



Back to Normal

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Is it normal for a romance to blossom between a man who's in the closet and a man who's never wanted more than a hook-up? How about when a clairvoyant grandmother and the ghost of a dead aunt are thrown into the mix, along with a stiletto-wearing twin sister, an Irish pub, a detective brother, and a mother who thinks her son just needs a good woman? Greg Capello thought that he'd feel normal if he pretended he wasn't gay, and now it's making him crazy that he can't stop thinking about his new boss Finn Sparks. Finn thinks it's not normal that instead of wanting to hop into bed with Greg, he'd like to know more about the man, like what's under that starchy exterior, and who he's talking to when it appears no one's there. They can't fight the attraction between them; every time they touch it's electric. So Finn finds himself taking it slow and going on dates, for crying out loud. And Greg has to accept himself, or accept the consequences of staying hidden. So...what's normal anyway?

Back to Normal Details

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From Reader Review Back to Normal for online ebook

Ami says

At twenty six, Greg Capello is facing a divorce and a pink slip. He also longs to be normal -- which is not easy with a dead aunt residing in his head and his suppressed desire towards men. But then his eyes catches the amber eyes of his new boss, Finn Sparks, and he wonders what is normal anyway.

Oh, I LOVE this book!!! Okay, the story is part of Loose ID's "Coming Out Celebration", so every participating book has a theme of someone coming out. In this book, it's Greg.

I love the pace that Ms. Boudreau sets. I'm happy that Ms. Boudreau takes time to build the relationship of Greg and Finn -- because I don't believe it, if it's written the other way around. I mean, there's so much happening in Greg's life, he has been living a closeted life, being afraid of acting on his desire towards men, plus having able to speak with his dead aunt. He just cannot easily admit that he is gay. You cannot help to feel your heart out for Greg (I choked up and got all teary eyed when Greg decided to tell his brother that he's gay)

I'm also happy to see the development in Finn's character -- he is started as one proud gay man, who loves his one-nighters. Only when he meets Greg, he realizes that Greg is different, and he is falling for the man, and he needs to take a different course to be able to get close to Greg. So when the two decides to get together, it feels like the right time.

The secondary characters are also entertaining: Finn's twin sister, Greg's big brother, as well as the dead aunt.

The ONLY ISSUE I have with this story is the ending. It feels a bit rushed, sort of "over-the-top", and doesn't fit with the pace that has been set. I can see Greg coming out to his big brother, Joe, -- but having him outed like that, on TV?? Yeah, that doesn't really sit well with me. I prefer him doing the similar route, coming out to the rest of his family, maybe with Finn by his side and Joe as moral support.

Despite the issue, this is a very good story. I look forward to reading more stories from Wren Boudreau.

Chancey Knowles says

I really loved the characters, all of them. I don't know how a story with so much going on and so well written left me feeling bored, but it did. Taken in pieces it was probably closer to 4 stars. I try to use the GdRd ratings more objectively than my personal ones, but I just couldn't give this 4 stars. So basically, take this review with a "grain of salt".

OkayKim says

4.5 There's needs to be more!

Charly says

Sweet romance, but overall a pretty serious coming-out tale

Warning: This review might contain what some people consider SPOILERS.

Rating: 7/10

PROS:

- There's an odd and intriguing story element that comes out right at the beginning, and I couldn't figure out at first whether it was psychological or supernatural. Either way, though, I was hooked from the start.
- Greg's life takes several difficult turns throughout the course of the story, and I admired his fortitude in dealing with them. Rather than rolling over and giving up, or even wallowing in depression, he just soldiers on.
- Parts of the story are on the heavy side: Greg struggles mightily with warring impulses to give in to his attraction to Finn and to stay in the closet forever. For several chapters, his thoughts are almost entirely focused on negative aspects of homosexuality like gay bashing. I don't *like* reading about difficulties like this, but I thought Boudreau did a fine job of showing a serious portrayal of one man's struggle to come out.
- The sex occurs only very late in the story, once the guys' feelings for each other are already strong.
- Several of the secondary characters are memorable without calling an undue amount of attention to themselves. Only one of them is really out there personality-wise, but now, one week and two other m/m novels later, I still have a vivid impression of two of the minor characters from this book.

CONS:

- Occasionally I got frustrated with the characterization because the story tells how a character feels on the surface but doesn't really delve into his head that much or show the outward impact of his feelings. It will say something like this: "Everyone was curious, including Greg," but then won't show how that curiousness manifests itself or the effect that it has on him.
- Some of the characters' actions are so dramatic that they come across more like caricatures than real people. Greg gets a letter at one point that he is certain will contain bad news, and he squeezes his eyes shut, "remove[s] the paper inside with two fingers," and "open[s] one eye" to read the opening line.
- The descriptions get a little repetitious at times. All of the following phrases occur within a few pages of one another, within a single scene: "Finn enjoyed the licking and playing"; "he enjoyed the hunt for [the hot spot]"; "he loved the feel of a [body part] growing harder in his hand"; "Finn liked it when they made noises and squirmed"; "He enjoyed the lines of sleek back muscles."

