

Title: *Be Not Far From Me*
Author: Mindy McGinnis
Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Lea N., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 22, 2021

The story takes place in a forest filled part of Tennessee, where Ashley Hawkins and her friends Meredith and Kavita begin the story by hiking up to a campsite to meet up with the boys from town and get drunk. Ashley is introduced as the main character, decently athletic, and very familiar with the wilderness. She likes to run, hike, and is constantly getting irritated by Meredith, the “visual” of the group. Although Meredith is more interested in applying eyeliner and walking in heels than sacrificing beauty for comfort, the two are, after all, friends, and help each other out when the time is needed. Shortly after the quick introduction, the trio reaches the campsite and meets up with the boys, one of them being Duke, Ashley’s boyfriend. Unfortunately, Duke’s ex-girlfriend, Natalie, also shows up, and Natalie and Duke start shooting each other looks which are getting longer and longer. After a couple beers, Ashley goes to bed after catching yet another long stare at Natalie from Duke. She doesn’t sleep for long, her bladder getting the better of her. One event leads to another, and soon enough her mind is foggy, her vision blurred, and her feet are carrying her further from the guy that cheated on her with his ex. Eventually Ashley hits a rock, breaks a foot, and finds herself alone in the middle of a forest. This is where her story begins, as she has to survive alone with nothing but the clothes on her back and the knowledge she possesses. Will she stay alive for long enough to find her way back to civilization? She undergoes many challenges, from sleeping in a meth trailer to getting an infection to losing her scholarship, as well as revisits many memories, most of them starring Davey Beets, her favorite counselor at Camp Little Fish who mysteriously disappeared one day. She remains strong throughout the entire book, going where many would have shimmied away. She is Ashley Hawkins, goddammit, and she will survive to see her father again.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

Absolutely! The plot, although a tad bit repetitive in style as the book went on, was constantly adding that one additional twist, or that one seemingly unnecessary memory, where in the end all the seemingly different plotlines or thoughts tied together quite nicely.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right. I read it over the course of a day, although it felt like I’ve been reading it for a week, in a good way.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

The book would be appropriate for seventh graders and up, due to the implication of mature content in the beginning. Although there are certain scenes which involve potentially squeamish content (open wounds, etc), they aren’t described with that intent. Rather, they are described for the sake of being aware of them and their setbacks.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this to a reader open to different types of writings and genres, as it begins with romance and ends with action. Those who liked “Hatchet” by Gary Paulson or “The Cay” by Theodore Taylor are sure to like this book as well. It is quite similar in concept and execution, even if the situations of all three books being quite different.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

It would be helpful to know that the story itself differs greatly from the beginning pages. This is one of those “don’t judge a book by its cover” types of reads, as the plot really does take an unexpected turn from the cliché start. Personally, when I started reading the book, I lost track of time quite rapidly, so it might be best to set some time aside before plunging into the novel.

Rating:

Out of 5 stars, I would give this book a three star rating. This is because even though the story pulled me in and the characters were filled out, rather than being flat stick figures in the corner waiting for their lines to be read, the plot was a tad bit cliché. The beginning, although an uncommon start (A trio hiking up to a campsite to drink some beer and enjoy themselves), quickly led into a well known sequence of events- An attractive/appealing character identifies themselves as a threat to a relationship between the main character and someone else, and when the main character decides to leave the scene/situation, said attractive person shoots their shot, resulting in the main character (usually female at this point) exiting quickly and stumbling into trouble during their “escape”. However, this is right about where the cliché ends, and the story segways into an interesting plot line, earning the remainder of the stars.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Yujay A., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 29, 2021

Ashley Hawkins is a teenage girl who lives on the edge of the Smoky Mountains. Ashley is a star cross-country runner and has extremely good survival skills as she has been exploring the forest since she was young. One weekend, Ashley and her friends decide to hike through the Smokies and party. The plan is to hike for a day through the woods, party, camp for one night, and come back the next day. Everything goes smoothly until Ashley catches her drunk boyfriend cheating on her with another girl. In a drunken rage, Ashley starts blindly running off into the forest, with no sense of where she was going. However, she trips and falls off a ledge, and wakes up with no idea where she is, and a broken foot. Ashley only has the clothes on her back and has no food or tools. Her foot has red marks signaling infection, and her friends simply abandoned her, so she must make her way out of the forest. Luckily, Ashley has extensive knowledge of the forest and has great survival skills because of Davey Beet, a counselor at a summer camp she was sent to when she was young. Davey set off into the same woods years ago and never returned, but before leaving, he taught Ashley everything he knew about surviving the Smokies. In order to survive and escape the forest, Ashley needs food, temporary shelter, and needs to get rid of the infection creeping up her leg. Although she is in extreme pain, she pushes herself and hikes through the forest, and along the way finds a drug van, kills wild animals, and has to cut off her foot to survive, all before finally reaching a highway where she is rescued. Ashley was assumed dead, and her story soon becomes national news. Although Ashley cannot run anymore and her life is changed, she emerges from the forest having learned valuable lessons. Ashley returns into the Smokies to try and find Davey Beet’s body so that he can have the funeral he deserves.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot of this novel definitely kept me interested, as it was very intense and there was a lot of suspense. Many of the scenes were captivating, such as when Ashley had to kill a wild animal, and there was a lot of suspense overall, as you were waiting to see whether she could survive.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of this book was a little too fast, but it helped the book not be boring. At times it was a bit difficult to understand what was happening as there was a lot of action, but it was not too fast that it made the novel unreadable.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grade levels 9 and up, as it has graphic content, violence, and many gruesome descriptions. The novel also has strong language and alcohol/drug use.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this novel to any reader who enjoys realistic fiction with a lot of suspense. Anyone who enjoyed the book Hatchet would also like this book, and anyone who likes survival stories would enjoy reading this.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

