



# On a Scale of One to Ten

*Ceylan Scott*

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## **On a Scale of One to Ten** Ceylan Scott

Tamar is admitted to Lime Grove, a psychiatric hospital for teenagers.

Lime Grove is home to a number of teenagers with a variety of problems: anorexia, bipolar disorder, behavior issues. Tamar will come to know them all very well. But there's one question she can't... won't answer: What happened to her friend Iris? As Tamar's emotional angst becomes more and more clear to her, she'll have to figure out a path to forgiveness. A shocking, moving, and darkly funny depiction of life in a psychiatric world.

A stunning journey of one girl's mental illness and the redemptive power of truth and healing.

## **On a Scale of One to Ten Details**

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Author : Ceylan Scott

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# From Reader Review On a Scale of One to Ten for online ebook

## Abbi Bennett says

3.25 stars, although I thought this book gave a good representation of mental illness, and didn't try to romanticise it, I don't think I enjoyed this book simply because it was so upsetting to me personally. There are huge trigger warnings with this book, including self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, so I would stray away from this if that would cause you distress - which clearly I didn't do. I think the character development for the protagonist was done well and overall it was a good YA novel that tackled talking about these issues in a good way.

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## Bethan George says

I've never really enjoyed reading and have always struggled to get invested in a book or finish one - but I couldn't put this one down! I read it front to cover in just one day. It was captivating, thought provoking and written with such sensitivity. An amazing and beautiful book.

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## Joanne says

3.5 Stars.

Originally posted on Once Upon a Bookcase.

**Trigger Warning:** *This book features mental illness stigma, self-harm, several suicide attempts, and suicide. This review discusses the self-harm and attempted suicide in this book.*

I wanted to review *On a Scale of One to Ten* by Ceylan Scott for Mental Illness in YA Month as it was an #OwnVoices novel for borderline personality disorder (BPD). While the story was written well, and has a lot to say on mental illness, I finished feeling pretty disappointed.

Tamar has just been admitted to a psychiatric ward for teenagers after a suicide attempt. Tamar has been self-harming for a number of years now, ever since the death of Iris. Because she killed her. Because she's evil and disgusting, and doesn't deserve to live, when Iris died. The doctors ask Tamar question after question, but unlike with every other patient, they can't seem to figure out what she has. *On a Scale of One to Ten* is the story of life on a psychiatric ward, coming to terms with the past, and trying to live when you don't know what's wrong with you.

*On a Scale of One to Ten* is a really well written, quick read. It's deeply affecting, and doesn't at all shy away from the dark side of mental illness. It's honest and raw and visceral, and, I guess, important. The story is told in alternating chapters of Then and Now, showing the events that lead up to Tamar entering the psychiatric ward, and life in the psychiatric ward. Tamar is really struggling with Iris' death. It's been two years now, but her mental health has just worsened. And what's worse, no-one seems to know what's wrong with her. All she knows is that she is evil, she is disgusting, she is worthless. She doesn't deserve to live, and can't stop thinking about ending her life.

*'I don't tell him that the desire for death has been raging through my veins like a stampede of angry bulls, and that every fibre of my disgusting being should be charred and powdered in a dusty crematorium.'* (p128-129)

*"Can you tell me what's been bothering you these past few days? You've been seeming quite unsettled to some of the staff, would you agree with that?"*

*"Yeah, I suppose."*

*"Why?"*

*Why? I can ponder that question in my sedated brain for days and I still won't have any answers. It's hard to make space for other thoughts when you only want to kill yourself. In fact, it's hard to make space for anything. It's hard to make space for remembering to eat or piss or smile when it's expected of you.'* (p129-130)

Tamar also really struggles with the fact that the doctors can't seem to figure out what's wrong with her. It's only at the very end of the book, when she's being discharged and she gets to take home her case-management notes, that we read *'Her symptoms are concurrent with a personality disorder borderline.'* (p215) But Tamar isn't told what the doctor or the nurses think while on the ward. She seems to be a puzzle to them, unable to work out what it is she has. And there's frustration and fear in not knowing what's wrong, and not getting the help she needs.

