



Touched

Scott Campbell

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Robbie Young is an ordinary twelve-year-old boy about to drop a bombshell that will devastate his small town family. One day he rides his bike home after school, finds his mother in the kitchen making dinner, and speaks aloud the secret he's been keeping for a year, "Jerry Houseman's been touching me." Robbie has been molested and the Young family will never be the same. From that moment on, the novel unfolds with inexorable power. The story is narrated in four parts: first by Robbie's mother, then by Jerry Houseman himself, then by Houseman's wife Linda, and concluded by Robbie himself fifteen years later, when he has returned to town for a high school reunion. Each voice is remarkably persuasive and utterly convincing, and the result is a novel that is impossible to put down as it is impossible to forget.

Touched Details

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From Reader Review Touched for online ebook

Shawn Mecham says

Very good book

I like how the author helped us understand each person's viewpoint through devoting sections of the book to their take on the story. A man falls in love with a boy and they have a relationship. It is then made known to others. The story is not simple. We can understand each character's turmoil in dealing with the reality of this situation. The boy's mother, father, he himself... What do they think and feel? The neighbor down the street - Jerry(the perpetrator), his wife, and daughters, how do they deal with the aftermath?

Xerodog says

Whilst the novel makes it clear that Rob has been damaged by Jerry it does allow that all of the adult characters (including, by his own account, the victim) are flawed and imperfect people. The portrayal of these adults is the most interesting aspect of the narrative because Campbell is interested in how our natures shape our perceptions of morality, and this novel is about perception.

Obviously Jerry initiates sexual contact with a child knowing this and is punished for it. I found it disturbing that he seemed to have drawn a line under his experience in the Philippines where buying Ernesto, '.... was just business', as though this was not as serious as what he did at home. However, we all also tend to minimise our culpability in a past action when we are resolved to try not to repeat it in the future and Jerry does try to change his behaviour because he is aware that it is wrong. I think that within the moral universe of this novel this is an important factor.

By contrast, the boy's parents are also culpable, though less blameworthy. For example, Linda's dissatisfaction with her introverted husband is an understandable factor leading to her affair, which takes her focus away from her family; but isn't it also cheating and betrayal? Similarly, her husband's introversion and lack of interaction is also understandable - some people are simply quiet and introverted - but it is a failing. Jerry is able to insinuate himself into Robbie's life whilst his parents' attention is elsewhere. The adult Rob certainly has this interpretation of the events when he faces his feelings about them at last. To him their unawareness allows them to cast all of the blame onto Jerry and desire his punishment and to resent that imposed on them by their guilt and public humiliation. They seek public vindication in the courts, but they see their son as damaged even after they receive it.

Robbie at least feels that Jerry taking all of the blame is unjust, but he cannot say so without being disloyal to his parents and his community. He is adrift from community standards in not simply wanting to see the proscribed guilty party punished and be done with it. He knows that a part of himself enjoyed the attention and even the sex. The evil of all of it is that that because knowingness preceded adulthood he remains a child (incapable of taking responsibilities, finishing school, maintaining a relationship etc.). He is terribly damaged and wronged by those who were adults at the time that he suffered the abuse.

I have not mentioned the other adult, Mrs Houseman, but I see that some reviewers revile her the most. It is certainly hard to comprehend what motivates her and why she is so loyal to a man she is appalled by. When Robbie gets the news from her that Jerry has died in prison, his reaction is to want to kill her. This is terribly ironic, given that he condemns his mother for having wanted justice. Mrs Houseman is constructed as the least selfish of the novel's characters and the adult who suffers the most because of this. I thought that it was interesting that she had a religious side and, though she obviously was not a Pharisee about church attendance and practice, she tried very hard to follow her religious principles (encourage the best in people,

hope that they will have integrity, trust them when they ask for your help etc.) when it came to moral judgements. You might argue that she enables him to be a monster, but if so she pays dearly for it and she never betrays him even though he does her. On balance I believe that she is punished disproportionately to her guilt for her loyalty to a man that most of us would have condemned and not attempted to understand. In all, then, a novel that condemns the wickedness of pedophilia and chronicles its destructive consequences; but also a novel that implies that our outrage and desire to vilify others may arise from our own selfishness; that attempts to support others in their struggles may be futile; and that trust is not always rewarded. Not a very cheerful take on humanity, but not a simplistic treatment of sexual abuse either.

