



## Damsel Distressed

*Kelsey Macke*

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*Hot girls get the fairy tales. No one cares about the stepsisters' story. Those girls don't get a sweet little ending; they get a lifetime of longing.*

Imogen Keegen has never had a happily ever after—in fact, she doesn't think they are possible. Ever since her mother's death seven years ago, Imogen has pulled herself in and out of therapy, struggled with an “emotionally disturbed” special ed. label, and loathed her perma-plus-sized status.

When Imogen's new stepsister, the evil and gorgeous Ella Cinder, moves in down the hall, Imogen begins losing grip on the pieces she's been trying to hold together. The only things that gave her solace—the theatre, cheese fries, and her best friend, Grant—aren't enough to save her from her pain this time.

While Imogen is enjoying her moment in the spotlight after the high school musical, the journal pages containing her darkest thoughts get put on display. Now, Imogen must resign herself to be crushed under the ever-increasing weight of her pain, or finally accept the starring role in her own life story.

And maybe even find herself a happily ever after.

## Damsel Distressed Details

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Author : Kelsey Macke

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## From Reader Review Damsel Distressed for online ebook

### Abbie says

*Most of us grew up with stories of happily ever after, of good triumphing over evil. But in real life the beautiful girl isn't always the good, kind-hearted princess; and the plain girl isn't always the bitter, angry monster. Sometimes it's the other way around...*

### This is a retelling of...

Imogen Keegan has been depressed ever since her mother's death. It also doesn't help that her father is always away and leaves her in the care of her stepmother. Imogen drowns her sorrows away in containers of food and her secret journal.

She's fat and she knows it. She feels insecure about herself and her image, she pines away for her best friend who she thinks will never want her; and she hides her talent behind the sound booth instead of shining like the star that she is.

But despite of her insecurities, Imogen is genuinely a nice person. She is warm and kind. She is smart and talented. She writes poetry, doodles, and even sings. But Imogen is still filled with all-consuming sadness.

Then Imogen's stepsister Carmella shows up and drives her into more dark waters. Carmella renames herself as Ella for Cinderella. She's beautiful and popular and overflowing with confidence --- everything Imogen is not and wishes to be.

Carmella is a bully. She has a wicked tongue that spews venom and sends Imogen spiraling into self-disgust. But Imogen has loving friends and a loyal prince charming to defend her. Soon she is able to stand up for herself and love the person she is.

I fell in love with this story because even though it's a modern-day retelling of Cinderella, it's realistic and filled with raw emotion. I couldn't help but become frustrated with Imogen but I knew she couldn't help feeling insecure. I loved her journey even though she had to endure emotional turmoil. I also loved Grant's kindness and loyalty, he was there for her always. It kind of makes you wish you had a guy like that for yourself.

The writing was beautiful and I was in awe of the artistic drawings. However, I felt bad for Carmella. I know that she did despicable things but she was also experiencing pain of her own. Everyone has a story, even villains and I felt that Carmella used a facade to protect herself from her own sadness. I wanted her to be happy too.

Anyway, all in all this was a touching tale that pulled at my heartstrings. I highly recommend this book to anyone who seeks inspiration.

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## Erica Crouch says

### TRIGGER WARNING: SELF-HARM

I love Kelsey Macke, and when I heard that her book, *Damsel Distressed*, was coming out, I was excited and terrified. I've heard so much about it from her and knew that I wanted to read it — but I was worried. What if it wasn't good? Or if I just didn't like it? What would I do then? Luckily, and unsurprisingly, Kelsey Macke wrote a beautiful, wonderful, brilliant story of rich characters and I can say with absolute sincerity that I loved (\*LOVED\*) *Damsel Distressed*.

*Damsel Distressed* follows Imogen Keegen, a depressed, overweight, hilariously snarky seventeen-year-old. The story takes place over the time of a play — *Once Upon a Mattress* — as she is working as the Sound Goddess techie, dressed in standard stage crew black. And while this should be a time of fun-stress-excitement for Gen, as she's a huge theatre nerd (me too, Imogen, me too), she instead feels like she's teetering on the edge of a breakdown because of, well, a number of reasons. First, she is still dealing with the death of her mother some years back; second, her father has recently remarried, seemingly out of the blue, though really not out of the blue; third, she basically had a little mini mental breakdown last winter following said marriage; and fourth, her new stepsister Carmella, who is already not too keen on Imogen, is moving in and hellbent on destroying her. Oh, and did I mention that Carmella Cinder is now insisting on being called Ella? As in Cinder, Ella? And just what does that make Imogen, the ugly stepsister?

