



Don't Wake Up

Shauna Kelley

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Gillian has always encompassed the vast space between pretty and ugly. In fact, she is painfully aware that there is nothing remarkable about her, until her husband Ricky experiences a mysterious fall that leaves him in a comatose state. As doctors and nurses rush to assure her that Ricky will recover well, Gillian thinks of the years of cold silence and manipulation that have overshadowed their marriage. As the coma persists, Gillian dreams of a different life, one her marriage has denied her, and hopes Ricky does not wake up. Nonetheless, his eyes open to reveal a man who claims to remember nothing of his former self. Gillian, convinced that this is only a furthering of his past cruelty, seeks to test this new Ricky. She invents a family they never had, and fills his head with stories of an imaginary life. Ricky becomes a father, and an orphan, eagerly accepting magazine-clipped photos and an urn filled with cigarette ash as evidence of his once-happy life. But, as Ricky persists in his assertion that he remembers nothing of their real past, Gillian begins to question how far she can go in punishing a man for sins he cannot remember committing.

Don't Wake Up Details

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From Reader Review Don't Wake Up for online ebook

Megan Bresina says

I couldn't put this book down once I started it. It kept me guessing throughout most of the book and even up until the end I wasn't sure how it would end. It could have gone so many ways but I love the direction the author went! The only negative is that there were times I wasn't sure who I was reading about until further into a chapter. It's told in the third person but focuses on the main character for the majority of it, but a few chapters were about another character and there wasn't any immediate distinction as it used pronouns. I'm hoping the final edit clarifies that but the story line was fantastic and I would highly recommend this book to another. I'm offering this honest review in exchange for being able to read this book through net galley.

Aimee Jodoin says

The quiet narrative of this novel brings upon the reader a melancholy tone, which resonates with the pain of losing a child and the wilting of a forced marriage. After twenty-some years of marriage, Gillian, who wed Ricky when they were young, due to an unplanned pregnancy, is distraught when her husband wakes from a short coma. Because he cannot remember anything after the age of fifteen, Gillian begins to plant false memories into his mind—memories of the happy family they never had. As Ricky recovers from the coma, he becomes a much kinder man than the husband she knew, who had numerous affairs, ignored her wishes, and secretly took money from his income each month and never told her where it went. Ricky's newfound gentleness—paired with Gillian's newfound infidelity—leads Gillian to grow guilty for her lies.

While the plot is occasionally a bit slow, inching toward boring, the inner world of the main character, Gillian, sustains the story, providing the skeletal support for the framework of the plot and keeping the reader interested in how Gillian will develop and learn from her mistakes. Much of the novel's tension comes from Gillian's morality—or lack thereof—seeing how far she can stretch the limit of her lies as revenge for the way Ricky treated her throughout the twenty years of their marriage, even though he cannot remember ever committing these terrible deeds.

The novel is short—perhaps too short—and because the pacing is slow, there is little action; all of the story's conflict resides in the virtue of the characters. Many intriguing themes are brought up concerning dishonesty in marriage, the resentment caused toward the spouse after the loss of a child, and punishment and revenge versus forgiveness. Though the vague plot may not excite readers, the inner world of the characters and the morality of the story should spark some thought. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this book is the off-balance good-versus-evil virtue of the characters, caused by years of slow breaking-down, cold silence, and financial and sexual manipulation. While Gillian is meant to be the novel's protagonist at the beginning of the story, by the end, the reader sympathizes with Ricky, despite his awful flaws, because he deserves forgiveness. The way these two characters deal with the death of their infant son, both in uniquely destructive ways, has slowly torn them apart.

This is a sad, thought-provoking story that will interest fans of romance and melancholy literature.

Dawn Lyons says

Despite the annoyance of numerous typos in the copy I received via Booktasters in exchange for an honest review (hopefully these aren't in the hard copy or Kindle versions), this book was an enjoyable read. The development of the main character was strong and the interweaving of the main plot with the experiences of Gillian's youth moved the story along while keeping interest. Though some of the things Gillian does seem contrived and unrealistic, and the author seemed to rush to an anti-climactic ending, it's an intriguing tale of how relationships can hurt us unnecessarily.