The book has many flashbacks to Ashley's childhood and history with Davey Beet.

Rating:

I would rate Be Not Far from Me 5 stars as it was very interesting and was an extremely captivating read. There was a lot of action and suspense, and there were no moments in the book where I was bored or not engaged. The novel also had a lot of funny moments, as well as more serious sad moments. Be Not Far from Me kept me guessing what would happen next and was very fun to read. Overall, I would definitely recommend this to anyone looking for a good realistic fiction or survival story.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Benjamin W., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: January 29, 2022

Seventeen-year old Ashley Hawkins is well on her way to finishing high school, with a cross-country scholarship that will get her into college and beyond. One day, she goes hiking into the Smokies with her friends Meredith and Kavita. They all look forward to a night of drinking and partying with a couple of classmates. Ashley plans to spend her time with her boyfriend Duke, but when she catches him with his ex late at night, a drunken rage sends her running into the forest, only to be stopped when she injures her foot. In the morning, she realizes that her foot is crushed and that she is lost and alone, with nothing but the clothes on her body. While most people would have been completely lost, Ashley is not. Nature has always been her second home and she knows exactly how to survive in it. A big reason for that was because her dad had made her go to Camp Little Fish when she was younger. There, she had met a man named Davey Beet who had taught her all kinds of survival techniques in the woods. So after a night of sleep, she makes a makeshift sling for her injured foot and starts moving. However, things get worse when she discovers a stream of white pus leaving her foot, a tell-tale sign of an infection. Additionally, she is very aware that Davey Beet had also been defeated by the very forest she was in now, as a broken heart had sent him running into the forest and never to have come out. As despair begins to set through the days, a terrible miracle occurs. Ashley finds a sharp piece of flint, which was just the thing she needed to cut off her infected foot. At first, she doesn't want to use it, but as she continues to walk, she stumbles upon an old trailer that used to

be used for making drugs. In it, she finds pills and whiskey. With all the tools necessary for her to cut off her foot, Ashley decides to proceed with the process. In the morning, she pops some oxy and chops off part of her foot, dousing it in whiskey to clean it. She passes out and wakes up lying in her own blood and coming off of a high. After a nice rest, Ashley decides to continue moving. However, she spends days finding nothing and turning into something more like an animal than a human. Eventually, she gives up and loses her mind. She starts running without a care in the world. After staying upright for a bit, Ashley falls down a hill and severely injures herself. However, at the bottom, she finds a tent and in it, Davey Beet, sleeping but dead. Helpless, she curls up next to him and falls asleep. In the morning, a new hunger overtakes Ashley. She wants to prove to the world that she can be stronger than Davey Beet. So after taking some of his supplies, she sets off once again to look for civilization. After two days, she finally finds some electric lines, and by following them, finds some workers. They get her to the hospital where she recovers from all of her injuries. There, she is met by family and the news crews, who all want to know her story. She tries to ignore the news and eventually they go away. After a year, Ashley suits up to go back into the forest, but this time with equipment and the goal of finding Davey Beet.

Now, I will answer some questions about the book:

Did the plot keep you interested? - This plot definitely kept me interested. This book was filled with suspense that kept me wondering what would happen next. There was also a lot of action and plot twists that kept me engaged in the book.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right? - I think the pace of this book was just right. While Ashley did spend a lot of time in the woods, the author didn't drag the book out too long by talking about non-important details. She also kept the book moving by adding events like Ashley cutting off her own foot.

What level(s) is this book appropriate for? - I think this book is appropriate for kids in grades 8-12. There is some profanity in this book as well as talk about sex and drugs so this book wouldn't be appropriate for younger kids.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to? - I would recommend this book to readers who like an adventure story. I would also recommend this book to readers who like a strong female protagonist.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book - There's nothing else you need to know. Everything was clear.

I would rate this book *4 stars*. The plot was pretty good and kept me interested the entire time. Everything was well explained and clear. The author did a great job of developing the character of Ashley.