



Everything Beautiful

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Riley Rose, atheist and bad girl, has been tricked into attending Spirit Ranch, a Christian camp. There she meets Dylan Kier, alumni camper and recent paraplegic, who arrives with a chip on his shoulder and a determination to perfect all of his bad habits. United in their personal suffering and in their irritation at their fellow campers, they turn the camp inside out as they question the meaning of belief systems, test their faith in each other, and ultimately settle a debate of the heart.

Everything Beautiful Details

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Author : Simmone Howell

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From Reader Review *Everything Beautiful* for online ebook

Alison says

It's ironic that I read this during Banned Books Week, because it has just about everything the people who ban books hate. Language. Teen drug use. Teen smoking. Teen drinking. Homosexuality. Anti-religious themes, and religious themes. Teen "unscrupulous behavior." Oh, and my favorite, "disrespect to authority." But blended in with all the bad stuff is an awesome story about the important things in life, the equality of all people, and not being just who others want you to be.

Everything Beautiful also has one of my favorite romances in a book ever, and I usually am not fond of romance. Said romance is an honest relationship between Riley, the protagonist, and Dylan, a paraplegic who's the least stereotypical disabled character you can think of. I say, pick this amazing novel up now and celebrate your right to read during Banned Books Week!

Daniela says

Okay, I'm a wheelchair user, and that's why I chose this book. Some time ago I asked on Tumblr for book recs that included wheelchair users, and someone told me about this one.

For starters, I didn't love Riley. She just wasn't my cup of tea, and I couldn't connect with her. That's why I didn't give it more stars.

But I really liked how the book treated Dylan. I think his angst and the struggle between hopelessness and hopefulness was on point. I liked his "Wheelchair 101" which I hope helped able-bodied readers to understand a bit of wheelchair etiquette. We hate it when strangers touch our chairs!

Fave quote: "Dylan stared to the back of the room. He looked embarrassed to be up there on display."

And this, my friends, is how I feel most of the times I'm around people.

I just wish there was another book about Dylan, about the future... It was all too short for my books-about-wheelchair-users thirst (?) But I'm so happy I read it :)

Keertana says

Everything Beautiful is the type of solid novel that has no apparent flaws - its pacing is perfect, the humor spot-on, the character growth remarkable, the romance swoon-worthy - and yet it is somehow underwhelming. I blame the hype. Quite thankfully, when you take away the immense build-up towards this novel and the reverent fans of Simone Howell, *Everything Beautiful* is still snarky, enjoyable, and the perfect summer-time read: sweet, fun, and one that leaves a lasting impression.

Riley Rose, a heroine who isn't a model, doesn't have a slim figure, and loves her body for what it is, is sent to a religious summer camp (don't worry, this book isn't every preachy when it comes to religion) when her father and his girlfriend decide they can't cope with her anymore. Riley lost her mother and is still grieving,

but she hides this under a facade of sarcasm and bad behavior. One of the best aspects of this novel is, hands-down, Riley herself. Not only is her narration compulsively readable, but she isn't afraid of herself or being herself, which is so refreshing in a genre where every novel seems to be about coming to terms with *yourself* instead of your *life*.

Another absolutely remarkable aspect of the book is the friendships and strong bonds. Although not all the secondary characters were as well fleshed-out as I'd have liked them to be, only because the book was so short, they were all three-dimensional and the impact they had on each other was touching. Dylan, though, is my favorite character in the book; an old camper, a popular guy, but now one stuck in a wheelchair. Against all odds, Dylan and Riley wind up being perfect for one another and their romance is gradual, stunning, and oh-so-perfect in a completely awkward and realistic way. Howell isn't afraid to touch upon subjects such as sex which also goes to make this one of the few sex-positive - and sexually positive - novels I've read in YA.

If there are any flaws in this novel it is that the ending is not the drive-the-punch-home type of conclusion I wanted. *Everything Beautiful* reads as a simple story of friendship and love, but not one of grief or further emotional connection. Ultimately, I felt this book lacked the impact I wanted it to have to be a better novel. Nevertheless, the good obviously outweighs the bad and at the end of the day, I have to admit that I am clamoring for another Howell read, despite my disappointment.