Once I started reading *Damsel Distressed*, I was sucked in. Imogen was a unique and realistic \*GASP\* protagonist with a powerful voice. She was a real teenager dealing with real issues — depression, anxiety, death, family things, friend drama... No matter what you've been through, there is something inside of Imogen that you can relate to. And for me, her character struck really close to my heart, for a number of reasons.

I've mentioned it a few times before, but I suffer from some serious, heavy anxiety/depression. As Imogen went through everything with her anxiety, I was right there next to her. I knew moments before she had a panic attack that she would have a panic attack, and I could feel that irrational fear with her. I knew that feeling of needing to get out of a situation, of wanting to hide away from friends and family when things got particularly bad. That feeling of "I'm too hot" and "I'm too cold" and "I'm going to be sick" that comes with feeling overwhelming anxiety. Imogen also deals with self-harm, and it can be triggering if someone has been through self-harm themselves, but this topic was handled with such gravity and felt true and necessary to the character and story that I think it was absolutely appropriate to include.

I cannot thank Kelsey enough for writing a character suffering with psychological disorders like anxiety and depression so unabashedly realistically. Nothing about it was romanticized or shied away from. There wasn't a moment where I felt that the illnesses were being looked down on or treated as anything less than physical ailment. I'll admit that there were a few chapters toward the end of the book that had me bawling my eyes out because of how close to home they hit for me.

Now, on to some more lighthearted stuff... The play! I loved the level of detail and information we got surrounding the production of *OUAM*. I was once very involved in theater, and nearly in the same position as Imogen when my high school put on *Once Upon a Mattress*. That was me backstage (or up in the booth, or running around the dressing room) with a big headset on, mic pressed up to my mouth, finger on the button ready for cues...

(READ THE FULL REVIEW ON MY BLOG: <http://www.erica.patchwork-press.com/...>)

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### **Brooke (The Cover Contessa) says**

I would like to thank Spencer Hill Contemporary for providing me with a copy of this book to read and give an honest review. Receiving this book for free has in no way altered my opinion or review.

Imagine you are Cinderella's sister. She's gorgeous and beautiful and everyone loves her. Your fat and you have tons of mental health issues and people aren't quite sure what to make of you. Well this is that story. The story where we come to see that Cinderella's step sister is not quite who we thought she was.

Imogen has issues. She's overweight, she's had a nervous breakdown, and she takes lot of medications to keep her balanced. Not to mention she has to see a therapist who also tries to keep her in check. It's impossible not to like Gen, not to feel for her and want her to have her HEA. She carries so much on her shoulders and throughout the book there's always that inkling that she can somehow overcome it. But then things always come crashing down on her and she's right back where she started. Despite all her quirks, her eccentricities, her ability to be up one minute and down the next, you fall completely in love with this character. She's smart and witty and absolutely relatable.

I have to say that this book was a bit of an emotional roller coaster for me. I laughed, I cried, my stomach got twisted in knots because I kept thinking something bad was surely going to happen. I love that Macke was not afraid to really delve into the emotional issues Imogen had. To show her audience that there is so much more to being a teen than we ever think. Compared to most YA novels, this one shows so much more of the truth of what teens go through than I've seen in the past. It's not sugar coated, it's not glossed over, it's you and the character in the thick of it page after page.

Macke's writing and ability to engage her characters in interesting and meaningful dialogue is fantastic. The words she uses are sometimes poetic, sometimes harsh, but always on target with bringing you to where you need to be emotionally. Mostly she is able to really pull your focus on the development of the main character, her growth, her change, her resistance, and even her stumbles and falls.

It's a story about finding out who you are in the mist of battling your demons. It classically demonstrates the roller coaster ride that is high school and all the intense issues teens have to face. The gripping reality of the book is really what pulled me in and kept me there. Fans of Gayle Forman will enjoy this one for sure!

\*\*\*Disclosure: I work for Spencer Hill Press but this has in no way altered my reaction to this book\*\*\*

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### **Erin Lynn says**

Full review can be seen at The Hardcover Lover.

First of all, I must applaud Kelsey Macke for the creation of this stunning book. Everything in this book is just perfect. It made me cry. It made me laugh. I pretty much experienced every human emotion possible while reading my book. In my opinion, I feel like the more emotions represented make it a better and more captivating read.