Carla says

I rated it a 3 because I found it interesting enough to finish and rarely finish books I don't "like". Although I usually don't need to like or be able to identify with characters of a book in order to like the story, I didn't have any respect for the 4 main characters whatsoever. I wanted absolute justice for the sicko who raped the boy, for instance, the perp going to jail and having the tables turned on him would have been a good start. The boy's mother, who used emotions to guide her actions, pursued "justice" the wrong way to get results. The wife of the perp was weak minded and short-sighted, no surprise there. The boy....ok, he was young, but still old enough and mentally capable to know he was setting himself up for more of the same even going around that loser....geez... particularly after being molested by the pervert prior. Ha...considering what I just wrote, I guess I do have to like or identify with at least 1 of the main characters to enjoy a story. I stand corrected.

Angela says

I broke plans to keep reading this book. I rarely find a story I can't put down, but this one pulled me in.

I enjoy stories on the darker side of the human condition - the things so seldom shown in the studio movies. Bad book reviews about deplorable characters and terrible events are often the reason I select a book. I am the reader that enjoys the opportunity to sympathize with the antagonists. When a writer can make that easy, I'm hooked. Give me characters who make regrettable decisions, tell me how they feel and how they manage their poor decisions in life. This is the depth of character I seek in novels.

The style of writing was also really appealing. This writer does a lot of "directing," for lack of a better term. I could see the characters' movements in my mind. It played like a film - a film I'd love to watch. The structure of this novel is something I haven't encountered before (though I admit I'm not the most well-read person), and I loved it. I appreciated the movement of the story in this unusual structure. He created a fantastic tumbling pace throughout. His segues between past and present in the characters' thoughts were wonderful.

I think my only criticism is that all of the characters sounded the same, but the way their stories played out made it easy to get involved. I didn't feel bored by their similar language.

Edna B says

this book i think was written by someone who.can "picture" what happens in the aftermath of a

molestation....but really this author was so poorly educated i could sense the characters forcing the cliches from themselves....the mom screaming to the neighborhood molester? what mother does that? child molestation is still a humiliating crime...you never announce even in anger on accident to the neighborhood that your child was molested based on your child not even really talking about it....it was all just too forced and fake...

Prescottl says

Superb story about a boy molested by a neighbor. The plot is developed through the POV of 4 characters. The author deftly described the molestation's effects on people without writing a gratuitous sex scene.

a. says

I guess seeing this unfold from several perspectives may have been interesting for some, but I didn't appreciate it. Three of the characters were horrible people and one had a horrible thing happen to him shaping the rest of his life. The worst character in this book is Jerry Houseman, but his wife is a close second and at times in my mind, she was a far worse human being. Because she knew what he was capable of and did nothing at all to stop it. And worse yet, she didn't stop his friendship with this young boy... She allowed it to continue. Some might say... "well what should she have done? He was her husband." and my answer to that is... Whatever it took to protect that child. Not every, not even near every, friendship between a man and a boy is this kind of relationship. I would wager a very, very small percentage is, but his wife knew that this type of relationship had occurred before.

The relationship between the molested and molester is complex. Robbie's viewpoint in the book illustrates that deftly. He was a child and had no idea the gravity of what was being done to him, what he was doing.

The mother in this book is a terrible character. I disliked her from the first words her character relayed in the book.

This is a touchy subject (I wrote that intending no pun or joking, because this is a subject that outrages people with just the slightest mention). So partially I'm sure that is why I was so angry with this book.

Other aspects on which to rate a book:

Storytelling... Poor.

Writing style... Mediocre.

Show me don't tell me... Abysmal.

Characters believability... Well done.

Kris says

I liked this book. A lot. I was a victim's advocate for almost ten years. This is a subject that is very important to me and the repercussions of abuse aren't always explained well. While it was hard for me to read the mother's, the wife of the predator and worst of all, the predators pov, I felt that the explanation of the aftermath and the willingness to look at what happened thru adult eyes as told by Robby, was really great.

My favorite idea was when he explained it was like being a dog chained to fence and you realize the chain isn't attached. Uplifting and healing knowing he was on his way to truly being "OK".

Jennifer Farr says

I was not too impressed with this book. I liked the perspective of the mother-I think mothers always internalize things like this, and in her case, she really WAS a little inattentive. I HATED the perspective of his-I don't feel like he ever "loved" Robbie-it was just his sick obsession and would have moved on. I understood (almost) the perspective of the wife-until he molested Robbie. She had enough warning signs. And Robbie: you can just tell he is screwed up and will be for the rest of his life. HOWEVER-you have to decide at some point to move on and deal with it. He never did. After all that-I had to remember this was based in the 1980's and I believe it was a "don't tell" era.

Mike says

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Therese says

A boy comes home one night and tells his mother the neighbor has been molesting him.

That starts an incredibly open and deep examination of how the thing happened. It is told from 4 separate points of view. The boy as an adult, his mother, the molester, and the molester's wife. Unique. Fascinating.

