



## **Exiled to Iowa. Send Help. And Couture**

*Chris O'Guinn*

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This is the story of me, Collin Murray, a bright, witty and charming L.A. teen who is cruelly transported to a small town in Iowa by parents who delight in my suffering. It tells the tale of my struggles against such obstacles as flannel, packs of bullies, lack of car, hoodies, crazy English teachers and vengeful former friends. It is an epic tale of survival in a savage denim wilderness.

## **Exiled to Iowa. Send Help. And Couture Details**

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Author : Chris O'Guinn

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## From Reader Review Exiled to Iowa. Send Help. And Couture for online ebook

### Kaje Harper says

I really enjoyed this book, and its somewhat mouthy narrator, Collin, who, when forcibly relocated from LA, brings couture and drama to a small-town Iowa highschool. His voice was a nice combination of young, hopeful and snarky, with a little bit of flaming mixed in. He runs into a believable series of stumbling blocks along the way. The characters were great, not everything was black and white, and the resolution was sweet and not perfect. There were some very funny moments, some painful ones, and quite a few quotable lines. The romance part of it was lovely and not too cloying. The missing star is because it didn't grab me emotionally quite as hard as the very best YA stories do, but it was fun, engaging, and definitely worth reading.

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### Lost in a Book says

3.5 stars

I had a hard time settling on a rating for this one. I love YA/Coming of Age books and was completely expecting that *feel* from this one too. But I didn't. The characters *voice* and maturity didn't flow with a 15 year old IMO even though the circumstances aligned with that of a high school freshman dealing with bullying, homophobia, moving to a new school in the middle of nowhere and proving to his family that he can handle things on his own. Also, I have a hard time calling this YA. One of the MCs is 15 (for most of the book) which brings the ick factor out for me any time they kissed, etc... I remember what it was like at 15 and I'm sure I did worse. But when I read, I like my MCs to be legal or very close to it. Fifteen is just too young for me to appreciate anything other than the overall coming of age story. I would have stayed away if the synopsis indicated the age or grade of the MC. But it didn't so I was flying blind. For MY reading preferences, anything else at that age hits too close to home with the ages of my previous students...

Colton was facing all of the previously mentioned things when his family moved to Iowa and had to start over. His new school experience was a nightmare. But, Colton rallied and eventually fought for his place at Herbert Hoover High. He brought couture and it slowly started replacing the sea of plaid and denim. He started a drama club that became popular. And he befriended the school "psycho" and loaner, Austin.

I liked Austin and Colton together. This book wasn't packed full of romance but they found their HEA; Well, as much of a HEA you can have at 15/16 years old. This is definitely one of the youngest YA I've read. There wasn't a lot of on page sex stuff but there was a lot of making out and allusions to other stuff. Colton's mom bought him a gay sex education book and naturally both MCs were "trying out" some of the stuff outlined in it.

Please don't mistake my ew... I'm 1 MILLION% on board for some M/M lovin' ...of the legal age.

This book was more of a journey for Colton to overcome his past, stand on his own two feet and realize that being accepted doesn't matter unless you can be accepted for who you truly are. Colton was fab-u-lous. He was funny, forgiving and left a "trail of flames" behind him wherever he went.

**"One of the upsides of being gay was not being burdened with needing to try to understand the chestier sex."** \*snort\*

**"If the world wanted to condemn me for being gay, then I was at least going to get the good parts too."**

Another thing in the plus column is the support system Colton had. His family loved him for *him* and he built of a great tribe of friends. On the negative column, Becca. WTF?!?! I can't go into specifics without giving anything away but if you read this, you'll know what I mean. Seriously. \*smh\* I don't understand the purpose of the way her character arc fleshed out. Color me confused AF.

I didn't dislike this book. I just didn't love it and sometimes felt like a creeper for reading it. If you like YA, give it a shot.

<http://www.lostinlovebookblog.com/>

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## **Cole Riann says**

Luci recommended this book to me a couple of weeks ago and I am so happy that she did. It is such a breath of fresh air. Funny and poignant, with characters that I really grew to love (and talk about one sexy, supportive boyfriend to have -- I loved Austin). At times, this book took me back to high school myself, where I'm happy to say I subtly avoided the kinds of situations in this novel. I tended to ghost around my classmates and only spend time with my little circle of friends. Not Collin, though. He is much too bright of a star (well, a flaming, rising one anyway) to avoid being seen and I loved to watch his subtle rise to stardom and his own queer takeover of his small town high school. What is wonderful about this book is that it is a story of one boy's journey on the cusp of adulthood, and how he chronicles that moment that every person has, where they realize that they're strong enough to stand up on their own, and the bittersweet revelation that is when the downside is having to look at the world in a new, harsh light. A beautiful story!