*'They gave me antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers. Because that's all they could do. Other patients could talk for hours in their sweaty-palmed state about their anxiety disorder. The eating-disorder patients, trapped in their unhealthy relationships with food, some of them emaciated, others not a pound off normal. The patients with such crippling depression that even getting out of bed in the morning was an achievement worthy of more than a pat on the back.*

*The monster that had swallowed me was different. The experts soon exhausted their options: manic depression, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder . . . But the monster didn't need a label or a name. The monster was me.'* (p170)

*"How can we help you, Tamar?"*

*"You're the doctor."*

*He nods. "You're right, I am. I can give a diagnosis, I can prescribe medication, but I can't--"*

*"What's wrong with me, then?" I say. "You tell everyone else what's wrong with them - Jasper's an anorexic, Elle's bipolar. What am I? Or am I just making all this up to waste your time?"* (p127)

It's really difficult to watch this struggle, and it's heartbreaking that it takes so long for her to get a diagnosis. I know for me that knowing for definite that I had anxiety, and knowing what that meant and how it affected my body and why, made all the difference to me. Understanding my mental illness took away some of the fear. I knew what was "wrong" with me, and I knew why, and although it was scary having a panic attack, understanding why my body was behaving the way it was, was helpful. I can't even image what it's like to know something isn't right, but not knowing what, and knowing doctors can't seem to figure it out either.

On a Scale of One to Ten also covers is the stigma surrounding mental illness...

*'My illness didn't command sympathy and grapes and bunches of flowers. No sympathy for psychos. People didn't want to have anything to do with that girl, the one who sliced her own skin for fun. But I wasn't trouble; I was in trouble.'* (p32)

...mostly in the form of Tamar's former not-quite-friend, Mia. Mia bullied Tamar when she was younger, until Mia became friends with Tamar's best friend, Toby, and a not-quite friendship was formed because of him. Mia visits Tamar at the psychiatric ward, on the day of Iris' birthday, and blows her top.

*"I actually can't believe you, Tamar! You just swan around like everything is so much harder for you, when it's not! It's fucking not, OK? Life is shit for everyone, it's shit for me too, but that doesn't mean we all have to start moping around and slitting our wrists for everyone to see. You're a fucking idiot. You just used Iris as an excuse to get attention, everyone can see it. You weren't even that close to her. She was just some girl in our class."* (p105-106)

Although I don't have the same mental illness as Tamar, simply having a mental illness, I reacted quite strongly to this. I felt sick and angry and upset, and I just wanted to cry. Mia's remarks aren't aimed at me, and yet this is the attitude so many have towards mental illness in general. I really don't understand how people don't get it. They don't need to have a mental illness to get it, it's called empathy. I don't understand how people could think those of us with mental illnesses just want attention, that we're faking it, being drama queens and over dramatic. I really don't get it. If I could choose not to have anxiety, I would.

Unsurprisingly, Tamar doesn't react well to Mia's outburst. She was already not doing ok because it was Iris' birthday - the guilt and the hatred and the certainty that she is why Iris is dead, yet she is alive - and Mia just pushes her over the edge. Tamar attempts suicide in the bath with three razor blades she smuggled in. I'm not going to quote it in my review, but the scene is really quite graphic, and it was so, so difficult to read - even though I knew she would be ok, because there was still half the book to go. It was described so well, and with such a choice of words - "spewing", "spurts" - that you can't help but see it happen. I think some may have a negative reaction to simply reading this in my review, to know there's such a graphic suicide attempt, but I think it's important. Suicide is not pretty or romantic, it can be something out of a horror movie. And also, Tamar regrets it as soon as it's done, so we also see her panic and scream for help, and her desire to live. She's lucky, they manage to save her, but sometimes there's no going back from a suicide attempt, and I think it's important to see how quickly - in an instant, when Tamar thinks she might actually die - she regrets it. How she desperately wants to cling to life.