~*kath*~ says

This book is a delight. It has so many things going for it. It's Australian. It is set in a cheesy Christian holiday camp. The love interest is a disabled guy. The support characters are diverse and mostly really interesting. But the best thing of all... The protagonist is a fat girl and she gives ZERO fucks about it! She's fat. She doesn't hate herself. She's confused and frustrated and sick of people treating her like shit, but hey, she's a teenager. But she knows what she has got by way of her body and she fucking flaunts it. I loved Riley Rose so much, and Dylan, the love interest is hot and complicated and a bit of a jerk sometimes and pissed off and just gorgeous.

The only criticism I had was the very abrupt ending, which made me feel like I was being chucked out the back door and told to "move on". I didn't get any sense of resolution to several threads of the story, and I don't quite know where Riley Rose was at as much as I would like to.

But other than that, a cracking read, and if you're looking for an awesome fat protagonist, you got it here!

Carla says

A week in the life of Riley Rose is a crazy insane riot. And this is why - She is a total rebel. And by rebel I mean she is a hard faced bad ass bitch who tries REALLY hard to hide the fact that she basically has the biggest heart ever. She swears a LOT and she smokes (ILY Riley, you angry girl you) because she's trying to smother the fact that she's really struggling with her mum's death. YOU DON'T FOOL ME RILEY ROSE. She gets sent to Christian Camp and she doesn't even believe in god. Oh Girl. PREACH IT. or y'know, don't. She meets this dude called Dylan who is a recent paraplegic with a serious chip on his shoulder who is all kinds of hot.

She weighs 82 kilos and doesn't give a fuck, and it's like YAYYYYYYYY real people in a book, whoop holla YES SIR!

Forgive me if I get all PREACHY on you. Because this book is insanely fabulous. It's all about being lost and the journey you go through on the road to being found. And it's SO ironic that it so doesn't shove religion down your throat considering it IS based at Christian Camp. You know it's not about finding god, it's about finding yourself and how to change things for YOU to make your hopes and dreams come back from where they were hiding. This is so a book about being willing to let people change you for the better if only you give them the chance. And you know, it was so fucking compelling and intense and wacky and funny. Srsly. It was a big pile of Carla bookness, and I loved it with the fire of a million suns.

And I like that it takes a crack at religion in a way that's not condescending or rude or uncomfortable. It's funny. And you all know how much I love the funny. Her writing style was just electric; it was sometimes quite ambiguous but always always beautiful and fresh and snappy. I love cynicism in a character, because it always makes for good development, and well both Dylan and Riley were serious headnuts.

Dylan? I hear you ask! Well let me tell you, this dude was a right pain in the arse. He was bitter and angry and I just wanted to punch him and hug him at the same time. Y'all it's SO refreshing to see a book with characters that have personal problems they need to conquer, and not just the stereotypical oh that girl snogged by boyfriend and now we're going to bitch fight. NOOOOOOO. this was serious, powerful things that are thrown into stark striking perspective. And it's done in such a wonderful way that doesn't shy from the fact but doesn't glorify it either.

"I say 'Are we dead?'

Dylan checks his legs. He lifts each one and lets it drop down. 'If this is Heaven I want a refund.' For Dylan, Heaven is where his legs work. I don't know what Heaven is for me - unless it's us, here, this" - this is only page five. PAGE FIVE. and it makes my eyes swim with tears.

"The salt lake would be pale green - opalescent - and the salt crystals would sparkle in the sunlight. The water would feel cool, maybe even carbonated. Once Dylan and I were immersed we wouldn't be able to feel our bodies. WE'd surrender to the lake's drift, its pulsing currents and tingle-essence. Dylan's crutches would float away like driftwood. And we'd laugh. We'd sink our heads under the water and hold our breath till one hundred. And when we came back out we'd be different. Dylan would be able to walk and i'd be able to cry." - page 197. MY ACHY BREAKY HEART.

This is a serious in yo face book that deals with SOOOOO much thought provoking and at times really sad situations. And it does it with perfect ease. Howell is an amazing writer that's for sure.

Nic says

Favourite Quote: *"He swallowed and wiped his mouth. 'I think you're beautiful'."*

Everything Beautiful is a wonderful coming of age of tale that was both hilarious and heart wrenching. It sends a message how important it is to truly love yourself with all your uniqueness.