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## **K says**

This book was chosen for me by Elci for the YA GLBT Group's February "pick it for me" challenge – thanks Elci!!

Ok, caveat... I don't usually do book reviews, mainly because I am never sure that my take on things will be of any use to anybody else but, here goes....

This is the story of 15 year old Collin, who moves with his family from Santa Monica to Burford, Iowa. This is apparently a terrible thing... now I am a Brit who has never been to the US and whilst I know general stuff about the Country I knew nothing about Burford and next to nothing about Iowa, not to mention why moving

there might be so terrible.... cue me going off to scour the internet to try find some more info so I can make some comparisons... the best I could come up with was someone being forced to move from somewhere like the glamorous parts of Manchester to, say, Grimsby... and no I've nothing against Grimsby

Collin, who is gay and at the start not out to anyone but his brother, narrates his story. He admits to being flamboyant and occasionally flaming, with a love of "couture" and all things shiny, particularly belt buckles.... His dim view of his new town is brightened from the outset by the discovery of a small boutique clothing store, which he eventually locates with the help of new friend Keith and his sister Becca.

The story follows Collin as he settles into his new life and school, where he is subject to bullying, he befriends Alex, the school's resident "psycho" (who turns out to have secrets of his own), starts a drama club and reforms the entire school's wardrobe whilst obtaining a job working at the clothing shop. Despite the misunderstanding regarding Becca, the drama of Collin's first relationship, his coming out and the results of the same I felt that the was somewhat predicable and for me the whole thing was a little too shiny and Glee-esque (ok, that was possibly the whole drama club thing – including the ability to find funding for and put on Moulin Rouge in a matter of weeks).

As much as I liked Collin's character I found I had more interest in and sympathy with Alex, particularly his back story, I loved that Collin's parents were so supportive (particularly his mother providing the book on gay relationships) but found that some of the minor characters, particularly the teaching staff were a little one dimensional. The character that shone though for me was Keith, who appears to be on the Autistic Spectrum and has OCD, his calm acceptance and tolerance not to mention his definition of friendship were spot on.

Overall I did enjoy the book and would recommend it to others as a light, quick and easy read that isn't going to challenge any sensibilities.

I've rated it as 4\* but probably 3.5\* is closer (I round up!)

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## **Bubbles Huntly Honest & Direct Opinions says**

I think I am going with 4 stars with this one.

The beginning was a bit slow for me. The main character seemed shallow and so gay it was annoying. I do not know anyone no matter how gay or what age that uses the word couture the way the MC does and I can't help but think it was used incorrectly but maybe that is just my understanding of the word.

Anyway besides being annoyed every time the word couture popped up, which was a lot the MC did grow on me. Although I never liked him as much as the secondary characters, especially Kieth and Aaron. I am not sure why they even liked the MC, without his pov i never would have gotten past his dramatic shallowness. He wasn't mean or anything he was just so centered around himself he was pretty much oblivious to anyone else around him. He was so conceited I am not even when or why i started liking him. I think I might have liked him simply because Aaron and Kieth did and they were both great so I just decided to trust their judgement. Some of the MC's thoughts did make me laugh so that might have helped warm me up to him also.

So anyway 4 stars because while it did start off slow for me by the end i wasn't ready for it to be over. I think

the book takes place over 2.5 to 3 months so I would like to see how the rest of the year plays out

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### **Jerry says**

Collin, the protagonist in this gay Y/A novel is snarky, funny, self-centered, and like so many teens he is deluded into believing that no-one else has a clue about anything. I enjoyed sharing his life for a while. There was drama, but no melodrama. There was conflict, but no conflagration. Collin was put-upon, but despite what Collin may have felt, this wasn't a tear-jerker.

From the start of the novel, Collin knows he's gay, as do a few others. Furthermore, he's okay with being gay; he just knows that not everyone else will be okay with it. Coming out is a factor in the novel, it isn't a focus. Being gay colors his life, but it isn't everything about him. The story isn't so much about coming out as it is about Collin finding a place where he belongs, which includes belonging as a gay teen.