The main character, Imogen, is unlike any YA character that I've ever seen in a book before. First of all, she's overweight. As someone who struggled with my weight my whole life, I finally felt like this weight was being lifted off my shoulders. I'm twenty-five now, but much I still experience the nights where I want to binge eat like Imogen, and I felt like much of her struggles with obesity were realistic and true. Not only is Imogen overweight, but she's also got a lot going on emotionally and mentally. I think fans of books like The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Love Letters to the Dead, and It's Kind of a Funny Story will be drawn to Imogen and enjoy her story.

Macke shows her incredible support of the arts in this book, and as a teacher, I must thank her. I am obviously an English teacher, but I was very involved in my high school's music program when I was a student. I was in concert band, jazz band, pit orchestra, and marching band. I still support that music program to this day, so happy tears were brought to my eyes when I saw just how much Macke cares about the arts. Maybe people will read this book and realize just how important the arts are to keep in schools.

So how exactly does Macke show her support for the arts? Imogen, our main character, is involved in her school's musical. She works in the sound booth. During much of the book, Imogen is at rehearsals. Another way that Macke shows her support of the fine arts is by including a special event dedicated to them in the plot of the book. Can you say awesome? Also, there are going to be pages full of original artwork throughout the book. And finally, Kelsey Macke and her husband are releasing an original album as a soundtrack to the book. Talk about dedication. Ms. Macke certainly knows how to tell a story while supporting the fine arts. Kudos to her.

I loved this book, and everything that it represents. Yes, it's a retelling of "Cinderella" with a point of view twist, but it's so much more than that. It's a book about grief, love, family, and friendship. Most importantly, it's a book about self-acceptance that I think all teenagers and young adults should read.

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### **Lola says**

Could you imagine a Cinderella that is **mean** – cruel even, **bitchy** and **manipulative**?

What if her stepsister is the most **unfortunate** one?

And what would say if Carmella wishes to destroy Imogen's happiness?

I have never read a contemporary fairy tale retelling before, so this book was surprise box for me. While I do prefer much much more the fantasy ones, this was a read that, in my opinion, has originality and is filled with pure emotions and honesty.

Imogen has a lot going on – she's depressive, craves inside her to be like those skinny girls that get every boy and is in love...with her best friend. Comes the time when her father announces her that she will be living with Carmella, a phony person that doesn't seem to have her best interest at heart. She even claims herself to be named Ella Cinder in school, making Imogen look like the ugly – I don't agree – stepsister.

**Hot girls get the fairytales.**

**Hot girls like my stepsister.**

We don't know why Carmella is being so unfair to Imogen...until a good part of the story has passed, and even then it is not one hundred percent clear. But that's good, in a way, since it gives us time and the possibility to make our own interpretation and assumptions. However, I thought it to be quite predictable, and is even a bit cliché, unfortunately.

The romance may have been simple, but it was definitely lovely. And filled with sexual tension and apprehension. What I liked most was the fact that, not only did I like the love interest, but their chemistry was evident. And beautiful. Had it been like the usual boy-and-girl-are-best-friends-but-girl-falls-in-love-with-boy, I would not have enjoyed it – because it is part of my pet peeves in books – but the whole romance/friendship is never less than a cute and smile-worthy one.

**Grant is my gravity. He doesn't force anything, but he is a force. Something I never even notice until I realize I haven't drifted away.**

**He loves me and has shown me that love over and over.**

**But it's not every kind of love.**

**It's just one kind.**

**And it's a really good kind.**

**But it's not the only kind.**

**It's not the kind of love that grew on me.**

I loved the writing.

It wasn't rich with those breath-taking words that crawl on you. On the contrary, it was pretty standard but that means a faster comprehension and connection with the whole plot, characters and themes, at least for me. By the little way, there is LGBT in this – I love love love LGBT. The sentences were beautifully structured and it was definitely a pleasure to read the story.

One shame though is the fact that we don't get to know Carmella very well at all and, since this is a standalone, that is sadly not a good thing. She indeed was a despicable character, but even those ones are ones I want to get to know better. Lack of characterization there. The secondary characters, them, were well-described. They weren't as present as I wished they were – especially Brice and Jonathan – but I do understand that it needed to be focused on Imogen and her story and feelings, especially those.

Have I told you that Imogen has a lovely sense of humour? She does! For instance:

**I try not to gag. "Yeah, no. I've really gotta go." Far, far from you, crazy morning lady.**

**"Well, okay then, honey. Now Dr. Rodriguez called last week and said that since we changed your dosage, we need to keep an eye on the additional weight gain."**

**Additional. I'm going to hit her.**

**"He's worried about the change from June to now, so he says if it goes up again during your November check-up, they're going to reevaluate your scripts."**

**Oh man, this woman is the worst. How dare she stand there all skinny and talk to me about being fat? Insensitive witch.**

Well, well, how can one being resist this type of narration voice? Really enjoyed her personality.