Rebecca Alvarez says

In *Don't Wake Up*, Gilly is a lonely wife who hopes her husband Ricky doesn't wake up from a coma after a fall. He quickly does, but has no memory of their life together. As punishment for his past behavior, she creates a fictitious life, but soon wonders if what she's doing to him is really worth it.

I have mixed feelings about *Don't Wake Up*. On one hand, it's a fascinating look at perspectives and how they inform our choices and overall character. On the other hand, the pacing for such a short story sometimes struck me as slow. I think, however, that my biggest issue was my dislike for Gilly. I found it hard to sympathize with her despite all of her difficulties, and she seemed rather flat, with little development. Perhaps that was the point. She couldn't get past her own perspective to see anyone else's, and therefore saw no reason to change her choices. Her husband Ricky was more interesting. Sometimes his reactions didn't ring true, but I enjoyed seeing the differences in his personality pre- and post-amnesia. And I wonder if the reason for my skepticism of his reactions at times was because my own interpretation was colored by Gilly's perspective.

I also liked the childhood flashbacks and how those events influenced Gilly as she grew up, but I would have liked more resolution of her sister's story. Overall, though, I found the ending very satisfying.

I received this book in PDF format via BookTasters in exchange for an honest review.

Keep Calm Novel On says

The author via Booktasters provided a copy of the PDF in exchange for an honest review.

Don't Wake Up by Shauna Kelley reveals Gillian's journey and her complicated relationship with her husband Ricky. After a fall, Ricky is left in a comatose state. During his recovery, Gillian evaluates her painful marriage. He does not have memories of his life after the age of fifteen. She invents a new past for him during his recovery. This character-driven novel explores many issues including but not limited to bereavement, lies, and abuse.

The strength of the well-developed characters sets the tone of this novel. Although their story has many twists and turns the author keeps the plot moving. The reader will be shocked as disturbing secrets are exposed. Gillian must face the uncertainty of lies and the uncertainty of the truth. Is there room for forgiveness?

Khin WT says

I loved the writing style, as well as the way this book shifts between pasts and present, from Gillian's childhood to the early years of her marriage, to her predicament with an amnesiac husband. What I'd thought was the question of whether or not people are inherently good when forced to start from the very beginning, turned out to be a set-up for our unreliable narrator who fails to grow up. As she spins lies about their marriage to Ricky, she also slowly reveals her own distortion of her memories. I think the title *Don't Wake Up* not only applies to Gillian hoping Ricky doesn't snap out his amnesia, but Gillian's own refusal to come to terms with her own flaws and the kind of person she really is. While on the surface it's probably a simple plot, this book gave me quite a bit to chew on after the final page.

Kelley writes a narrator who isn't likeable, but ultimately ends up almost pitiful, while the antagonised character Ricky is redeemed both as the amnesiac husband and as the husband Gillian didn't realise she had all along. Gillian's backstory is very firmly established, and I was very fond of the characters in it (her sister, especially), but I think I would have liked to know more about Gillian and Ricky in the early stages of their relationship, even if through Gillian's distorted retelling.

An easy read, though occasionally confusing if you aren't paying attention to what you're reading because of the time jumps.

Jon Fassnacht says

This quick read is a fitting book for the current climate. The heart of the book's plot is main character Gillian's repeated lying, as she creates a new reality for husband Ricky, who wakes up weeks after an accident with no memories from the previous few decades. As she tries to keep up with the lies, some discrepancies occur, causing her to fill the holes by creating new lies. The time shifts back and forth from present-day to the distant past, from when Gillian was a child up through their awkward wedding day and a devastating incident that occurs soon thereafter. There's not really someone to pull for in this story, at least not during the present-day period. Every character is flawed, though the protagonist/antagonist line blurs throughout the book, resulting in an ending that is sudden and depressing, yet probably what each character deserves. Certainly not a feel-good book, but that's not a bad thing.

Kerstin Vollbrecht says

Gillian's husband is comatose in hospital after an accident, but when he wakes up with amnesia that doesn't let him remember anything after his childhood, she's fabricating a whole new story of their lives together that is the complete contrary of their reality. As she has grown up learning that appearances are major important than the individual, her feelings and choices, she has carried these lessons into her marriage as well, leading the life of a psychological abused and unhappy woman. Will the fake story of their lives hold and lead them to a happy after all?

