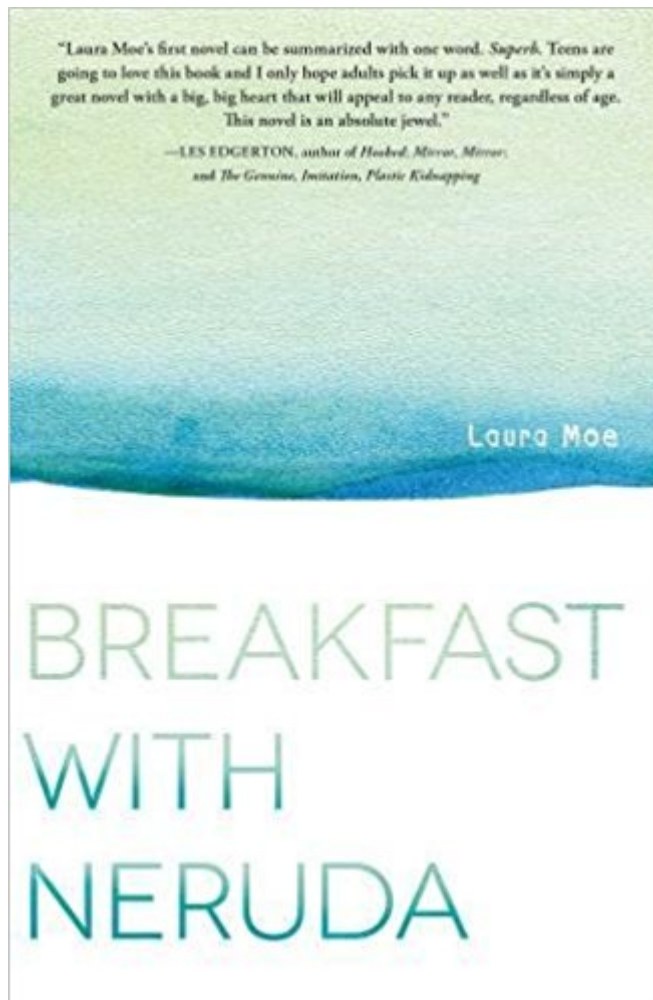




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Breakfast With Neruda



Synopsis

Michael Flynn is just trying to get through his community service after he made the dumb decision to try to blow up his friend's car with fireworks--the same friend who stole Michael's girl. Being expelled and losing his best buddy and his girlfriend are the least of his problems: Michael has learned to hide everything, from his sick hoarder mother to the fact that he's stuck living in a 1982 Ford LTD station wagon he calls the Blue Whale. Then one day, during mandatory community service, he meets Shelly, a girl with a past, who's also special enough to unmask Michael's deepest secrets. Can he manage to be worthy of her love, a guy living in a car, unable to return to his chaotic and fit-to-be-condemned home? Shelly won't give up, and tries to peel back the layers of garbage and pain to reveal Michael's immense heart.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up "This debut novel offers honest yet optimistic insight into teenage homelessness and hoarding. Despite getting expelled for bringing a bomb to school, Michael Flynn, 18, is a straight-A honors student with good manners. During the summer, he is relegated to cleaning the school to avoid jail time. There, he meets fellow rebel Shelly, who discovers that Michael lives in his station wagon. The two form a relationship but keep secrets from each other. Michael finds out the reason his mom hoards and never brings it up to her, yet a quarter of the book is his mother's diary, which never feels completely integrated into the text. Though the mother's entries provide context for Michael's family's issues, they make the work feel disjointed. Michael also visits his father, whom he

researched throughout the novel, but this narrative thread doesn't get fully resolved. Michael is a likable protagonist. However, the characters aren't dynamic, and the work's dialogue varies and is inauthentic to the characters. The author's important message about homeless teens and how people shouldn't judge them gets confused in the inconsistent writing style. The conclusion also lacks punch. VERDICT A good debut attempt at portraying homelessness, but a little off the mark.â Rachel Reinwald, Lake Villa District Library, IL