There is also to know that, in this book, there are some beautiful illustrations, such as:

Overall, this is a must-read for those who enjoy psychological books or some containing mental illness, loss, death and joy of life as themes. A great writing style, entertaining female lead and endearing scenes will await you.

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### **Imogene Dacanay says**

4.5 Stars

#### **Damsel Distressed has the most beautiful and promising dedication I've ever read**

*"We often try to hide the parts of ourselves that have been broken. We work so hard to make sure other people never see the bits that make us feel weak. This book is dedicated to those precious, fractured fragments, for teaching us to grow and hope and never, ever stop fighting."*

Reading the first line, I knew I was hooked.

I really like the character of Imogen, despite the fact that her name is only a letter different from mine, I can really connect myself to her. Like she's the one who's voicing my thoughts out, expressing my feelings. She felt so real. Similar to Imogen, I'm not fond of Disney princesses too. She always rant about Disney's Princesses. Though she's in pieces, she tries so hard to be strong. The only thing I hated about her is her callousness to her step mom and dad.

A Cinderella story, but Imogen's not very Cinderella like, she's more like the stepsister. Her mom died instead of father. New mom and stepsister moves in. It was 6 Decembers ago when her father decides to marry another woman. Imogen went hysterical of course she hasn't moved on yet, but she has to. Her dad fell in love, and I hate the fact that instead of being happy for her father, she went crazy about the new mother and sister thing. She started putting cuts on her arms, six cuts- one for each year since her mom died. *Imogene* is broken, and she thinks that she's beyond repair. Yes, I just typed my name. Like Gen, I have a sister (a real one though) and she's adored by everyone. Smart, gorgeous, she has the body I'm rooting for, she's talented. Everyone loves her. Whilst I'm the ignored one. Obviously, I'm insecure. And it pains me that I can see myself on Imogen. I used cut too. Anyway...

Reading Grant and Imogen moments, I felt really cozy. The two of them have been best friends since kindergarten. They're sweet and cute, with the right amount of romanticism. And THE SEXUAL TENSION OH GODS. Grant loves and accepts his best friend for who she is. He's always by her side even if Imo kept on pushing him away.

*"I'll stay." He says.*

The whole time I'm reading I kept on hoping that they'd just kiss already! You'll like them to bits. Imogen has friends whose always there to help her get through the day. They support her, they give her love.

*"People should treat each other with kindness, but I'm not talking about them. You can't fix them. I'm talking about you. You deserve better treatment from yourself."*

I'm glad Gen learned how to face her fears, accept her failures. That she confronted her weaknesses and all the things that were hurting her. She realized that in the loneliness of one's life, there's always light. I was practically tearing up while reading the character's exchange of apologies. Too heartfelt.

Kelsey Macke's writing skill is truly endearing. It wasn't deep or breathtaking, but loved the way her words were constructed nonetheless. I don't know, her style makes me feel comfortable. I really love it.

Though the book touched my heart, and though it's all about being broken and being whole, I'm still left in pieces despite of the lessons. This book is a really powerful one, provocative. This tells us about an individual's insecurities, jealousy, also one's demons. I just had a beautiful, yet emotional journey. **I NEED MORE BOOKS LIKE THIS.**

Btw, thanks to miss Macke, I now have a new mantra!

*"I am whole. I am more than just the pieces that I see. I am so much stronger than I seem."*

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### **Mlpmom (Book Reviewer) says**

Adorable. Heartfelt. Emotional. Genuine. Raw. Beautiful.

These are all words that I would use to describe this wonderful debut novel by Macke. She took a retelling, twisted it and made it absolutely her own so much so that you barely see the original story underneath.

Gen is not your average stepsister fairy tale villain and the princess of the story, is not a princess at all.

Macke tackles some pretty challenging, pretty tough emotional issues in this story and she does it with such finesse that it is all believable, all real, and all something you can't help but actually feel right along with the characters. You see their struggles and they become your own insecurities and issues. You feel their pain and you feel their heartache. Their triumphs are your triumphs and their happiness is something you want more than anything.

I loved Grant and Gen and Brice and Jonathan, how could I not feel for them all and love them all for their strength and their character? I don't think it is possible to not fall in love with this story, with their stories.

I absolutely loved every minute of this read and I can't wait to read more from this author.