Overall comments: I thought this was a good book, and coming-out stories are something that I never tire of reading. This one doesn't gloss over the pain that Greg experiences as a result of his emotional struggles, so although I enjoyed it for the most part, I didn't find it entirely pleasant. I'm certainly glad I read it once, but it's a little too heavy to make it onto my re-reads list.

Lily says

4.5 stars

Newly divorced and faced with losing not one but two jobs at once could have anyone at the breaking point.

Add in the fact that the ghost of his aunt lives in his head and his fear of facing his sexuality and Greg Capello seems to really be heading for a breakdown. When he meets Finn Sparks his safe and orderly life suddenly takes another unexpected turn. As they slowly form a friendship will Greg finally find the strength to accept who he really is and reach out for true love?

I really enjoyed this well-written and entertaining story. Both Greg and Finn are likable, three-dimensional characters and the slow progression of their relationship worked well. Greg especially is an interesting character. He's lived with the ghost of his dead Aunt Coco in his head for the past twelve years and while at first I wasn't sure how that would work in this 'romantic coming out' story I really enjoyed their scenes. Finn for his part has an interesting family that includes a clairvoyant grandmother which made it easy for him to believe and understand Greg and Aunt Coco's strange relationship. The supporting characters in *Back to Normal* are entertaining and instead of just being page filler they bring humor and a nice emotional touch to the story.

The heart of the story though is Greg and Finn's personal growth as well as how their relationship slowly blossoms. Greg suffered physical and emotional trauma at a young age just when he was starting to explore his sexuality and that resulted in Greg totally repressing his attraction to men. Finn for his part is an out and proud man with a well-deserved reputation for one-night stands with no commitment. Outwardly they appear to have very little in common but the more they work together the harder it becomes to deny their mutual attraction. Greg has to find the courage to accept himself and find a way to let others know who he really is. Finn's journey is one of maturity. He slowly comes to the realization that casual sex without a connection to the other person isn't what he needs. I really loved how the author allowed their feelings to slowly develop and didn't rush them along. When it came time for them to finally acknowledge those feelings and act on them it was well worth the wait. This is a case of quality over quantity and it worked really well.

I did however have one issue with the book and that was the ending. It felt a bit rushed and somewhat over the top and the manner in which Greg publicly 'comes out' felt wrong. I really liked the scene where he came out to his brother, who was a great character as well, and I would have preferred the rest to have followed that path.

Overall however I really enjoyed *Back to Normal*. It's an engaging story with memorable characters and is a wonderful second offering by Wren Boudreau. Highly recommended.

Kathleen says

I really loved this book until it just ended. It is just one of my personal literary kinks but I need the ending to be spelled the freak out. I don't want the big confrontation that I have been waiting the whole book to see how it goes to just be alluded to in the last paragraph of the book. Nevertheless the rest of the book was good enough that I still give it 3 stars (it would have been 4 if there had just been one more chapter).

Barb Manning says

Back to Normal is the classic gay tale of out and proud meets closet case with a twist. Greg Capello, an about to be out- of-work teacher and part-time waiter is so far in the closet he got married, a serious mistake on his part. Now divorced, Greg is fighting terrible headaches and dealing with the ghost of his Aunt Coco, a

resident in his head for the past twelve years. He's also dealing with a very strong attraction to Finn Sparks, his new boss at the restaurant where he moonlights. Finn is definitely out and proud. Most of his adult life he's been a love-and-leave kind of guy.

The first time Finn sees Greg he's immediately attracted. Greg's lean physique and handsome good looks make Finn's mouth water. He tries to keep his cool, at his sister Hayden's insistence. Finn and Hayden are the new owners of the restaurant where Greg works. Hayden, twin sister, is certain Finn is heading for trouble by becoming involved with an employee.

Both Finn and Greg try to maintain a boss and employee relationship, as the renovations for the new restaurant get under way, but it's clear that they are attracted to each. Greg is seriously fighting the attraction until a physical and emotional breakdown force him to come to grips with being gay and psychic. Greg's resident ghost has always made him reluctant with people, but Aunt Coco may just save his budding relationship with Finn.

Back to Normal is a fun read. Wren Boudreau peoples her story with some great characters: Aunt Coco, the resident ghost in Greg's head, who just happens to be lesbian; Finn's grandmother, Miri, the Celtic pagan; and Greg's detective brother, whose smart enough to know how to help Greg face his future. *Back to Normal* gets 4.5 stars for the pacing of the story and the quality of the writing. This one is a keeper.

Book Review by Creative Ink

MsMiz (Tina) says

Ohhhh, I need more of this!!!

Harry says

A cute book, with an interesting paranormal angle (that a skeptic might say was just Greg's own brain playing with him after his traumatic injury). This is a fairly standard coming-out story - Greg's got the usual hang-ups with himself and with fear of his family's reaction. I like the chemistry between him and Finn, and their individual growth as they become friends and then lovers. But the ending feels rushed and doesn't resolve a lot of the problems that were set up earlier in the book. (view spoiler)

Hrtnsoul28 says

A unique book. I am sure I would never want a dead aunt to live in my head. I think Gree did a great job of not going insane after listening to her for years. I loved that even after fighting it he still told tha man Aaron about the message from his mom.