The writing from the very first page had captured my interest, by the third page it had me laughing and by the fifth page it had pulled at my heart. When a book can do that within the first 5 pages then you know it is going to be good and well it was.

Everything Beautiful is a character driven novel and these characters are quirky, complex and entertaining. You either love them or hate them, there is no in between. Riley, our a female protagonist, is a misfit and a vibrant character. Instantly likeable and completely relatable. I liked how Dylan described Riley:

'Well most people try to avoid trouble. You go for it with open arms. Also, for someone who wears a lot of black, you're very colourful. You like this...action feature where there's so much going on that the audience can't tell who they're supposed to be barracking for.'

Dylan, a paraplegic, who is on his own journey was my favourite character though. His witty personality kept me amused. This story felt like it was his too and I think it would have been just a strong from his point of view.

There was some romance in this story and had a nice natural progression to it. There was no instant declaration of love. I think again Dylan summed it up well: *'We're just in deep like'*.

Overall, a great read that left me in a good mood!

Cass - Words on Paper says

4/5

I'm not sure if there was any particular reason why I finally decided to pick this book up, I think I just came to the conclusion that it was time. I didn't know too much about *Everything Beautiful* other than that it was an Aussie YA book set in a religious summer camp, and therefore would be a good summer read.

Sixteen-year-old Riley Rose is out of control, getting into all sorts of trouble with her best friend and best worst influence, Chloe. Her dad's girlfriend, Norma, suggests that she attends a spiritual Christian camp. Forced against her will and doomed to miss meeting her crush Ben at an upcoming party, Riley is desperate to escape. But much to her surprise, amongst all the suckage she may actually find something worth believing in, and it isn't God.

I loved Riley, I love how in under 300 pages Howell manages to peel back layer after layer of her character and I liked seeing every different side to her. So she lost her mum to cancer, is overweight but "loud and proud", gets constantly bullied and reprimanded for who she is, and will basically tumble (as in, have sex with) any guy who shows an interest in her. I loved her vulnerabilities, she shows this tough exterior but inside you can see that she just wants to be accepted. I loved her bold and fearless she could be; the crazy stuff that she gets up to and without even seeming to think of the consequences is pretty admirable! I do wish that there had been more of a focus on grieving her mum's death, though.

There is a myriad of colourful characters that Riley meets at Spirit Camp. I found Dylan to be profoundly interesting, I thought the exploration of his accident and its aftermath to be sensitively and authentically approached; more so, I relished his interactions with Riley, they worked together so well! Bird - yes, that's a boy's name - was cute. I liked Sarita's (Riley's cabin-mate) transformation and minute rebellions, her friendship with Riley was so sweet and lovely I was left feeling warm at times. Even some of the Camp's staff members and authority figures had some level of quirkiness to them.

The narrative is sectioned off into Days. The 'intro' begins on Day Five, but then we are transported to the beginning so we see everything that happens during Riley's stay at Spirit Camp. I liked the writing style, Riley's frank tone, expression and thoughts. I found it easy to become absorbed into the narrative, I cared about what happened to Riley and whether she was going to be able to escape the camp.

There is a bit of sexual content - nothing explicitly written, but the act of it is implied. I think Howell explored sexuality in a way that is realistic for teenage readers to relate to. There is even a gay couple and while it is slightly made taboo and this big deal by Riley, the rest of the campers don't seem to care too much about it at all.

Everything Beautiful was an engaging and quick summer read, laden with surprising hidden depths. Riley is a superbly written protagonist, refreshing in her boldness and sharp wit. I enjoyed reading about the many misadventures and mischief that occurs during Riley's time at Spirit Camp, and seeing the character development as her world and mindset changes was satisfying. Certainly a worthwhile read!

Amanda says

Everything Beautiful by Simmone Howell is set in Victoria and features Riley Rose, wild girl. Riley's mother died of cancer two years ago but she has been unable to cry or mourn her loss. Instead she's spent much of her time with best friend, Chloe, drinking, partying and generally having fun – or getting up to no good in her father's eyes. Her step-mum suggests they ship her off to Spirit Ranch, a Christian Camp in the Little Desert and despite her protests, off she goes.

