



After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away

Joyce Carol Oates

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In the raw was how the world felt now. My feelings were raw, my thoughts were raw and hurtful like knife blades. . . . In the blue had been my place to hide, now In the raw there was nowhere to hide.

Jenna Abbott separates her life into two categories: before the wreck and after the wreck, Before the wreck, she was leading a normal life with her mom in suburban New York. After the wreck, Jenna is alone, trying desperately to forget what happened that day on the bridge. She's determined not to let anyone get close to her -- she never wants to feel so broken and fragile again.

Then Jenna meets Crow. He is a powerfully seductive enigma, and Jenna is instantly drawn to him. Crow is able to break down the wall that Jenna has built around her emotions, and she surprises herself by telling him things she hasn't told anyone else. Can Jenna bring herself to face the memories she's tried so hard to erase?

After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away Details

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From Reader Review After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away for online ebook

Leslie says

Spoiler Alert

A young adult book, "After the Wreck" is about Jenna, a teenage girl who is in an accident with her mother who is killed. Jenna feels, though she isn't sure, that she may be to blame. Jenna's life begins spiraling out of control "after the wreck" as her loneliness and guilt lead her to make dangerous decisions involving drugs and alcohol abuse.

Refreshingly, this teenage character doesn't blame everyone else in her life for her problems and it's evident she feels powerless to pull herself together. When she finally makes a decision to help someone else, she also takes control of her life and finds unexpected help from a motorcycle riding, tall, dark and handsome "Crow." It's no accident that he's named Crow, because throughout the book images of birds are integrated with Jenna's wish to fly away into "the blue".

I admit at first I was disappointed that the Crow came along, with his typical dangerous good looks and sex appeal, characteristic lately of many male YA novels. When I started reading about him I was thinking, Ms. Oates, please don't disappoint me with this character. And of course, she didn't,

how could I have doubted her? JCO doesn't allow Crow to become the typical hero; he helps Jenna, but he doesn't "save" her. He has his own demons which he ends up admitting to Jenna and even when Jenna realizes he is far from the perfect guy, she still wants a romantic relationship with him, but thank God JCO doesn't allow the two of them to develop an obsessive love for each other. Instead, both Crow and Jenna, though remaining friends, must individually follow the path their choices and life circumstances have made for them. JCO portrays them sympathetically as "accident prone" young adults who find within themselves they are individually strong enough to deal with life.

"After the Wreck" is an example of a novel with something important to share with kids, in contrast to one that's purpose is solely to entertain. Of course teenagers must have access to all types of YA fiction and there's definitely room for fantastic, sexy vampires who save girls from other exceptionally evil vampires and wonderfully, hunky werewolves. God bless Stephanie Meyers for writing great, long books for kids who otherwise would never have attempted anything over 50 pages, and hopefully, feeling successful with their long Gothic fantasy, will go on to read something, maybe not as long, but definitely more substantial. Who knows, maybe one of them will ask me, "Miss, do you have any books about real teenagers?" Now I have just the right one.

Looking forward to Freaky Green Eyes, Sexy, and Big Mouth, Ugly Girl her other YA books. The pile is getting higher.

Arminzerella says

Jenna Abbott wakes up (sort of) in the hospital after a terrible car accident on the Tappan Zee bridge, where

her mother was killed and she was terribly injured. She's on so much medication that she seems to drift up out of herself and "into the blue" – a phrase she keeps repeating to herself. That's where she wants to stay, too, so she doesn't have to think about what's going to happen now. Despite her wishes, Jenna does have to come down, and she does have to make decisions about her life now that her mother is gone. She can't bear to live with her father, who left them for some new family that he's made, and who doesn't know her or understand her and hasn't been at all sensitive about the situation that she's in, so Jenna chooses to live with her aunt and uncle and their family. It's a really difficult transition for her. She leaves behind all of her friends, her home, and everything that used to be important to her. She's extremely prickly with her new family and doesn't make friends quickly or easily. There's one person who seems to understand her – Crow – an older guy that goes to her high school, but Jenna's too hurt and angry and then embarrassed to really open up to him until the end.