When it comes to BPD, though, there's not really much I can say about it, because I don't feel like I know what it is. There's a lot of talk when it comes to diverse books about mirrors and windows; they should be mirrors for those from marginalised groups so they can see themselves in the characters, and windows for those who aren't part of those marginalised groups, to see and understand characters unlike themselves. From the reviews on Goodreads, it's clear to see that On a Scale of One to Ten is very much a mirror, it's had so many reviews from people with BPD raving about it and how it was spot on. But - and perhaps it's just me missing things - I didn't feel it was much of a window; I don't know any more about BPD than I did before picking up the book. I couldn't tell you how it manifests or what its symptoms are. We get some medical jargon at the end of the book from Tamar's case-management notes, which gives some kind of idea, but I'm still really none-the-wiser. However, maybe it's just that On a Scale of One to Ten isn't for me. Perhaps it's for those who do have BPD, and if so, it's obviously doing its job. And as I'm pretty sure I haven't come across any other books featuring BPD (if you know of others, please do let me know!), this book is hugely

important for those teens with BPD, as this is a book they can read to see themselves in.

However, for all it's good, there are elements of *On a Scale of One to Ten* I found quite disappointing. The characters, for the most part, are two dimensional. The only thing we know about Tamar as a person outside of her mental illness is she used to enjoy being part of the cross country team at school, and really enjoyed running. She makes friends at the ward with Alice, Jasper and Elle, but we know nothing about them as people, who they are, outside of their mental illnesses. Alice and Jasper are anorexic, Elle has bipolar. We know Elle has been in foster care since she witnessed her mother overdoses as a baby. But none of that tells us about *who* she is as a person. Jasper is funny, and Elle is a bit out there, but that's pretty much down to her bipolar. Otherwise, we know nothing about any of the characters. Nothing. And that's so very frustrating.

Overall, *On a Scale of One to Ten* is an important and deeply affecting novel that will do a lot of good for BPD readers. It's heartbreaking, but hopeful, and we really need more stories like this, with characters getting the help they need (even if it's a struggle to work out what that help is).

Thank you to Chicken House for the review copy.

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### **Immi Murray says**

What an utterly fantastic page turner!! Beautifully written. Would definitely recommend!!

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### **Bryony Reid says**

One of the best books depicting mental health I've ever read.

This was an honest story, not afraid to say how mental health it is. How precarious it can be, how out of control, how here-and-there, come-and-go. There was one like, about nobody cares if you try unless you win, and it really stuck with me. Its so true. People want the destination rather than the journey.

Tamar's story won't apologise for how real it is, and nobody wants it to.

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### **Rosie says**

I've read a lot of books about mental health and this is by the best, the most realistic, the most compelling. As someone who has spent time in CAMHS inpatient units, I was impressed beyond words.

It's hard to get it right when it comes to mental health. All too often with the portrayal of inpatient units we get either the hellhole with tyrannical staff or the rosy summer camp type. Scott gets it exactly right with the inevitable bad but the surprising and heart warming good.

I laughed, I cried. My heart broke and the story pieces it back together again. This is a story about mental health but also about youth, about love, about life. And you can feel the realness of it seeping through every single page.

10/10 I'll be urging all my friends and family to read this book.

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## Em The Reading Challenge Challenge says

*"There isn't a cure. Except me: I am the cure."*

Nobody believes her but Tamar killed a girl. The guilt of what she did has clawed its way into her brain and she has taken it out on herself. After attempting suicide, Tamar is admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she must find a way to reconcile with the fact of being alive. She must fight back against the darkness or else let it consume her completely.

A lot of other reviews of this book talk a lot about the weird depiction of Tamar's borderline personality disorder or the representation of the psychiatric hospital. I don't have any experience with either of those things so I'm not even going to try to comment on their accuracy or authenticity. But Tamar's pain and her despair and her guilt all felt so true.