Riley is overweight but is determined that won't be the only thing that people see when they meet her. She's loud, defensive, intelligent, witty - but all of this is a front because she's a really loving and awesome girl. She feels abandoned by her dad, guilty for not crying over her mother, and worried that the boys she sleeps with don't really like her, but then again she doesn't like them either. She exudes personality and anyone would be lucky to have a friend like Riley.

I adored her bunkmate, Sarita, as well as siblings, Olive and Bird, and I especially loved the way Riley slowly befriended them – it's one of my favourite themes in YA. The slow build up between Riley and Dylan felt true to me – no insta-love here!

Simmone is so skilled at capturing what it means to be a teen and the situation and dialogue sounded so real to me. There were some really sweet and funny moments as well parts that made me teary.

A note on the audio book: this too was read by an Aussie and it was well read and I had no issues with it other than the accent the narrator used for Sarita, it sounded really put on but other than that, it was a great book to listen to.

Everything Beautiful is a wonderful story of love, loss, faith and friends. This is another read I highly recommend this to all fans of contemporary YA.

Originally read the paperback 26 Dec, 2011, listened to the audio in Nov 2012

Rachael says

Ever since the death of her mother years earlier, Riley Rose has been on the fast track to self destruction, choosing to muddle her way through life with the aid of drugs, alcohol, and sex. Against her will, Riley's father and his girlfriend Norma force her to go to Spirit Ranch, a religious prison in the middle of nowhere, as Riley sees it. Riley prepares herself to loathe the experience, the annoyingly religious campers, everything that just doesn't fit with Riley's personality. But Riley never expects to find the possibility of a kindred spirit, especially in Dylan Luck, a dark and sullen boy confined to a wheelchair. And then Riley realizes that she just might have faith after all, even if it's where she least expected it.

Everything Beautiful is a beautifully written story that draws readers in with its complex and unique characters. Riley seems to play the stereotypical fat girl, drowning her woes in this substance or that, but in reality, she is so much more. Weight barely plays a role because Riley's sarcastic yet cautious personality is larger than life, no pun intended. Readers can't help but like Riley and hope she finds whatever she's looking for because she's so lovable even with some of her mean qualities. Dylan's character is also compelling to read about, and I loved how he played the hero in the end. A big disappointment was when Spirit Ranch ended, because it is left up to the reader's imagination if Riley and Dylan ever meet again. With quirky characters, Everything Beautiful is a sweet romance that spreads a message of faith, if not in a religious way.

Fans of Vibes by Amy Kathleen Ryan and All About Vee by C. Leign Purtill will fall in love with Everything Beautiful's unforgettable main character. I hope I get a chance to read Howell's Notes from the Teenage Underground so I can sample more of her realistic writing and well drawn characters.

reposted from <http://thebookmuncher.blogspot.com>

Cath Crowley says

This is one of my favourite books. I just re read it instead of having comfort food.

Becky says

Howell, Simone. 2008. (November release). Everything Beautiful.

First sentence: I am the maniac behind the wheel of a stolen dune buggy. Dylan Luck is at my side. We are tearing up the desert, searching for proof of God. My driving experience amounts to a few stuttering laps of the Safeway parking lot. That was supervised--Dad blanching and clutching his seatbelt. This is something else; something beginning with Freedom.

The above is quoted from an ARC, so it's possible that it might be different from the final version which will be released in November of 2008.

Riley Rose is a wild child. Perhaps she hasn't always been a wild child, but the death of her mother--cancer--and the remarriage of her father--to someone named Norma!--and the appearance of her new best friend, Chloe Benson, have all led up to one conclusion. Riley Rose is a bit too wild for her own good, her own safety. The "help" that Riley is about to receive is to be sent for one week to Spirit Ranch, a Christian camp

for teenagers. It shouldn't really surprise anyone that Riley is an atheist. An angry atheist who uses her mother's death as proof that God doesn't exist. Do I blame her for being angry that her mother died when she was fourteen? No. Do I blame her for not wanting her father to have moved on and fallen in love with someone else? Not really. No doubt about it, Riley is a hurt soul who uses anger and bitterness as a shield. Oh. I should also mention this. She also uses food. She's 180 pounds and climbing. She does use food to hide herself and numb her feelings.