The one friend Jenna does make is Trina, and Trina is trouble with a capital TR. She's reckless and careless and drinks, does drugs, and parties whenever she can. Jenna's drawn to her for some reason. During the last party they attend together, a bunch of older guys get rough with Jenna and Trina. Jenna escapes serious injury only because she gets sick and throws up on one of them. The rest take Trina into another room, strip her, and attempt to gang rape her. Jenna manages to get help, but not before Trina is severely beaten. Trina refuses to speak to Jenna, and her mother moves her away – no charges are pressed against the guys who raped her. Jenna gets some flak from the guys who are still in school with her – for ratting them out. It's Crow who steps in and defends her, and it's then that she finally finds someone who understands what she's been through.

There's no romantic ending for Jenna and Crow. We find out that Crow is a much more complicated person (with a more complicated life) than it first appears – he's already got a daughter and as soon as he graduates, he'll be moving to another city to live with the mother of his child. Jenna discovers that she has the strength to go on and even the desire. Once she wants to live, things begin to fall into place for her.

Short, with short sentences, readers will race through Jenna's troubled story. For those who like gritty, issue-rich teen fiction, this will be most appealing. Jenna's anger and drug dependence didn't do a whole lot for me – I think because I'm not struggling with these issues. I'm not sure that I ever did. I was most intrigued by Crow, and would have liked to hear a story from his perspective. Still, this was a decent story, and should be appreciated by a wide audience. I'm glad that Joyce Carol Oates didn't give Jenna's story a romantic ending – this was much more realistic.

Kevin Hinman says

Oh? Another Joyce Carol Oates story in which young women are sexually abused by older men. No one presses charges and the cycle of violence continues for another Oates day. Oh, there's some other drek about a car crash and some hunky older boy that reads like it's out of R. L. Stein.

Just awful.

Erin says

Jenna Abbott is a high school freshman trying to come to terms with the car accident that killed her mother and sent her to the hospital. Jenna vows that she won't let anyone get close to her again - they always leave her anyway. So when she goes to live with her aunt and uncle in New Hampshire, she pushes her family and former friends away, choosing instead to befriend Trina. Trina, who has many problems of her own, takes Jenna under her wing and introduces her to the world of cutting class, underage drinking, and drug use. After Jenna is rushed to the emergency room to have her stomach pumped, she starts to evaluate her friendship with Trina.

Throughout the entire ordeal, Jenna's thoughts are constantly on two things: the car accident, and the mysterious biker named Crow who has caught her attention. Will Jenna ever allow herself to let anyone in?

This story had a lot of feeling behind it. Jenna is extremely broken by the events that take place, and does everything in her power to prevent it from happening again. Her struggle to cross the bridges in her life - physical and emotional - make for an authentic story that was hard to put down. It did drag a bit in the middle, during her "friendship" with Trina, and I found myself asking how many wrong/illegal things this girl could talk Jenna into doing before something bad happened or before she got smart and left Trina behind.

Karen Crowe says

Fascinating page-turner.

Salty Swift says

Realistic, if not a bit simplistic picture of post-dramatic syndrome a teen girl suffers after a car accident that involves her and her mom. Drug abuse is the focal point of the story along with depression and finding a balance in new family structure. I only wish the turns the story takes were less sugary...

Kelly says

Whenever I read Joyce Carol Oates I kind of hate myself. It's overly dramatic and tries a little too hard to be artsy, yet when I finish, I can't stop thinking about it. It's a very haunting quality.

Tranna Foley says

From Destiny library record, "Blaming herself for the car accident on the Tappan Zee Bridge that killed her mother, fifteen-year-old Jenna undergoes a difficult physical and emotional recovery."

