ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Lean Mean Machines
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Susan Ouriou, translator
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“A mystery is like a mechanical problem with a bike. No matter how complex the problem, there’s always some solution,” mulls Jeremy, whose school locker is filled with bicycle parts. He is intrigued by the new student who has been assigned the locker next to his. Laure has a rich, preppy look about her—not the type of girl who would normally interest him. Jeremy also notices her sadness and the mornings she has bags under her eyes. The beautiful teen is evasive about her past, and the little that Jeremy learns about her doesn’t make sense. A clue may be a picture in her locker of a large ginger-colored horse and a conceited-looking man.

Hating her new life, Laure refuses to socialize on the weekends. It doesn’t take her long to tire of her charade and lies, but she is unwilling to share the awful truth, even with Jeremy, who tries to befriend her. Because of her tortured secret past, Laure is vulnerable to blackmail; another student, Christian, uses information about her family to harass her into an abusive relationship.

Jeremy, who enjoys a joyous home full of siblings, is determined to learn the truth. He skips school—with his mother’s permission—and rides his bike fifty kilometers from his home in Montréal to the town in which Laure had lived and where she had attended a prestigious academy. He learns about Laure’s lawyer father—that he had lied, cheated, and broken the law, then committed suicide. The family had lost everything, even Laure’s beloved horse.

With this knowledge, Jeremy is able to break Christian’s hold on Laure and free her from her self-imposed prison of silence and shame. In a teen-pleasing touch, Jeremy helps Laure reconcile her former lifestyle with her new one by talking her into the perfect job—working at the stable where her horse lives.

Marineau’s book is less about bikes than about relationships, the power of secrets and shame, reconciliation, and true friendship. The author demonstrates that, indeed, complex teen problems can have solutions. The characters are refreshingly honest, and their situations and emotions are authentic.

The author has won several awards in Québec, France, and Belgium for other books. The original French edition of this one received an honorable mention from the Priz Alvine-Belisle.

Linda Salisbury