The plot and the characters are very well developed and the way the story is told invites the reader to feel the main characters melancholy as she dives into her memories and reasoning for her actions.

Debbie Viscosi says

Life isn't fair. We don't all end up with a "happily ever after". In Shauna Kelley's novel "Don't Wake Up" the main character, Gillian is emotionally damaged by her parents, her sister and her husband. The life she leads is tragic. She deceives herself about so many things that it becomes difficult for her to face the ugliness of reality. This novel is a well-crafted look into the life of a misguided woman. The internal dialogue of Gillian is fascinating and offers a glimpse inside of her reality and fantasy. I found myself wondering what would become of Gillian. I thought I knew what would happen and in the final chapters, my predictions proved wrong. This book slowly builds the tension and you find yourself unable to put it down. As I closed the book I found myself sad for Gillian. When you finish a book and feel for the characters...that is the sign of a good book. I look forward to more from Shauna Kelley!

Jessica Bell says

(3.5 stars, but worthy of rounding up) This book has a very intriguing premise. For a character-driven novel I was really able to appreciate the length, too. Not too long, not too short. Perfect window into the lives of some very unique characters, with forgivable flaws. I recommend this to those who love well-portrayed minutiae of reality, and a deep exploration of relationships.

Tia Bach says

Rating: 4.5 stars (but worthy of rounding up)

Life is not always a Kodak moment, even though we want it to be. Gillian's dreams have long been crushed, and she struggles to find any joy. Her husband, Ricky, is cruel and distant. When he has a devastating accident, a big part of her prays he won't make it... that he won't wake up.

Then he does, but without any memories of their time together. Gillian assumes this is another one of his cruel mental games, so she tests him. She makes up the life she wanted, filled with kids, love, and happy times. She even kills off his mother, a woman who has only added to Gillian's years of misery.

Gillian's struggles and losses broke my heart. She lost her child, her sister, her parents, and her marriage, but I ultimately found myself wondering... was Ricky really as bad as she remembered, or did Gillian's grief cloud everything? Did Ricky and Gillian just lose their way, or is Ricky truly heartless and cruel?

I'm sure some readers will have a difficult time with the uncertainty of the ending and general sadness of the novel, but I found it compelling, raw, and intensely honest. I love character-driven pieces, especially ones that I think about long after the last page.

Thought-provoking and intense, *Don't Wake Up* shows the slow decline of relationships under the stress of dishonesty and miscommunication. A line from the book keeps echoing in my head, "Sometimes, when something is broken, it simply can't be fixed." Too often, determining if it's truly broken is intense and uncertain.

I highly recommend this book to readers who appreciate flawed characters who are finding their way and real life endings.

Note: I received a complimentary copy for review purposes. A positive review was not requested or guaranteed; the opinions expressed are my own.

Ghata says

Gillian pretends to be sad for her husband who is in coma after a fall, but is secretly relieved to be rid of him. She likes going back to the house, watch mindless television and eat ice cream for dinner. But one day, her husband, Ricky wakes up. But he does not remember anything after the first 16 years of his life. She is secretly sure that Ricky is playing mind games with her, only to catch her red handed as soon as she makes a mistake. But turns out, that's not the case. Gillian discovers that not only does Ricky not remember anything, he is a totally different man from what he used to be. Gillian remembers him as cold and distant whereas the new Ricky is warm and caring and wants to know all about his old life.

The thing that worked for me was the brilliance of Gillian's character. It is complex and layered. The way it progressed from a happy child to a pregnant teenager and subsequently, an unhappy adult is totally comprehensible and spoke for many of her life's decisions. The narrative keeps going back and forth, but definitely keeps one hooked.

A couple of things didn't work for me. Gillian keeps insisting on the fact that Ricky was manipulative in the marriage, but has only incident to share for it. And somewhere down the line, I got an impression that maybe she was so clouded in her own grief of losing her child, her sister and her parents, that she was a little too preconceived about her relationship with Ricky. Also, Ricky's character was never delved upon in the book, except from the protagonist's view. And so, one forms an opinion about him based on that. But by the end of the book, I felt like I would have liked to know what was going on in Ricky's head as the years rolled by and their marriage kept falling apart and none of them did anything about it. I never got to know if it was Ricky, a philanderer and alcoholic who destroyed the marriage, or Gillian, who was too cold and hurt to care or both. Also, the sub plot of Ricky donating money for causes that are close to Gillian's heart seems like a cliché and doesn't add to the book in a meaningful way.