I liked it okay, but not as much as Big Mouth, Ugly Girl (also by Oates). I do feel that she did a good job conveying the sense of loss and confusion that a teenager would feel after a wreck like the one in the book. Also, the relief of being "in the blue" that painkillers give shows how tempting drugs are for teens.

Review from School Library Journal:

Gr 9 Up—Jenna Abbott, 15, is struggling to come to terms with the car accident that killed her mother and nearly took her own life as well. Formerly athletic and smart, she suddenly finds herself unable to concentrate or communicate with anyone. She is broken in both body and spirit and desperate to escape into the blue, which is how she remembers the drug-induced haze immediately after the accident. Not wanting anything to do with her father and his new family in California, she moves to New Hampshire to live with her aunt and uncle, and begins looking for ways to escape. She steals OxyContin from her uncle's medicine cabinet and becomes friends with Trina, who is dealing with her own substance-abuse problems. It takes two near-disasters for Jenna to tentatively open up to her classmate Crow and face her fears and grief. Oates is at her best telling the stories of teenage girls dealing with internal trauma and outside pressures. Jenna's pain at losing the only person truly close to her and the isolation she creates for herself are poignantly drawn. Her understanding that her choices are not what her mother would want for her is especially telling and may speak to teens in comparable situations. Similar in topic to E. R. Frank's Wrecked (S & S, 2005), this powerful novel is well worth reading.—Stephanie L. Petruso, Anne Arundel County Public Library, Odenton, MD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Ina Vainohullu f says

Als Jennas Mutter bei einem Autounfall stirbt, wird sie selbst schwer verletzt und findet nur langsam ins Leben zurück. Der Unfall hat Jenna nicht nur körperliche Spuren und den Verlust der Mutter hinterlassen, sondern er hat sie auch psychisch verändert und macht aus einem früher einmal lebensfrohen Mädchen, einen Teenager der in unerreichbare Tiefen rutscht. Sie versinkt in bodenlosem Selbsthass, verliert sich in Schuldgefühlen und kapselt sich immer weiter ab. Sie entzieht sich ihrer Familie, umgibt sich mit den falschen Freunden, betäubt sich mit Medikamenten und Drogen, bis die Situation schließlich eskaliert und sie endlich aufwacht...

Meinung:

Bis vor kurzem war mir die Autorin Joyce Carol Oates leider so gar kein Begriff und das obwohl ich doch reichlich Jugendliteratur verschlinge. Umso mehr freue ich mich jetzt, das ich durch den ungewöhnlichen, langen Buchtitel und den ansprechenden Klappentext auf diesen Roman und vor allem auf die Autorin aufmerksam wurde.

Joyce Carol Oates hat einen sehr ausgefallenen, eindringlichen und hervorstechenden Schreibstil durch den sie mir Jennas Gedankenwelt näherbringt. Sie wählt die Ich-Form und ich muss gestehen das ich eine Weile brauchte, bis ich mit ihrem Stil warm wurde. Zwischen den eigentlich durchweg ruhigen Zeilen steckt unendlich viel Tiefgang und es schwingen so viele Emotionen mit, das ich beim Lesen ganz aufgewühlt und gerührt war.

Allgegenwärtig nagen Schuldgefühle an Jenna. Sie kann sich kaum an den Unfall erinnern und doch blitzt immer wieder Bilder auf, die sie aus der Bahn werfen. Hat sie ihrer Mutter ins Lenkrad gegriffen? War da ein Tier auf der Fahrbahn? Was tatsächlich geschah ist nicht greifbar, doch durch ihren Verdacht, die alleinige Schuld am Unfall zu tragen, rutscht Jenna immer tiefer und tiefer in einen Sumpf aus Selbsthass und Drogen. Sie haut sich Medikamente in den Kopf um den nagenden Schmerz, den Verlust und all die offenen Fragen zu betäuben. Zu all diesen Problemen mit sich selbst, kommt der Hass auf ihren Vater, der sie verlassen und eine neue Familie gegründet hat, der kaum noch Zeit für sie hat und sie nach dem Unfall

bevormunden will. Jenna weigert sich vehement zu ihm zu ziehen und wird stattdessen von ihrer Tante aufgenommen.