The camp is a bit much. It has its ridiculous moments. Some stereotypical. Some not. Would I want to be sent to Spirit Ranch? No. So I can't blame her there. If she at first has difficulty liking her roommates, it's understandable. Especially in the case of Fleur. And her camp group, the Honeyeaters, there really aren't many there I'd seek out to make friends with either. There are more than a few that make fun of her. And only a few that don't. And those that don't, well, they're different themselves. There's Dylan. This is his first time back at camp since an accident has left him in a wheel chair. And then there's Bird. A sixteen year old with definite social problems. It's not that he's dumb. He's very intelligent. And he's kind. It's just that he doesn't have much social grace or social skills. Then there's Sarita, her other roommate, who becomes almost her closest friend at camp.

It was interesting to see a few of these friendship develop. And the budding romance between Dylan and Riley was nice. It was nice to see how they could sort-of-melt each other's hardened shields. Neither wanted to be vulnerable. Both were resistant to "authority" and afraid to make friends. It was easier for both to be angry and alone. So it was nice to see them bringing out the best in each other. And in the process, both got to know themselves a bit better than before.

Can a week change a person's life? Maybe or maybe not. But the Riley that leaves camp is a slightly wiser Riley. So it may have been the beginning for a change, a transformation.

Don't read *Everything Beautiful* expecting a clean read. Language. Sex. Underage drinking. Smoking. Drug use. Some occur with the week at Christian camp, others are just referred to in talking about their pasts, their lives before camp. But the book has its strengths.

Note on the cover. I REALLY REALLY hope that the cover is not supposed to represent fat-girl-Riley, because the cover model is so not fat.

© Becky Laney of Becky's Book Reviews

Sandra says

This review originally appeared on Clear Eyes, Full Shelves.

Riley Rose. What a name and what a personality.

She's complex, beguiling and difficult for others to understand. Her outward appearance and verbal flippancy belies the depth of her emotions. She charmed me with her always unexpected and often cynical insights.

In *Everything Beautiful*, Australian author Simmone Howell created a character who's a seemingly tough teen with a rough exterior, yet inside is soft, tender and vulnerable.

She's overweight. She's experiencing an acute loss after the death of her mother. She's having difficulty adjusting to her father's new love, a Christian woman who's a radical contrast to everything that was her family. Riley Rose is experimenting with sex. She's found a great new friend who's a perfect partner in any new adventure they embark on.

In other words, Riley Rose is one vulnerable teenager.

With a push and a hard nudge from his new girlfriend, Riley Rose's father sends her to a Christian retreat. Spirit Ranch Holiday Camp, a camp for spiritual growth and enlightenment, ushers in a new world for the rebellious self-proclaimed atheist. What kind of experience is this for a cigarette smoking, alcohol imbibing, troubling-making and delightfully smart mouthed kid?

Most of the campers have been coming for their spiritual renewal every summer for years. They know each other well and are keenly aware of their place in a hierarchy they've crafted. Most of them are full of their own self-righteous glory; most are bullies; most are intolerant; most would love to see the smart-mouthed, offensive, chubby new girl go right back where she came from—the sooner the better.

For Riley, sooner is a bus ticket ferreted away in her belongings, a plan to skip out halfway through the week, catch a bus back to her best friend and on to a party, drinking and falling into the arms of her much hoped-for crush.

But, the best laid plans of Riley Rose and her best friend become another bit of detritus piling up like so many useless relics.

Life isn't simple and neither are the campers.

They've been divided into groups assigned to strengthen one another. Strength: It's needed in what becomes a swamp of careless words, actions and heartbreak. Riley Rose's group—the Honeyeaters, named after a critically endangered Australian bird—at first view Riley as not only a member of an endangered subgroup of humans, but one that's the more quickly extinct, the better.

Into this mix comes Dylan. His history is a bit sketchy but his present situation's clear. He was injured after last summer's spiritual renewal and is now a paraplegic. Add to this a gay group leader, a lovely and shy roommate, and a whole cast of characters who are as quirky as the camp itself. No one's truly normal! It illuminates this book like a spotlight in a darkened stadium.

Everything Beautiful is not for the faint of heart. It's raw. It's richly detailed. It's realistic. And, it's finely crafted in a way that will not only appeal to its teen audience, but adults will also connect with Riley Rose's experiences and feelings. A message for all ages lies in the heart of the story. It's about reconciliation, love, forgiveness and shared humanity. Softening the harsher aspects of life in a spiritual camp, a welcome touch of humor and irony lighten the story.