Collin is fabulous without being flamboyant. But like other boys like Collin whom I've known, he foolishly thinks he's subtle. He's certainly not a gay stereotype, but he's also not a straight-acting jock-boy. And Collin coming to rural Iowa from California accentuates how different he appears to his school mates. Gay teen novels too often vary between the uber-angsty fey boy and the secretly sad behind the straight-boy facade. I can enjoy those too, but it is nice to see a gay boy who feels more like an average gay boy. Collin rather reminds me of my gay teen nephew.

The story is about Collin working his way through a new school in a new town, and finding where he belongs, as well as finding himself. I believe that many of us, gay or straight, can relate (or look back and relate) to Collin and his trials - finding new friends, dealing with bullying, and growing up.

The story was complete, so I don't know that there are more stories to tell, but I liked Collin enough that I would enjoy spending more time with him if the author has more to say in this world.

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### **Preston says**

Can snark, irony, Zest for life and cuture counteract homophobia and bullies? Will the best attempts at stoicism end in tears? Read how Chris O'Guinn, author of Fearless, once again uses a victorious voice that brings YA into a solid maturity.

Quote: "He was the hardest person to figure out I had ever met, which was saying something. I knew girls, after all...."

One of my all time favorite books.

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### **F. says**

Enjoyed it. Liked how his parents were portrayed ie ordinary - not nasty, superhuman, overnice - portrayed just like most are.

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## Lori says

Oh dear lord why did I wait so long to read this? Talented author is talented and I'd recommend this to all YA fans.

The star of this book is undoubtedly Colin. Fifteen and uprooted from his LA abode to move to Hickville, Iowa, where plaid shirts and jeans are the order of the day and *the gay* is not to be mentioned, he has two choices, sink or swim. Kinda thrown in at the deep-end with a disastrous first few hours at school he really has to swim and he does it in style.

Colin, Colin, Colin - I thought he was brilliant. He tries to dampen his flame, but he's not always successful - but that's a good thing, because he's a great person and people love him. Apart from the bullies, he is after all an easy target.

This story, written about the struggles of being a teenager, friendships, first love, families and daring to be different is a fabulous YA read. I'm only disappointed it took me this long to read it - I know I'm a huge fan of this author.

It always amazes me when such brilliant writers are less well known. If you're looking for down and dirty and steamy sex, this isn't for you, it's a proper YA book. That doesn't mean it's any less amazing. It totally made me laugh and cry and I can't wait to read the next Chris O'Guinn novel.

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## Aimee ~is busy sleeping~ says

~3.8 stars~

Most of my absolute favorite books are YA, and a lot of them are lgbt. I have read and discovered some pretty amazing authors and writing. So any YA book I read, I end up comparing and rating to the best YA I've read (Suicide Watch by Kelly York, Gives Light by Rose Cristo, Collide by J.R. Lenk).

There were niggles, but I really enjoyed this. This was a relatively shorter book compared to what I'm used to reading for YA, and the length did affect the story for me. I felt some things were rushed and skated over, particularly towards the end with the bullying. But overall, I thought the issues and consequences of bullying itself was still handled well enough for what was a light-hearted book. I also did feel things were just a bit too happy-go-lucky, with the successes of the play, the store, B's transformation. Generally, I like my YA stories to be more depressing, or at least emotionally heavier. But this also made it a nice change of pace. What worked for me so much was the MC, Collin, and Austin. I loved Collin's voice. He initially came off as snarky and moody as most teenagers are wont to be, but once he got over his anxieties over the move, he turned out to be a likeable character. A little self-centered, yes, not to mention flamboyant, but also funny and brave. I loved his relationship with Austin, the school outcast, and his family. I might have wished the story went deeper in some areas like the characterizations, but it still made me smile and feel hopeful, even tear up at times, crybaby I am. I think we could always use more stories like this.

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## **Justin says**

Highly recommended YA book. Funny and entertaining, with a great cast of chracters.

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## **Emilia Barnes says**

Okay, so this wasn't for me. It wasn't exactly terrible, only it wasn't, er, very good... I don't know, I feel bad writing bad things about it. It was harmless, first of all, and secondly it might be the sort of thing a gay kid who's struggling with bullies at school would like to read. I really don't know. As an adult I am not the target audience for this.

Pro: there is definitely a distinct narrator's voice.

Con: every other character sounds the same.

Pro: the narrator is a gay dude, and his boyfriend is a gay dude, and there's none of that ever-so-popular straight-guy-realises-he's-in-a-gay-for-you-novel angst.