Finn was a bit harder to connect with but his grandma Miri was a hoot.

Overall fun to read.

Mandy*reads obsessively* says

I first read this in Jan 2011, doing a reread.

Greg, poor Greg , he is in the closet and suffering, physically and emotionally under the weight of it all. And as if that's not enough, his school is letting all the new teachers go because of budget costs, and yep, you guessed it Greg was one of the newer teachers and the restaurant he works at to make extra money is closing AND as of that wasn't more than enough he has his dead aunt living in his brain, at least part time.

Greg does get a chance to start at the new bar opening up and there is where he meets one of the twins running it Finn.

Finn is a love em and leave em kind of guy but Greg is different and he is willing to take his time and be friends.

There are lots of other things going on here, Greg's family and even Finn has a few cool talents in his family. I was really rooting for Greg, I totally got why he was in the closet, that was a big trauma for a young kid, my only niggle with this book was the ending, it just sort of left me wanting just another look, what happens after his family sees the news , does he start teaching again...etc...greedy me, always wanting more.

Bark says

Sigh, I am in a lovestruck haze that only a thoroughly engaging love story can bring on. This book is fantastically romantic, the two men have a believable connection with a slow, satisfying buildup, they become friends, they grow and change and they accept other. The secondary characters add so much to the characters as well. I adored it. Seriously, I have no words. Ok, I do have words but I can't repost my review so I'm going to be a jerk and post a link to JERR.

Leaundra says

This story upset me and made me cry at the beginning, because I feel people shouldn't have to hide who they are. I just hurt for Greg. So glad he had someone like Finn. I loved how Finn was so patient with him. What can I say about Aunt Coco, I really really loved her! I usually like when they fall in love fast, but I have to say I enjoyed the slow build up of their love, it worked for me! I really didn't want this book to end. Great great read!

Magnolia says

2.75 stars It was ok. Nothing really stands out about the book. I didn't hate it, just didn't affect me.

Kassa says

An actual romance without much sex! Do these exist anymore? Anyway Back to Normal offers a look at two men who come together slowly, building a friendship and easing into the sexual attraction. This story stands out immediately because the two men don't fall into bed immediately but they also don't lack any sexual chemistry. There is no big tension keeping them apart, they simply move at a slower pace. I really enjoyed this difference and kept the story fresh and interesting, even during the slower parts.

Boudreau's second novel follows Greg as he stands on the cusp of change. Fresh out of a divorce, newly pink slipped twice, and faced with an attraction he can't deny, Greg is also on the verge of a breakdown. Although he's used to hiding his feelings and problems away, Greg is slowly discovering that he can't do that anymore. His slow awakening makes him focus on his goals in life and what being normal and happy means to him. With the support of his brother Joe and Finn's surprising patience and help, Greg just may figure out his life.

The plot is very character driven and surprisingly light given the life changing issues Greg deals with. Coming out to himself and in his life is not an easy process and the novel does a commendable job by offering this with honesty. Greg fights himself and denies his nature outwardly while knowing the truth. He has some childhood trauma associated with being gay so it takes him quite a while to get over this and accept that being gay is not a death sentence. The story is very sweet and honest, letting Greg take time to accept his choices and come to terms with his feelings. Greg even sees a therapist who is instrumental in giving Greg new coping mechanisms and helping him be happy.

Greg is a good character and he sparks well with Finn. Both men grow and change considerably over the course of the novel. Greg changes from a scared, hiding man to someone confident, even aggressive and knows what he wants. Finn goes from being a one night stand emotionally distant man to focusing on one person and letting their needs come first. Finn is remarkably patient and understanding as he lets Greg take his time. Going weeks and months without much physical interaction is a huge change from Finn's past one night stands. It's nice to watch Greg take the time he needs and slowly accept this new relationship. Both men feel genuine and their connection realistic.

The addition of Greg's eccentric dead aunt in his head is very well done. Not only is this a very funny detail but it doesn't feel ridiculous or over the top. In fact I loved it when Aunt Coco had something to say, which was usually entertaining and witty. The writing has an ease which makes the pages fly by. I didn't even notice how much I'd read until I had to put it down. Towards the second half of the story it does slow down some. There are several repetitive scenes of Greg training as a bartender and working at his new job. While these scenes are fine and nice to see people actually working in books, they also feel like filler. Just a way to show life goes on as Greg works out his issues and Finn is a stable, patient presence.

Unfortunately these scenes go on for a bit too long and there is no resolution to Greg's job. He gets satisfaction from bartending but what about his goals of returning to teaching? This is dropped and unresolved. Also the ending is over the top. I don't want to give any spoilers but this feels contrived and unnecessary, not to mention contrary to the progress Greg had been making. It shows how far Greg has come and provides a happy ending with Finn, but I felt it could have been done in a much better way.

Other than those few stumbles, this story is incredibly fun to read. There is great tension between Finn and Greg and the slow pace of their relationship is enjoyable to read. The dialogue and secondary characters have warmth and humor, keeping you interested and entertained. This is a story I'd read again for something light and totally satisfying.
