This excerpt segues smoothly from one emotion and painful thought to the next, as each survivor finally understands that this explosion cannot be pinned on themselves - they now fully understand each emotion and thought that has come through their minds, accepting it rather than pushing away, which is what helped them through this turbulent time where one of the survivors - Caroline, had meticulously planned out her suicide, only to realize that in the end, there was still things to live for, such as her newfound friendships, family, happiness and adventure. '

This poignant story demonstrates the importance of acceptance and letting go as well as the significance of friendship. Grief cannot be contained. It must first be understood and accepted. To forgive rather than forget. Only in this manner will you be able to finally come to terms and live side by side with grief, rather than it triumphing you. Friendship is also a very important facet of being able to overcome this grief, amongst other troubles such as family matters and relationships -something that Golden Jennings experiences on a day-to-day basis as she struggles to understand the depth of her emotions. This story has shown that friends can help you overcome grief by being there, allowing you to lean on their shoulder as you calm down and reset your troubled mindset. Lastly, it also encompasses the importance of generosity and how it can have a much more profound impact (positively) than you might think.

Overall, I give this book a 4.5 out of 5 stars for its sincerely heartfelt and expressive story. The character development was also very clear as readers are able to first-handedly experience their transformation from fearful and lost in their own thoughts (often depressing and sometimes even suicidal) to being able to speak freely without qualms of any sort and not being afraid to show the world who they truly are as people rather than just pitiful survivors of yet another bombing. The plot was also very intriguing. Although there wasn't any significant or remarkable plot twists, it was still engrossing as you followed through each character's recovery. I would recommend this book to anyone, regardless of fans of any specific genre. It isn't an incredibly short read, but it is a riveting book that makes you want to read till the end.