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### **shady boots | #WatchPOSE says**

**4.5 stars.** This was great. Just great. Also, this book is begging for me to do this so I just have to:

IF YOU CAN'T LOVE YOURSELF, HOW IN THE HEEEELLLL YOU GONNA LOVE SOMEBODY ELSE, CAN I GET AN AMEN UP IN HERE???

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### **Hazel (Stay Bookish) says**

Visit Stay Bookish to win a copy of this book and for more book reviews!

Have you ever had a book speak to you even before you actually read it? Because I can confidently say that Damsel Distressed spoke to me. It wasn't even a case of 'judge a book by its cover' because I knew about this book before it had its gorgeous cover. I'd simply read the summary and some more bits that Kelsey shared about the book and I knew I needed to read Damsel Distressed. I was so excited about this one that I even preordered it on my kindle app (just so I could read ASAP) despite already ordering a physical copy, which is a first for me.

*When are we gonna get a fat princess? How about a princess with bad acne and crappy posture and the mouth of a sailor? Probably never. Every. Single. One. Is the same. Totally hot. Totally predictable. Snow White has the attention of seven little men, not because she's the only one who can reach the top of the bookshelf, but because she's a porcelain-skinned, ruby-lipped knockout. The Little Mermaid got a prince because she shut her trap for five whole seconds and looks fierce in a bikini. And Cinderella? She's a girl who clearly demonstrates to the prince that she's got lots of experience on her knees and doesn't mind getting dirty.*

Anyway, after finally getting to read Damsel Distressed, I have a newfound love for this book and it knows no bounds. Damsel Distressed was all I ever expected to be and much much more. There was snark and banter and swoons and tears, but most of all, there was heart. In fact there was so much of it that my own heart was filled to the brim. A reversed fairytale retelling of Cinderella, Damsel Distressed explored the story of the 'ugly step sister' who in this case was our female lead, Imogen Keegan.

*I am whole. I am more than just the pieces that I see. I am stronger than I seem.*

Imogen thinks that a happily ever after for a broken, overweight girl like her is impossible. She's meant to be behind the sound booth not center stage of a theatre performance. Her prince charming best friend, Grant, won't ever fall for her the way she has with him. She'll never live up to her princess step sister, Ella Cinder, who is perfect and gorgeous (not to mention evil). Life is a constant struggle for her as she deals with these harsh realities, as well as the death of her mother and the absence of her father. I felt for Imogen so much. The thoughts and feelings her character conveyed stunned me and moved me- they were so honest and heartbreakingly real.

*People should treat each other with kindness, but I'm not talking about them. You can't fix them. I'm talking about you. You deserve better treatment from yourself.*

Imogen's insecurities about being heavy-set which were something I especially shared with her. At almost 160 lbs, some people might say I'm only slightly overweight compared to Imogen's 200 lbs, but when you're the oddball among your petite friends and when your own family likes to remind you about how your voracious appetite and addiction to sweets is getting you bigger, confidence doesn't come easy. You start to

wonder if being chubby is the reason why you're so unpopular or why you've never had a boyfriend. Like Imogen, I rarely had the luxury of feeling pretty. When you see yourself in a character like that, and you root for her to realize that she's beautiful inside and out and she finally does, there's a feeling in your chest that's warm and radiant. So thank you, Kelsey Macke, for writing Imogen the way she was.

*"What if I broke us?" In less than a breath, a smile—his real smile—breaks across his face, and his eyes stare straight into mine as he shakes his head, laughing. "Oh, would you stop being dramatic? Nothing's broken. A little bruised, maybe, but not broken. Never broken. Not us."*

Now, let me talk about Grant, Imogen's bestfriend. OH THIS BOY. I love him to death. I love him because he wears cute geeky shirts and because he always makes Imogen happy. I love him because he is loyal, caring, sweet, wonderful, hilarious, charming and REAL. I love him because he accepts Imogen wholly and believes in her. I love him because he gets her and because he know's what's best for her. I love him because he is the anchor that keeps Imogen grounded. There are a million reasons to love Grant but I love him most because while Imogen may feel alone in battling the darkness that attempts to consume her, he always has her back. No matter what and no matter how bad things got, as he promised her once upon a time.

*Someday you'll have to let some of that pain go to make room in your heart for something even bigger.*

Aside from Imogen and Grant, the rest of the Damsel Distressed cast left such significant marks as well. I loved watching Imogen develop such strong friendships with Brice, Jonathan and Antonique. Imogen's relationship with her family, her stepmother Evelyn, her dad (and even how she deals with her horrid stepsister) was moving. Honestly, I ugly cried a whole lot especially during the last few chapters. And really, the best books are the ones that go so deep and awaken so many many emotions inside of you.

