

## Munching on the Sun

**Mark Paul Oleksiw**

Mark Paul Oleksiw (Aug 15, 2018)

Softcover \$15.99 (294pp)

978-1-77511-112-2

*Munching on the Sun encapsulates what it is like to have big questions about life while you're falling in love and growing up.*

Mark Paul Oleksiw's realistic coming-of-age novel *Munching on the Sun* focuses on an emotional young man with a sweet heart.

University senior Lukas surprises a theater professor by declaiming a heartfelt monologue to an empty room, only to collapse from injury and emotion. But Lukas's story begins much earlier: the novel jumps between his senior year in a business college and his childhood friendship with beautiful and enigmatic Kara, a neighborhood girl who seemed to understand Lukas better than anyone else.

Early in his senior year, Lukas thinks he catches a glimpse of Kara, who has long been out of his life. As Lukas grows more and more detached from his college life, living inside his head, his friends begin to wonder whether something in his past is haunting him, creating both the person they love and the inner demons that plague him. Friendship, love, and the need to pursue true passions are emergent themes in this suspenseful and romantic tale.

The framing structure—an event in the first chapter turns out to be the culmination of almost all of the following chapters—creates some initial confusion. Much of the story is told through flashbacks, but they are helpfully related in precise order. All of the necessary information is forwarded, and the text maintains curiosity. The story is most lucid in sections that include both Lukas's childhood and college experiences, though his fanciful descriptions can be hard to parse. Intense and abstract language captures Lukas's mental states, driving interest to find out what happened to cause so much upheaval. The story is layered, fast, and balanced, including through subplots like unexplained attacks on women at Lukas's school.

Character development is accomplished through excellent dialogue. Lukas comes across as delicate, caring, and sensitive; his college friends, his sister Maggie, and Kara are well established, too. Conversations lead to tense moments as well as humor, and Lukas stays positive even when he's out of sorts.

While the love-story-gone-wrong elements of the novel are quotidian, they are dressed in remarkable prose and ably convey the high stakes for Lukas, his friends, and his family. The book works toward a conclusion that hits the perfect notes, resolving plot threads and allowing all characters to air what they've wanted to say. Rereading the book's beginning results in a full sense of what the professor and Lukas were talking about.

*Munching on the Sun* encapsulates what it is like to have big questions about life while you're falling in love and growing up.

LAURA LEAVITT (August 14, 2019)

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