The ending of the book is a little abrupt and yet not bizarre. It takes you by surprise, and yet not! It feels like "not a happy ending", but a right ending as if this was real life. By the end of the book, I felt sad for Gillian and her life journey hitherto

His Wife7474 says

I received this book (in manuscript form) via BookTasters in exchange for an honest review. Here goes...

I scored Don't Wake Up by Shauna Kelley 4 out of 5 stars. I round down instead of up.

Character Development- 4

Entertaining- 4

Plot- 5

Flow of Story- 5
Gripping- 4
Immersive- 5
Well-written- 2
Likely to recommend- 5
Likely to read a Sequel- 5
Praying for a Sequel- 5

Character Development: (Characters had their own unique voices and personalities. They were believable.) Kelley did a great job defining the characters in this book. The only character that seemed out of place was Roger. The story likely would have been affected in the slightest by his absence.

Entertaining: (The book was fun to read. There were parts that caused me to react physically- I am known to throw a book across a room lol- and/or emotionally.) There were a few moments in this book that made me mutter, "This woman is batsh*t crazy!" There were a few moments that made me raise my eyebrows in amusement. I found Don't Wake Up to be an entertaining read.

Flow of Story- (The story flows well and seamlessly. It doesn't have to stick to a traditional timeline, but the story isn't annoyingly choppy or disconnected.) I wish I could score this higher on my made-up rating scale lol. The story moved beautifully, even in parts where the main character took us back to her childhood and teen years. This alone makes me anxious to read more books written by Kelley.

Plot or Storyline: (In literature, the plot is driven by conflict. No problem to solve...not plot. This story has an interesting, well-defined plot.) The plot- wife hates mean husband... husband lands in a coma... when he wakes, wife seeks psychological revenge- is new to me and I loved it! Honestly, I can't say any more about this without spoiling it so...

Well-written: (I'm not much of a grammar nazi (at least, not anymore). So, while an occasional misplaced comma, misspelled word, or questionable sentence structure will not ruin a book for me (at least, not anymore lol), it is an important component of my book reviews. Grammar nazis will thank me... others with simply roll their eyes at me.) I read the manuscript, which had several typos and grammatical errors. However, it did not take away from the story. My score here reflects the quality of the writing, not the quality of the story. I am certain that the author had/will have editors clean it up before officially publishing it.

Gripping: (A great book will sink its claws into you and not let go. Such books have readers staying up the wee hours of the morning just for "one more chapter". And if the reader happens to fall asleep while reading, the book will accompany the reader while brushing teeth, eating breakfast, morning commutes, lunch hours, etc. The reader takes every opportunity to jump back into the book.) Yep! Yep! And yep! As soon as Ricky opened his eyes it was on! Don't Wake Up would make a wonderful Lifetime movie.

Immersive: (If a story is immersive, I can visualize myself right amongst the characters...like some peculiar spectacle.) In Don't Wake Up, I was with Gillian from beginning to end, trailing her like a hungry shadow. Shauna Kelley is a really, really good writer. She has a way of turning a phrase that drops readers dead-center of the story. I could hear the beeping of machines in the hospital. Hear the clicking of heels and clocks. I could smell the menthol, the liquor, chocolate, etc. If Gillian, the main character, were a trainwreck, Kelley has me 6-feet from the tracks watching it happen.

Likely to Recommend: Yep!

Likely to Read a Sequel: (Some books just stay with me and I want more! I'd be interested to know what happens to the characters 1, 5, 10 years after the story ends.) Yep, without hesitation!

Praying for a Sequel: (Some books just stay with me and I NEED more! Like a spin-off to a great tv series. Think Frasier, which was a spin-off of Cheers! I'm likely to pester an author, via tweet or email, about writing a sequel.) Yep! I do follow Shauna Kelley on twitter. I will be asking about a sequel.

In summary, read the book. It comes in at less than 200 pages and is a short read. Enjoy!
