

The Bravest Thing

Laura Lascarso

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Lascarso's writing is enthralling and stays true to the inner workings of a seventeen-year-old mind.

Following the tumultuous, burgeoning relationship between two teenage boys in rural Texas, *The Bravest Thing*, by Laura Lascarso, is an engrossing and compassionate look at the excitement of first love and the havoc which that can wreak when the community doesn't approve.

Protagonists Berlin, a successful high-school football player and all around country boy, and Hiroku, the artistic and outspoken new kid in town, couldn't be more different, yet the two find themselves attracted to each other instantly. Set in an unforgiving Texas town, the two manage to develop a relationship, only to have it abruptly halted by malicious townsfolk. Berlin must contend with the lie he's been living, while Hiroku must fight to stay away from an abusive ex and an addiction problem.

Lascarso expertly switches perspective between the two teens throughout the novel, a choice that allows for a plethora of insight on both sides. Berlin struggles to reconcile his faith and public persona with his newly found attraction to men, while Hiroku must adjust to being the only openly gay (and Asian) student in town. Facing blatant homophobia, the two are forced into secrecy until a savage attack changes their lives forever.

Never preachy or heavy-handed, the novel manages to touch on many ever-relevant topics, from finding and maintaining faith in times of trouble to battling the perils of addiction. The solace each teen finds in the other is only the beginning of their journey to greater self-awareness, much of the internal work required for growing up left to the individual. This is the great strength of *The Bravest Thing*. Though decidedly a romance, the typical unhealthy codependent relationship is subverted, instead allowing two very different people to come into their own.

Lascarso's writing is well defined, enthralling in both setting and plot advancement but also staying true to the inner workings of a seventeen-year-old mind. Moments of clarity and growth are peppered with the self-doubt and heightened emotion that come along with teenage love.

Offering new perspectives on a familiar feeling, *The Bravest Thing* is well worth a read.

AMANDA ADAMS (LGBTQ+ 2017)

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