Ultimately though, Everything Beautiful is about hope. Dylan's legs will not take him where he yearns to go. Riley Rose cannot go back where her memories send her. Hopes and dreams abound for all of the characters. Each must find their own unique path forward.

The lyrical prose gave me pause. It was as if I were reading a lovely poem. It also made me smile at Riley Rose and her whimsical humor and actions. And, it made my lips turn down in sadness at the sometimes ruthless insensitivity Riley Rose faced daily.

The themes in the Everything Beautiful offer a refreshing play on the notion that most people are good.

This book is truly everything beautiful.

Joanne says

When Riley's Dad gets a new girlfriend, life turns upside down for Riley. She doesn't like Norma and Norma doesn't like her. But it is not until Riley finds herself shipped off to 'camp' that she realises just how bad things have become. Determined to continue on her path of bad behaviour and general obnoxiousness, Riley Rose is sure that she can turn this 'spiritual camp' upside down. And when she meets Dylan Luck, recent paraplegic, she thinks she has found a fellow troublemaker. What follows is a very surprising week for Riley. Truths are told and secrets revealed, and sex, cigarettes and booze prove to be a potent cocktail, but in the end Riley has learnt quite a lot about herself, Dylan and exactly why she appeared hell-bent on self-destruction. From Amazon UK

Everything Beautiful was one of the first books recommended to me for BI&SP Month, and was highly praised, so I knew it was one I definitely had to read. I'm so glad I did, it was just so positive!

This book isn't so much about body image or self-perception, but about self-acceptance in all its forms; it's about truly being yourself and accepting who you are, as a person, as well as how you look. Riley is overweight, to the point where people make comments about it - but she doesn't care. She knows she's overweight, but doesn't have a problem with it; she accepts herself and, most of the time, has a positive body image. It's just so refreshing to find someone who's happy with how they are.

'As I walked away I tried to picture what they saw: my crazy curves, my straw bag swinging, my hat in my hand sweeping the air. I bet they'd never seen a big girl so confident. Boom-boom-BOOM. My mules clacked on the floor like castanets. Arriba!' (p54)

'I gave pretty good about owning my fatness, I could dress provocatively, and I only sucked my stomach in when I was squeezing past someone but for all my boldness I'd never actually showed myself to anyone - not completely.' (p111)

Riley is also a bit of a rebel; she goes out of her way to annoy and anger those in authority and those who take the mick out of her size. Yet it's only when she makes friends with Dylan does she start to see things differently. These people aren't all that bad, the world isn't out to get her.

It's also great to get to see Dylan and how people react to him through Riley's eyes. This is his first time at camp since his accident. Hearing from others what he used to be like compare to how he is now, how people treat him, it's really sad. He tries to act like he doesn't care, but Riley sees through it. As Dylan helps Riley, Riley helps him - accepts him for who he is, gets to know him, rather than just seeing a guy in a wheelchair. In each other, they find someone who understands.

Riley also has something brilliant to say about this subject herself:

"It s***s me how everyone's so beautiful in the movies. The whole world wants to pay money to see beautiful people doing bad things. It's sick. Brad Pitt gets paid a fortune just because he has good genes... Also, I hate the way you never see fat people on the screen unless they're white trash or retarded or a criminal or all of the above. A fat girl on film is either there for laughs or to gross people out. Unless the

film's about the fat girl's "journey" to social acceptance through weight loss. Where's the happy fat girl? That's what I want to know. Hmmph.'" (p172)

Awesome or what?

I have to say, I wasn't too pleased with how it ended. It just seemed like I turned the page, and there was no more. It just seemed to finish so quickly, you didn't notice it winding up. I would have liked a little more. But overall, Everything Beautiful is a brilliantly positive novel that I'm so glad I've read. It's highly recommended!

Tatiana says

Dumplin' got a lot of attention last year, but, IMO, this is a much better, more charismatic novel about a "fat" girl.

Maggie says

This story of two misfits... is what I wanted Eleanor and Park to be.

Like My Mad Fat Diary, it's an in-your-face slice of life story that is real, honest, and funny. Riley Rose, like some of my favorite characters, is a marshmallow. I loved this.