*I feel like a door has been unlocked by a key that was in my pocket the whole time. I've been broken, but I'm not broken. That pain won't disappear anytime soon, maybe not ever, but it's not all I have.*

Damsel Distressed is a beautiful emotional journey. Mixed with amazing music and artworks, Kelsey Macke has created a phenomenal debut novel, one I'm sure will leave a huge impact on its readers as it did for me. Despite grappling with tough issues of grief, self-harm and depression, this book is a shining ray of light—one that promises hope and happy beginnings. This is a story that deserves to be read and I highly recommend it.

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### **Paula M. of Her Book Thoughts! says**

You can also read my review [here!](#)

**"I am whole. I am more than just the pieces that I see. I am stronger than I seem"**

Wow. That gif right there is right, my feelings right now is indescribable. Kelsey Macke just slayed me with her words. I can literally feel my heart squeezing while reading Imogen's thoughts. I don't know how to go about reviewing this book. Frankly, this is a book that will linger in my mind for the rest of my life. *It made an impact on me.*

**Imogen is overweight and depressed. She's Ella Cinder's step sister. And she hides in the audio room because she thinks that that's where she belongs.** Imogen is such a real character that it scares me. She's engraved in my heart now and I'd be lying if I say that it's easy letting her go because it's not. I cried with her, laughed with her, she shared her feeling about everyone that surrounds her and she even let me know her greatest fears. And I am grateful for that. **There are characters that you read, but there are characters that you read.. and stays with you.**

**Imogen is also Grant's best friend, the sound goddess and a precious friend to have.** Grant.. Gosh, how do I even describe Grant? I want to say he's perfect. But he's not. He is absolutely flawed and beautifully made. I have a feeling that I might love him more than Imogen.

**This book is stunning.** It will break your heart. It made my stomach hurt as I recalled my past experiences, and made me cry at how cruel people can be to others. But this book needs to be read. Bullying and depression needs to be brought into the light.

This is not an easy book to read, but well written, capturing the truth and hardness of high school bullying and where it leads to, the damage it can do. With a cast of characters that you will love to hate, Kelsey Macke has portrayed the bullies in this book exceptionally well.

I enjoyed this book despite it's difficult message and content, **a YA book that adults can read, an intelligent book talking about important matters using fiction as the messenger.** What happens to Imogen? Do the bullies get the best of her in the end? Will she learn to love herself so she can finally open her heart for other people who wants to love her?

Damsel Distressed is a powerful debut. It's provocative, beautiful and creative. Kelsey Macke is an author to watch out for. I cannot wait to see what's more in store for her readers. I really hope everyone will read this book.

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**Gray Cox says**

**This is one of the most original re-tellings I've read since Marissa Meyer.**

Instead of the gorgeous Ella being the sweet protagonist, why don't we switch it around to the ugly stepsister?

YES. A 100%, yes.

Besides the plot idea, this was beautifully written. *'I am made of glass. And I've been broken before. I've been in a million little razor-cut pieces and I've been totally lost and alone.'* -Damsel Distressed (pg. 85).

Most books I've read dealing with **depression, anxiety, and self-harm** have romanticized it, and it's disgusting, but this book didn't, it dealt and showed Imogen's feelings with a gritty realness.

This book was diverse, but it felt effortless.

**It was also surprisingly clean, I can only recall one swear word used, although it was crudely suggestive in a few places**, such as Imogen's rant about Disney princesses in her diary: *'And Cinderella? She's a girl who clearly demonstrates to the prince that she's got lots of experience on her knees and doesn't mind getting dirty.'* (pg. 156).

## POINTS

1. A very original plot +1
2. A likeable but complicated character +2
3. Diversity that feels natural +1
4. A stepmother, who actually is kind and wants to be a mother to her stepdaughter (stepmothers get a bad rap, it annoys me). +2
5. Tons of clichés (the mean girl blonde, the boy next door). -1
6. Suggestive themes. -1/2

## TOTAL:

~3.5 stars~

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## Susana says

TW's: cutting

DNF at 68%

I give up. It's not that the book is badly written \_ it isn't \_, but for the life of me I can't listen to Imogene's whining anymore. Yes, she has clinical depression. Yes, her mother died seven years ago when she was about ten years old... I'm not a sociopath, that made me sad, BUT, she has had so much support that I've reached a point in which I just want to scream at her, as well as to keep her from binge eating junk food until she throws up...