Jennifer says

May Contain Spoilers

Touched by Scott Campbell was a quick and very interesting read about a child who has been molested. It was broken down into 4 parts told from 4 different character's perspectives. The first part is told by Linda, the young boy's mother. Linda was an okay character, however, I felt a lot of her responses to what happened was with concern about herself. Is this my fault? Did I suspect this and just ignored it? that kind of thing. To me she was more worried about when it happened and how than trying to get her son the help he needed at that moment. She also speaks of an event in her life that I don't understand why it was necessary to the story other than it keeps her away from being home, however, even when she was home she wasn't off looking for her son.

The second part of the story is told from Jerry, the child molester. His point of view begins the day the news comes out of what he has been doing. I have to say even though the topic of this book is extremely difficult and what he did was horrific, I liked his character the best. He goes into his backstory with young boys and how it started with Robbie and you can tell he knows what he is doing is wrong yet he does not think he is a monster. He is in love.

The third part was from Jerry's wife, whom I hated and I felt like she should have been punished in some way for what happen to Robbie as well.

The last part we finally get to hear from the young boy, Robbie. His point of view comes when he is 27-28 and he is feeling very restless with life. He is floating around, doesn't know what he wants. I wasn't sure if the stage Robbie was in in his life had to do with what happened to him as a child or if it was just because he didn't have direction and really didn't know what he wanted. I would have rather had his perspective from when he was younger versus the adult Robbie.

I give the book 3 out of 5 stars. I didn't care for the characters and did not feel the need to have them in the story, I think just Jerry and Robbie would have been fine and it would have been just as powerful. As the story goes, I felt too much time was spent going over each character's history when it was their turn to speak that it took away from the present moment. Plus learning more about their past did not make me like them any more or less. Overall the book was good. I had to keep reminding myself that this took place in the 80s and that is why everyone reacted so differently than if it happened today.

Sallie Dunn says

Disturbing! And I have to admit it held my interest. Would like to see what other books this author may have written.

Micha Meinderts says

Interesting premise, but the way it was used left much to be desired. Many chapters started with unrelated ponderings of the respective narrators, stuff I was not interested in and it didn't even feel it was building up to something. Those long boring introductions were probably supposed to flesh out a character and all that, but it only bothered me and I kept thinking "get on with the story".

Style wasn't anything remarkable. It wasn't bad and it wasn't outstanding. Some observations were neat and redeemed the author a little, but most were bland and uninteresting. Other than the daring subject, it was nothing special.

Adam Dunn says

I didn't know what to expect going in to this book. Was it a thriller, a drama, was the guy guilty, didn't know. Turns out the book is a very straight-forward and believable portrait of a man and boy relationship.

What I liked about the book is that it was well-rounded, all the sides were presented and the four sides were presented unslanted. Everyone in the story did something wrong, and there was no attempt to hide that, but at the same time it wasn't glorified. People do things that are wrong all the time.

The interesting thing for me was the grey area of the whole situation. I feel that pedophilia has become the witch hunt of our times, and the witch hunt is doing more harm than good. I was dating a guy who lived in a different country from his daughter and missed her very much. He inquired about a job at a day care and was told no single man was ever going to get that job, and it's a shame. These kids are missing out on something and so is he. There seems to be an attitude of men all being sex-fiends and women having to clutch them to their bosom for protection 24/7 and that is not good.

The boy in this story was 12, still a child, but also capable of having sexual feelings, like most kids do. I know I did. So is this relationship with the man the worst thing that could happen? More to the point, is it

worse than the aftermath of the trial and the whole town knowing?

At the same time, there were holes in the perpetrators judgment you could drive a truck through. How could you “love” someone only at a certain age? What happens when they get older? And how do you “love” someone who isn’t fully developed, who is so pliable that you can mold them with the slightest contact? And there is a responsibility with that power.

I’m reminded of *The Last of the Wine* by Mary Renault and the boy-love practiced in ancient Greece. It’s something that’s been around for at least thousands of years, and I don’t know that moral outrage is the key to stopping it. There seems to be a reluctance with this topic to talk about actualities instead of ideals.

This all being said, I felt the book was slow in parts. I felt the plot other than the touching was nonexistent, that the part from the wife’s perspective was the weakest and went on too long. I didn’t care about her time in the moonlight with the perpetrator. The guys three daughters were so stiff they could have been called cardboard one, two and three. Also I read the author on Amazon say this was made into a play, I don’t know who the audience for that would be. I don’t know who the audience for this book would be really, there’s such a moral outcry against this topic that any slightly impartial viewpoint would be crucified.

Good enough book, didn’t change my life.