The way Tamar thinks about her illness - the way she lets it consume her, the way she hides it, the way she internalises everything - that part felt realistic. How it fits into diagnostic criteria I have no idea but it made her so vivid to me. I think what really helped with that was how afraid she was to get better. From opening up to her psychiatrist to having stitches after self-harming. That fear felt primal and it bled off the page. It's so hard to let people into your head and into your illness and Ceylan Scott depicted that trepidation with such effect and eloquence.

What I think I liked most about this book was that it avoids most of the YA mental illness clichés. The entire time I was waiting for Tamar to fall in love with one of the male characters - she doesn't. I was waiting for someone to touch her scars without permission and tell her they were beautiful - they didn't. I was waiting for one of the other patients to die to inspire Tamar to stay alive for them - none of them did. This book shows the brutality of recovery and doesn't try to sugarcoat it but also remains so hopeful.

I would say that is this book's biggest strength - its unwillingness to leave the characters hopeless. All of them are better at the end than they are at the start, whether they're "cured" or not. As someone who has struggled with mental illness for ten years and will probably struggle with it for the remainder of their life, I greatly appreciated the hopefulness of *On A Scale of One to Ten*.

Gritty and grim, lucid and lyrical, this is a lovely book that tells a realistic story of coming to terms with mental illness and finding a way to keep moving through life.

**Warnings: Graphic self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, mania, depression, paranoia, anxiety, side character with psychotic symptoms, set in a psychiatric hospital, use of p\*yocho and similar words.**

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## leonie says

this is the most realistic book on mental health especially BPD and suicide i've read and doesn't romanticize anything! my favorite quote: "toby helps, but he isn't my cure. there isn't a cure. except me: i am the cure."

please consider reading this

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### **Bella Clark says**

This feels like an honest portrayal of some of the struggles of teens with mental illnesses. The discussions of anxiety, depressive and manic episodes and suicidal thoughts were uncomfortable to read. I also felt the frustrations hopelessness of the main character as she negotiates the various medical professionals in the mental health systems.

Overall, I was glad to read it for my understanding of the issues, however, I found the ending too neat and a bit jarring against the hopelessness of the rest of the book. There are also major trigger issues, so readers beware.

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### **Fabulous Book Fiend says**

This book comes with some serious trigger warnings so make sure you're aware of the content before picking this one up and the back suggests trying page 3 to get a taste of what the book is about, I think it's a pretty good representation of what's inside so definitely give that a go too.

Obviously this book deals with the subject of suicide and all aspects of mental health. Tamar is convince that she does not deserve to be in this world any longer and is willing to go to extreme measure to make sure that happens. She is definitely an intriguing character, not necessarily someone to like or someone even to sympathise with most of the time but she is definitely intriguing and this is definitely a character driven novel.

There are a host of other characters in this novel, all of whom are struggling with their mental health but are in a facility which should support them and give them the help they need. I do feel like a little bit more time could have been given to these other characters but then we would have lost focus off of Tamar and it would have become an issues based novel rather than a character driven book and would have been a lot more of a difficult read than it was.

I think this novel deals with the issues of depression, anxiety and some of the other aspects of mental health that it covers well. It definitely did have an effect on my own mental health and gen real outlook and was difficult to read at times. It does very much go into the different ways Tamar, and others think about killing themselves and about the skewed view of the world that people have when their mental health is not 100%. The ending of this novel was hopeful but not everything was tied up neatly in a bow, which I found fitting for the content but the kind of books I read, I would have liked more of a conclusion, however overall I think this was a good representation of teens with mental health issues and it was good that this book's release coincided with mental health awareness month in the UK.

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### **Zazie Lawson says**

Honestly the most realistic account of BPD I've ever read. Has made people close to me reconsider their views on mental health and be far more understanding of and empathetic to my struggles. Thank you.