~~Some people at this point will probably want to point out that I shouldn't talk like that, that depression doesn't work like that, and that I'm being a bitch. I don't care.~~

This is not a book about a criminal, I'm reading a story about a troubled teen, so as a reader I'm supposed to feel some empathy for her plights... since I'm not, I think it's better if I just stop.

"Objectively" speaking, this story is leaving me all kinds of depressed, stressed and angry.

Oh poor "kid" with a father who cares about her, even if he has his faults. Poor kid with access to

psychological help. Poor kid with a bff who has been there since always... \*breathes\*  
With a friend out of a Dawson's creek plot who decides to be her guardian angel; since he was ten.  
Did I mention how incredible mature these kids are?  
Because, wow, also aren't Grant's parents, the best?!  
Honestly, I kept thinking about that. His best friend is depressed so, "hey mom and dad \_ I'm presuming the guy isn't a clone\_ I'm going to spend the night with my depressed friend, who is a child just like me."  
"Oh, sure honey."  
I CAN'T ANYMORE.  
I hate soap operas, and I hate how judgemental, narrow minded and egotistical Imogene is.  
As for the Cinderella wanna be retelling, what can I say?  
Her stepmother isn't an ogre. Her father isn't dead. Her stepsister is a sociopath just because, and the Grant the Prince has the soul of a dog; clearly, Grant is just way too good for all us mortals.  
(...)  
Also, you wouldn't believe the amount of dialogues and plot involving a high school musical.  
  
As for the secondary characters \_ see, incredible mature peeps \_ they're good people: As I mentioned before, there's the bff, the cute gay couple (one of them a wonderful tailor because... why not?!), and the new girl who is actually a good person.  
All of you deserved more.  
Susana out; I'm mentally drained.

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### **Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says**

**Warning :** This isn't a review, just a *please still love me* post. *Yikes.*

Actual rating : 2.5/5

*(Of course the 'yes' is ticked, you know I'm a hopeful girl, right?)*

Because I think my *I'm putting this on hold because I'm feeling too guilty to dnf it* "**I didn't like the book that much**" is a case of **That's not the book but me.**

To be clear:

- ✓ **I don't want to be annoyed but I am.** Sorry Imogen, maybe I just reached my month limit in teenagers' insecurities.
- ✓ **I don't want to be bored but well, I am.** Sorry writer, because your writing is great, it's just - I don't have a damn clue of how I'm supposed to be interested in highschool stage - I'm just not.
- ✓ **I don't want to guess the end but...** ~~Let's say I am wrong about it and I didn't guess what will happen next, shall we?~~ I wasn't wrong.
- ✓ **I wasn't lying when I said I wasn't a huge fan of this let's love my best friend kind of plot.** It did happen I loved that - but that's far from the majority, unfortunately.

Because here's the thing : sometimes I'm okay with the fact I'm reading a predictable book. *Hey, I'm reading romance for God's sake.*

**But sometimes I'm not. That's not fair, I agree, but that's what I feel right now.**

**Forgive me?**

Of course I'm cheating with that Gif. And I'm really proud of it :p.

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**Let's try this! I never loved Cinderella *that* much in the first place.**

I mean, she was a bit dumb, don't you think? (*please don't hate me for saying this*) I always preferred the birds. What can I say? I'm weird.

But *they're* cute, aren't they?

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Okaaay, I'm *so* missing the point. I'd better read.

**Mei says**

**Actual rating: 2.5 stars**

*"This hurt is never going away. Ever. And neither is yours. But that doesn't mean life is over."*

**This book is certainly not for everybody.** The chances that you love this book largely depends on whether you relate to it and how much you understand it from the main character's perspective, like really feel her, be patient with her and not hate her at all despite how intolerable she is.

Imogen, the main character, is struggling with depression due to grief from her mother's death seven years ago and loathes her plus size body. When her father remarries a woman with a daughter the same age as her--Carmella--and moves to their house, her seemingly okay therapy sessions have gone much worse.

