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General

Reconstructing Natalie
Laura Jensen Walker
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Cancer is no laughing matter—except when it is, says the author in her latest novel. As a breast cancer survivor herself, Walker, a chick lit writer (*Dreaming in Black and White*; *Dreaming in Technicolor*) translates her own experience into a poignant story about a young woman dealing with a potentially life-threatening disease.

It's far from funny when twenty-seven-year-old Natalie Moore is diagnosed with breast cancer. Still in the prime of her life, she finds herself haunted—not simply by the fear of dying. As an evangelical Christian, she feels certain that she'll be saved and welcomed into "the arms of Jesus" should she die, but she's just as concerned about the here-and-now lack of a boyfriend's or husband's arms in which to seek comfort as she confronts her mortality.

It's a natural and normal reaction for a young woman struck by a possibly-terminal illness. The telling of the story, too, is natural, as it perfectly captures a rapid-fire alternation between tragedy and hilarity. One moment, Natalie is sobbing on the shoulder of her neighbor, Andy, wailing, "'I don't want to die,'" and the next, she's hysterically laughing about a series of breast-related puns her friends are making ("'Happy Boob-Voyage!'" they wish her on the eve of her voluntary double mastectomy).

It's a difficult journey, but—fortunately—Natalie doesn't have to make it alone, as she is assisted by the eclectic group of women in her support group and by her two close girlfriends. Helpful, too, is that neighbor, Andy—a childhood best friend (or maybe more?, Natalie wonders) who lives next door, nursing a broken heart (his wife picked up and left one day after "deciding the white-picket-fence-and-mother-in-the-suburbs bit wasn't for her") and raising his young son.

Natalie is a delightful narrator, doling out vivid and humorous descriptions of her friends. She says of one free-spirited, bohemian pal, "She's a modern day Annie Hall. (Or Mary Kate Olsen with a little more padding. But don't ever tell her I said so)." Natalie's penchant for

pop culture (the Olsen twin reference is followed quickly by an in-depth analysis of the Ross/Rachel relationship on *Friends*) is a chirpy foil to the book's darker sections about Natalie's battle with depression, and the author deftly skips between humor and sadness.

Though the voyage from cancer victim to survivor is central to the plot, the book is much larger than that. It's also about Natalie's growth from girl to woman and about her journey to a more complete life and a fuller spirit. But, mostly, it's a touching and realistic story about the precious lifeboats—friends, family, and faith—that keep everyone afloat in life's choppy waters.