Con: the pacing is all over the place. You have a rather detailed account of the first couple of days in Colin's new school, and then suddenly it's Halloween, and the drama club is ready to perform the big show, which is done away with in a single paragraph, claiming it was great.

Pro: blissfully angst-free and misunderstandings-free gay relationship.

Con: tip for all writers - if you have a character called Shawn, restrain yourself from creating another called Shawna. And if you already have two characters called Jack, you can think of another name than Jackie for a third character.

Pro: it had it's amusing moments.

Con: it was under the impression that those moments were uproariously hilarious.

Pro: it had POC in it.

Con: they were all of them black.

Okay, that's it. I don't want to say mean things about this book. It's not great, but it could be worse. Not my cup of tea, but I didn't suffer reading through it, and it made me smile a few times.

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## **Ulysses Dietz says**

Chris O'Guinn's "Exiled to Iowa. Send Help. And Couture." is remarkable for the richness of its story, the sharp, laugh-out-loud humor of its writing, and the big-hearted emotions (painful and joyous) of its characters. Young Adult novels can be as appealing to adults as for the teenage audience they presumably target--after all, we were all teenagers ourselves. What is tricky about this genre--one that is a personal favorite of mine--is capturing the perspective and the language of the young protagonists without losing the kind of literary craft that makes a book work as serious writing.

O'Guinn pulls it off extremely well in this, the story of Collin Murray, a gay fifteen-year-old who is dragged away from his urbane Los Angeles adolescence and plopped down in small-town Iowa--the nightmarish heart of Sarah Palin's "real America." Fearing the worst, Collin instead discovers friendship, acceptance, love--and couture--in his new hometown. He also discovers what it means to be loyal, to be courageous, and to be blessed by your family. Collin is smart, but he is not perfect. Like all teens, he is self-absorbed enough that he misses things, and makes mistakes, misjudges and mistrusts. All of the significant characters around



Collin become important drivers in the narrative. In fact, the one problem with this book is that it is a little too rich; such a plethora of potential plot material that one wishes that Chris O'Guinn had opted to make it a two-part series.

Actually, there's enough material here to create a second volume. Moreover, at the end of this book, I wanted more: more of the characters, more of the story, more of O'Guinn's wonderful writing. After all, Collin's only sixteen, and there's plenty of trauma ahead of him in high school. As a former teenager, and the current parent of two high-schoolers, I hope we'll see a sequel.

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## ? Todd says

So reviewing this book leaves me a bit conflicted.

Do I review **the book that it was?**

Or do I review it for **the book that I \*wished\* it had been?**

### What the book was:

A **well-written story** of being uprooted from an urban life and dropped into a cultural wasteland, where 'fabulous' people, i.e. people outside the norm, with a bit of flair, are scorned, ridiculed and sometimes beaten.

Then overcoming that adversity to find 'your people' there and regroup to build a life that makes you happy.

Plus, as what seemed almost more of a **sub-plot**, along the way you happen to get a boyfriend, even if (view spoiler)... Ummm, okay.

### What I had more \*wished\* the book to be:

The same as above; however, this book was extremely **Collin-centric**, concentrating mostly on Colin overcoming the limitations of his new small town existence.

I kept holding my breath for a true romance, where the story was about **Colin and Austin falling in love and growing together**, with the \*side story\* being that of their perseverance over small minds and bullying.

I'm extremely romance-oriented, so for me, while an entertaining read, it didn't quite fully engage me to the point of other YA romances have, such as "**After School Activities**" by **Dirk Hunter**, where the couple's common goal was **firmly focused on their coupledness** above all else.

So I longed for chapter after chapter of Collin and Austin getting to know one another more deeply, instead of each simply divulging 'their big secret', then mostly diverting back to the drama at school and with friends.

If you're looking for a **gay high school drama**, focusing a bit less intensely on the romance, then this one is highly recommended.

**4 \*puzzle-missing-one-critical-piece\* stars** from me this time.

**\*\* BOOK PIMP:** I just wanted to note that **Chris O'Guinn's "Fearless" is one of my favorite Top 10 books of all time.** Period. So PLEASE do yourself a huge favor and check out "Fearless". Read **my** review, if you're scared by the blurb or other reviews. ;- )

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This was my own copy of the book and was not provided by the publisher.

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**Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says**

Thank you so much for the gift, Monica!!

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