Damsel Distressed is a retelling of Cinderella, but the only resemblance the book has to it is that there is a stepsister and you can tell that she is mean, rude and annoying, and the "princess" gets the prince in the end. And that was the problem. Carmella was so mean and evidently irritating with her flipping hair attitude and that's fine, she's supposed to fill that role since *she is the stepsister after all*. But no justice has been made to her character. Her parents divorced leading to her mom marrying Imogen's father, and I get it, the girl is suffering from a parent's divorce, incomplete family and stepping to a new life with a new sister, away from the life and friends she's always known. Depressing, I know. But while that is already given, the book did not give hints why she acts that way, saying those through her feelings. There was no spotlight for her to share her emotions, and if it's okay for you to know a *minor* spoiler, (view spoiler) And that was sad and I did not like it. **She barely even had dialogues in the book.**

Also, there was a kind of a **slut/body shaming** in this book, which made me hate Imogen even more. *Oh, my stepsister wears short shorts, why does she always wear that, is that her everyday clothing?* And more commenting how sexy Carmella is, how flawless her skin is, how she can attract boys' and attention, in general, easily, how she has the perfect life, how she has the fashion and beauty, etc. *Like that was supposed to make me like Imogen more, eek, no thanks.*

Imogen is having panic and anxiety attacks. I could never connect to this character at all. She was insecure, lacks self confidence, wallows too much in self pity and in her weakness, shortcomings or anything she lacks, feels like she's unimportant/rejected. I've experienced all these as a human and I'm supposed to relate to her, but I couldn't bring myself to like her. She has mood swings that are so random and unreasonable that she doesn't care if the people she loves are affected. She hates it when they don't understand her situation. *I have depression, please understand me, I am exempted!* She also hates it when she loses the argument, even though obviously, she's the one who's wrong.

She has a strong support group of friends. That's the second thing I liked most about this book. The secondary characters Evelyn (her stepmother), Brice, Jonathan, Antonique and maybe even Andrew did nothing but to show her how amazing and important she is, despite what she thinks. **What a pity that I liked them more than Imogen.** Going back to my point, the love interest, her long-time best friend, Grant, is the receiving end of these mood swings. She always tells Grant how Carmella makes Imogen feel miserable so there was one time in the book that Grant *personally witnessed it*. So Grant says, *wow, it really is true* (non-verbatim) and then Imogen says *You don't believe in what I say? Leave my room! I can't believe you're my best friend and you don't believe me!* (again, non-verbatim). They were so **okay** telling happy stories and then she transitions to **THAT!** Obviously, Grant believes her, it was just an expression of making it more true than he knows because he witnessed it. And so this goes on forever, with all the pointless and stupid drama, with Grant always being treated like this, and Imogen always starting it, but in the end **Grant's the one who always apologizes and initiates it.** This goes on for a long time that **it got tedious.**

Grant is what I liked most about this book. Honestly, I can't believe how he can tolerate Imogen being like that. He was there for her when Imogen cuts herself, cleans her wounds, goes to her house, sleeps in her room, holds her hand while she cries, etc. They've been best friends since kindergarten. I wish he was mine, though! Poor Grant have to suffer these! Anyway, **best friends turned couples type of romances are not a bother to me. I think for this book, it was well-executed. The build-up of the romance was slow**, Grant is not a bad boy, he was even a science nerd (which made me love him even more!) and his actions towards Imogen are genuine. You know he likes Imogen but his actions, no matter the subtlest they are, are still not obvious and *I liked it that way.*

I love the ending, except for one part if you opened the minor spoiler. There was one part that did not suspend belief--(view spoiler)--but overall, it was a happy ending. Relationships were built strongly on each of the characters, specially her dad and stepmom Evelyn who did nothing but care for her, Grant and all her theater friends. There is not much to say for this book, really. I did not find the story special and might forget the story in a few days or weeks. I think if Kelsey Macke removed the pointless drama and made Imogen more likable, I might've liked this book more.

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### Alex Toney says

Though its premise is one we've all seen before, *Damsel Distressed* manages to bring something fresh to the Evil Stepsister subgenre. This 'something' is probably the book's main character, the delightfully wry Imogen Keegan. Imogen is overweight, clinically depressed, and struggles with self-harm. And though my issues have been different than hers, I found myself relating to her in an unexpected way.

This is in part because the novel is told in compelling first person. Macke has a way with dialogue, and manages to toe the line between "witty and delightful" and "things teenagers might actually say." In a favorite habit of mine, Imogen refers to her therapist, George, as "Therapist George." She says this to his

face.

The book has a few surprises, but most of the pleasure is in the execution. Imogen has a dream she does not think she can attain, a past she does not think she can escape, and a love interest she doesn't think she can win. She surprises herself, but her path is fraught with difficulty, a task Macke handles evenly and deftly. All in all, a very promising debut from a first time author. Plus, the book is sure to matter deeply to a whole generation of theater-loving, cheese-fry-eating young women . . . and to pretty much everyone else who reads it. Would recommend.

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