Doch dort angekommen kapselt sie sich immer weiter ab, lässt niemanden an sich heran und verweigert jede Form der Hilfe.

Das ändert sich auch nicht, als sie dem geheimnisvollen Crow und seiner Clique begegnet. Im Gegenteil: es wird noch schlimmer. Denn Crow selbst bietet ihr anfangs zwar seine Hilfe an, macht sich dann jedoch ziemlich rar. In der Hoffnung ihn wiederzusehen, gibt sich Jenna mit seinen Freunden ab. Allesamt junge Erwachsene, deren Leben von Drogen, Alkohol, Gewalt und Sex bestimmt wird. Jenna fällt, noch tiefer, bis die Situation irgendwann komplett aus dem Ruder läuft und sie endlich aufwacht.

Was mich ein bisschen, vielleicht nicht gerade gestört, aber irritiert hat, war, das ich davon ausgegangen bin, das Crow hier zum heimlichen Helden wird und sich zwischen Jenna und ihm eine klassische Liebesgeschichte entspinnt, in der sich beide gegenseitig retten, denn auch Crow hat kein leichtes Leben. Crow wird ohne sein Wissen zu einem Anker für Jenna, dabei erscheint er eigentlich nie selbst auf der Bildfläche, was es für mich schwer macht, ihn mir vorzustellen. Erst gegen Ende des Buches taucht er plötzlich öfter auf und beginnt Jenna zu helfen, bleibt für mich aber leider ein gesichtsloser Charakter. Das fand ich sehr schade, denn irgendwie hatte ich mir davon ein bisschen mehr versprochen.

Das Ende kommt also anders als erwartet, stellt mich aber zufrieden.

Fazit:

"Nach dem Unglück schwang ich mich auf, breitete meine Flügel aus und flog davon" ist ein tiefgründiger, sprachlich glanzvoller Jugendroman über Schuld, Selbsthass und den Weg aus der Dunkelheit. Ein emotionales Werk das ich nicht nur jungen Lesern unbedingt ans Herz legen möchte.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Sally Kruger, aka "Readingjunky" for TeensReadToo.com

Joyce Carol Oates's new book for teens has a long title and it really does sort of give away the ending. Although, the ending is probably not the most important, rather the journey and its twists and turns.

Jenna is in a tragic accident with her mother on the Tappan Zee Bridge. Her mother and the driver of the other car are killed, leaving Jenna a survivor, but at what cost? The circumstances of the accident are unclear. What Jenna does remember leads her to believe she might have been responsible.

As Jenna struggles to recover from her injuries, she lives in a drug-induced haze. Her father, who remarried years ago, has a new family. Jenna certainly doesn't feel welcome in his home, so she's told she will be living with an aunt and uncle. Her mother's house is sold and her new home comes complete with two cousins, a new school, and the sometimes nosy concern of a small town.

Attempting to cope with new surroundings and the death of her mother sends Jenna into a tailspin of emotions. She meets new friends, but gravitates to those who help her forget with pills and alcohol. An accidental overdose lands Jenna in the emergency room and under the care of a therapist. Despite the care and concern of her caregivers, her life continues to spin out of control.

Finally there is the arrival of Crow with his dark and mysterious side. Jenna finds she can talk to Crow about things she can't say to anyone else. Does he care about her? Does he have the answers to get her back on track?

AFTER THE WRECK, I PICKED MYSELF UP, SPREAD MY WINGS, AND FLEW AWAY captured me right from the start. Jenna's struggle felt authentic and true. I was touched by her pain and sensitive to her attempts to move on, only to drift back into confusion. Oates definitely outdoes herself with this one.