"This debut is...flecked with an endearing blend of idealism, empathy, and quirk..." --Booklist "Moe uses lyrical language to introduce teenagers whose problems go beyond bullying or unrequited love. She treats Michael's unusual home situation with realistic grace, while the relationship between the two teenagers is organic and interesting. A summer long punishment becomes a sensitive, thoughtful novel." --Kirkus Reviews "It's about love and understanding and betrayal and pain. All the necessary ingredients to make a connection to the reader." --Teen Librarian Toolbox "There is a beautiful relationship between two teens who connect over poems of Neruda...and their ever-witty banter." --Voya Magazine "Those who choose to read it will not regret it. It addresses some interesting topics (hoarding, missing father, community service, car bombs), and the not-so-average love story is refreshing. A good, quick read to take readers away from the usual dystopia and back into the real world." --Voya Magazine "Character-driven, funny, lyrical." --New York Public Library Bibliophile blogNYPL Best Book for Teens 2016 Pick

Laura Moe writes authentically about the dramatic shifts in the lives of two teens. Michael and Shelly meet in the summer while performing community service at the high school for their crimes. Both have closely kept secrets about themselves and their families they won't reveal to anyone. Secrets, lies, and dreams clash until both are forced to look at the truth. Thoroughly believable characters, strong dramatic tension and truthful storytelling set this book apart. I highly recommend it.

I expected a good read but it blew away my expectations. It's shocking to me that this was the author's first novel.

BREAKFAST WITH NERUDA is a story of two young adults dealing with issues of homelessness, building relationships, trust, and blended families. Laura Moe weaves her storyline around the two teenagers from two different social and economic lifestyles. The author introduces Michael Flynn providing her readers some details of his backstory such as his secrets of where is living and his

lack of funds. The storyline moves forward, increasing the intrigue of both Michael and Shelly's connections, as events unfold at the high school. Moe introduces Michelle Miller (Shelly) who is also performing community service at the high school. Shelly keeps her troubles to herself and is aware the dark cloud of rumors and innuendo creating a mystery about her troubles. Readers see Michael and Shelly developing a friendship regardless of the social and economic differences in their lives. Both find common ground to build their friendship learning to enjoy each other's company regardless of the secrets in both their pasts. When Shelly finds out Michael is living in his car on the school parking lot and Michael hears a rumor about Shelly's tainted past, they both learn to accept and not judge each other. Throughout the storyline, Moe explores social issues such as low income, mental health, and homelessness. Shelly convinces Michael to begin searching for the identity of his father. Moe helps her readers see issues of a blended family such as a spouse not welcoming a stepchild. The more time Michael and Shelly spend together their relationship grows beyond friendship, and they begin to share secrets of their past. *BREAKFAST WITH NERUDA* creates a lifeline of trust for Michael and Shelly as readers finish the story to find out how things turn out. Laura Moe's *BREAKFAST WITH NERUDA* is a must read and earns a five-star ranking.

This book was quite honestly, refreshing. Overall, I was enthralled with the characters, the pace of the writing was good, and the story was original. (No love triangles here!) Michael is like any good character, flawed. I cannot say that I absolutely loved either main character completely, but that is probably a good thing. At times, the rate of progression of their relationship seemed a little quick to me, but nonetheless, I still think it was fairly realistic. I mean, who didn't have a relationship that progressed a little illogically when they were young?? I would have appreciated more insight into Shelly's background, and her story of transforming into the Shelly that Michael falls for. The reason given for her change of personality and estrangement from her family seemed a little insufficient. I really enjoyed the different trials that the author presented in this novel. Hoarding is a very prevalent and damaging disease within our society, we often lose sight of just how painful this struggle can be for families and individuals. Hoarding is estimated to affect 2-5% (that's almost twice as many as suffer from Alzheimer's!) of the United States alone, with 92% of those people also suffering from a co-occurring mental illness. As someone who struggles daily with anxiety disorders, depression, and other risk factors for hoarding, it is truly a slippery slope. Affordable, accessible mental health care should be at the forefront of our minds as a nation, and a society. Annie being left in the home with their mother was just heart-rending, it would have been interesting to have seen her point of

view in a little more detail. Maybe this comment will show just how far west I live, but I had no idea that Ohio could be so dangerous. The loss of Annie's father and Michael's anxiety about the security of his rolling home kind of shocked me a bit. I can't help but be curious about Michael's mother, how complex and difficult her youth must have been. Her story would most likely illustrate even more clearly the need for mental health services in our nation. When thinking of her, the tune of "Unwell" by Matchbox Twenty dances through my mind, and I feel for her in a very real way. The ending of the book was so genuine to real life, everything doesn't always end in a pretty box, tied up with a bow. True love doesn't have to be forever love, people come in and out of our lives, what we do with their influence marks the breadth of the relationship. I am left feeling a little unsettled, slightly uncomfortable, and I think that was intended.

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