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## **Garance J. Bonadonna (The Nerdy Bookseller) says**

I did not like this book.

At first it was pretty good. I liked the writing, liked the mystery behind what had happened to the main character before she got into the psychiatric hospital. I liked that she talked about a monster inside her.

Here's what bothered me. To me, it was clear that Tamar self harmed and had suicidal thoughts because she had PTSD. First because she was bullied, second because her friend died. But at the very end of the book, the author is like "Oh no, all along, they were just triggers, I was ill before that, I have BPD."

No. I have BPD. This is not what BPD feels like. BPD is having extreme fear of abandonment (the character barely talks about the fact that her father has given up on her), it's having extreme emotions both positive and negative (she is severely depressed the entire book), it's having extreme mood swings. She doesn't have any.

I was also intensely annoyed by the quirky sides of the other characters. Oh, we're in a PH but we all have our weird habits that makes us loveable.

No. I have been to a psychiatric hospital. The weird habits caused by mental illnesses are not fun or loveable. The caretakers, nurses and psychiatrists usually just don't care.

And finally, the author creates a character, who's clearly a bully and pushed someone to kill herself and the other one to self harm and attempt suicide, she even goes to the hospital JUST to harass her, and nothing is done about it.

I was bullied and rejected and let me tell you, it's all you think about when you have BPD because your brain makes you think they're right about you. The main characters barely talks about her a few times and pretends everything is normal. The bully is not punished or pointed at.

What about teenagers who get bullied and read this book? They learn to shut up. And this is why bullying at school continues and no one suffering from it speaks about it. This is all wrong.

Twice Tamar shows characteristics of BPD. She gets extremely angry and violent, and at the very end she repeats to herself that everyone hates her. It comes out of nowhere. And then the next page she's all like "Ouh I'm not cured but I'm alive and I run and I have a boyfriend". The character doesn't evolve in one way or the other until the last three pages. WTF?

No, when you have BPD, every time you meet someone, your brain tells you they hate you and then your mood changes and you cling to them and then your mood changes and you push them away, all in one day.

This is not an accurate representation of mental illnesses. This is a pale copy of *Girl, Interrupted*. This feels like the book was written by someone way too young, who wanted to put way too much of herself in it without thinking about plot holes, character development or anything that has to do with writing.

This book is all wrong. I'm giving it one star for the writing style of the beginning.

I do not recommend. Read *Under Rose Tainted Skies* instead. Or *Every Last Word*. Or *Eliza and her Monsters*. Or even *Optimists Die First*. Read *Speak* for Christ's sakes. And even *Fangirl* which has an accurate depiction of social anxiety.

Don't read this.

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## **Elise Smith says**

Words can't express how much I love this book! I find Tamar so easy relate to as a fellow BPD sufferer. I would highly recommend to read this book!!

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## **Marta Sala says**

DNF

2° of 3x1

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## **Joelie says**

I have mixed feelings.

Firstly I dont have any experience with a person that is suicidal so im not going to mention my opinion of whether I think this is an accurate portrayal of what it looks like.

Positives:

It was a strong narrative and i enjoyed looking into the world from the eyes of someone that is hurting themselves and isnt really sure why they are doing it.

I felt Tamar's helplessness and fear and its what kept me interested in the story.

I likes that we got to go back and see the chain of events from Tamars perspective rather than just listen to her relay the whole story in a therapists office

Negatives:

The subject matter is very confronting and detailed which should make for a really impacting read, however the writing felt a little messy so I was getting distracted trying to follow the story.

I dont think that Tamar's parents would pay for her to be in an institution and also allow her to smoke at home but get annoyed at her drinking.....that doesnt seem logical.

Elle was.....insufferable - mental illness or not. I dont think a mental illness like depression or bi-polar gives you an excuse to act petulantly.

There where a some serious issues brought to light and not handled in the book.....maybe it was for shock value but this story already has many triggers in it, as an author you have an obligation to discuss topics if you are going to bring them into the story.

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