Mari says

Marking this three stars is strange, because this is a well crafted book, if not one that you *enjoy* reading. It's short, and relatively easy to read, though it does take on hefty topics like drug abuse, drinking, and rape. I've read complaints about this book "trying too hard" but I enjoyed the way JCO played with words and structure. It gives the book a duality: flimsy, yet gritty, much like the life of our protagonist after she's involved in a fatal car accident.

I understood Jenna all throughout the book, even when I wanted to slap her.

I liked the character of Crow, but his involvement in the storyline was the weakest part for me, and the most forced thing. There was a bridge scene that had me rolling my eyes, because it takes Crow like 10 minutes to get Jenna through some issues she's been battling all book long. Okay.

Either way, I can appreciate this book for it's merit and substance.

Sirah says

I suppose I should have expected that a teen novel about recovery would inevitably involve drugs, which means it would inevitably involve a rape scene. If you were not expecting this, consider this a trigger warning. It's not graphic, but it's there.

Anyway, aside from the PTSD I will now have to deal with for the next few days, I rather enjoyed this book. The title is poetic, and the rest of the novel follows that theme, cleverly using words, punctuation, sentence structure, and sometimes poor grammar to illustrate a depth of feeling that is almost palatable. It was very easy to empathize with the main character even as she makes unhealthy choices because I as the reader get an intimate look into the brokenness in her brain. This isn't a romantic tale either; I appreciate the break from the cliché "love fixes everything" rhetoric. While romance plays a part in this story, it is neither the focus of the book nor the solution to the conflicts therein. I don't have much else to stay about this book. It's a raw and real book, but beautiful in its brokenness.

Kristen says

Totally possible that I just wasn't in the mood for a book like this, especially as I generally enjoy Joyce Carol Oates, but this book was just...okay. The recovery story of a young woman whose mom dies in the car accident that she survived, this just felt disjointed and incomplete. And disappointing. I just finished it with

the thought, really? That's it? I mean, yeah, duh, I get some of it, but it just felt off. It was a quick read, so yay for that, but I don't know that I'd recommend it unless you're just looking for something fast and easy.

Rachael says

Jenna Abbott was just a normal girl living a normal life, until the wreck happened. Nothing was the same after the wreck as before it—Jenna's friends, her home, even her own self. She has been irrevocably changed, whether she likes it, or wants to admit it, or not. She's really only a shell of the girl she once was, clinging desperately to distant memories of happiness even though she's on the verge of completely losing it. She can't trust anyone, can't let herself trust anyone, even her own family. And then Jenna meets Crow, who's got secrets of his own. Jenna finds that she can open herself up to him, but will this put her on the path of redemption and self forgiveness, or will she continue down the ugly road of self-destruction? In this emotional and moving story, Oates explores the trail of damage that death causes and the fragile strength required to rise about it.

Most of this story can be summed up with its lengthy title, *After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away*, because that is, in essence, what Jenna struggles with doing and eventually accomplishes. I really appreciated Oates' sometimes simplistic writing style because it so effectively conveyed Jenna's thoughts, emotions, and delusions. It's from this style of writing that I was able to truly grasp how damaged Jenna was by the wreck, and it caused my heart to go out to her. There is something so fragile and delicate about Jenna's character that makes the reader want to protect and take care of her, but at the same time, Jenna's nature does not permit this type of babysitting. I loved how complex Jenna was and how she struggled to distinguish between dream and reality, because I feel this is an issue many of us also struggle with, although not necessarily on so desperate a scale as Jenna. *After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away* is an emotional journey and moving tale about death, forgiveness, and everlasting friendship.

This novel is one of those that you want to take your time reading to fully understand. It ranks up with other novels on the same topic such as *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *Freeze Frame* by Heidi Ayarbe, and *Saving Zoë* by Alyson Noël.

Fanny says

Jag kunde inte hjälpa det. När jag börjat läsa en bok (och i det här fallet kommit nästan halvvägs) måste jag avsluta den.
