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When The Moon Was Ours: A Novel



Synopsis

Winner of the 2016 Tiptree Award! Longlisted for the 2016 National Book Award for Young People's Literature Stonewall Book Award Honor
“McLemore’s second novel is such a lush surprising fable, you half expect birds to fly out of the pages” | McLemore uses the supernatural to remind us that the body’s need to speak its truth is primal and profound, and that the connection between two people is no more anyone’s business than why the dish ran away with the spoon.”--Jeff Giles, New York Times Book Review
Anna-Marie McLemore’s debut novel *The Weight of Feathers* was greeted with rave reviews, a YALSA Morris Award nomination, and spots on multiple “Best YA Novels” lists. Now, McLemore delivers a second stunning and utterly romantic novel, again tinged with magic. To everyone who knows them, best friends Miel and Sam are as strange as they are inseparable. Roses grow out of Miel’s wrist, and rumors say that she spilled out of a water tower when she was five. Sam is known for the moons he paints and hangs in the trees and for how little anyone knows about his life before he and his mother moved to town. But as odd as everyone considers Miel and Sam, even they stay away from the Bonner girls, four beautiful sisters rumored to be witches. Now they want the roses that grow from Miel’s skin, convinced that their scent can make anyone fall in love. And they’re willing to use every secret Miel has fought to protect to make sure she gives them up. Atmospheric, dynamic, and packed with gorgeous prose, *When the Moon Was Ours* is another winner from this talented author.

Book Information

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Hardcover: 288 pages

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Best Sellers Rank: #63,717 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in Books > Teens >

Literature & Fiction > Magical Realism #98 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social &

Family Issues > Family > Siblings #106 in Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy >

Fantasy > Contemporary

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • Love bests every opponent in this surreal exploration of familial bonds and sexual identity. Teens Sam and Miel have been best friends for years, ever since Miel appeared, sodden and terrified, amid the flooded ground around an overturned water tower. As their friendship unfolds into romance, long-repressed secrets and rumors clamor for air. Sam is reticent and obsessed with painting moons on paper and metal. Miel and her guardian, Aracely, are thought to be witches • Miel because roses grow beautifully and painfully out of her wrist one at a time, and Aracely because she cures lovelorn townspeople with potions she creates. Until recently, the four haughty, gorgeous Bonner sisters held mysterious sway over the hearts of the town's young men. Now that their power has gone, they believe Miel's roses are the fix they need, and they have no scruples about using physical cruelty or blackmail to get what they want. Amid the ordinariness of the small-town setting, McElmore winds arabesques of magical realism. This imbues the narrative with the feel of a centuries-old fairy tale, while the theme of sexual identity gives it the utmost relevance. Some teens might be put off by the frequent descriptions of egg and pumpkin varieties and their associated shapes, colors, and uses. VERDICT Readers who stick with this novel will be rewarded with a love story that is as endearingly old-fashioned as it is modern and as fantastical as it is real. • Jennifer Prince, Buncombe County Public Libraries, NC

A Kirkus Best Book of 2016 A Booklist Editor's Choice "With luminous prose infused with Latino folklore and magical realism, this mixes fairy-tale ingredients with the elegance of a love story, with all of it rooted in a deeply real sense of humanity. Lovely, necessary, and true." • Booklist (starred) "McElmore mesmerizes once again with a lush narrative set at the thresholds of identity, family, and devotion... Readers will be ensnared in this ethereal narrative long before they even realize the net has been cast." • Kirkus (starred) "Readers who stick with this novel will be rewarded with a love story that is as endearingly old-fashioned as it is modern and as fantastical as it is real." • School Library Journal (starred) "It is a story of secrets, and of speaking them, and the power of saying and living your truth, without fear." • Lambda Literary "McElmore blends magical elements with a culturally vibrant cast to create a haunting modern fairy tale... Lush, reverential language remains a hallmark of McElmore's work..."

Readers interested in gender identity and the pull of family and history will find this to be an engrossing exploration of these and other powerful themes." *— Publishers Weekly*

"McLemore's lush writing gives way to a necessary tale of love and truth that spans across gender, sexuality, and even ethnicity *—* call with just a hint of magic." *— Nivea Serrao for Entertainment Weekly*

"You've never read a book quite like this one...The story is lush, sexy, and ethereal, making you feel like you've been enraptured by some old fairy tale that, strangely, feels completely modern at the same time." *— Bustle*

"One of the most delightfully unusual YA fantasy novels of the past year. There's dark magic, deep friendship, and queer romance bound together by a lovely, well-written narrative." *— Tor.com*

"McLemore dances deftly across genres, uniquely weaving glistening strands of culture, myth, dream, mystery, love, and gender identity to create a tale that resonated to my core. It's that rare kind of book that you want to read slowly, deliciously, savoring every exquisite sentence. I adored this book." *— Laura Resau, Américas Award Winning Author of Red Glass and The Queen of Water*

"Lushly written and surprisingly suspenseful, this magical tale is not just a love story, but a story of the secrets we keep and the lies we tell, and the courage it takes to reveal our authentic selves to each other and to the world." *— Laura Ruby, Printz Award Winning-Author of Bone Gap*

Ethereal and beguiling... The enchanting setup and the forbidden romance that blooms between these two outcasts will quickly draw readers in, along with the steady unspooling of the families' history and mutual suspicions in this promising first novel. *— Publishers Weekly on The Weight of Feathers*

Told with skillful poetic nuances, this Romeo-and-Juliet story of forbidden love will entice fans of Maggie Stiefvater's *Raven Cycle* who wished for a little more romance." *— School Library Journal on The Weight of Feathers*

A very imaginative modern-day romance akin to Romeo and Juliet and is infused with the whimsy of magical realism. *— RT Book Reviews on The Weight of Feathers*

Readers beguiled by the languorous language...will find themselves falling under its spell...A contemporary, magical take on an ever compelling theme. *— Kirkus Reviews on The Weight of Feathers*

"Scales and feathers touch and burn in McLemore's stunning debut. The beauty of the language wraps around you, not letting go until long after the final page." *— Jaleigh Johnson, New York Times bestselling author of The Mark of the Dragonfly and Secrets of Solace on The Weight of Feathers*

When the Moon Was Ours, captures a beautiful love story full of colors, scents, musical prose, and magical realism. Miel and Samir are peculiar children; Miel grows roses from her wrists and Sam

paints moons and hangs them in trees around town. Anna-Marie McLemore's rich narrative walks us through the lives of Miel and Sam, two teenagers with complicated histories. Miel's fear of water, ghosts, pumpkins, and tormented memories of her mother, are intensified when the town's rusted water tower falls and water rushes out over the fields and her. It is at this moment that she appears in the town, at the age of five, alone, in a thin nightgown, and bathed in rusted water. No one knows her or approaches her, except for Moon (Sam), who talks to her and covers her with his jacket. Miel goes home with Sam, but Aracely, the town's curandera, offers to bring her home and look after her. This town, like the novel, is full of mystery. There are four beautiful sisters, known as the Bonner sisters, who are thought to be witches. They usually get people to do what they want, and get boys to fall in love with them. They seemingly accept and care for Miel, but are manipulative and cruel to her when they think her flowers can help them get their powers back. The Bonner sisters are not free from gossip, envy, unexpected pregnancies, and secret sexual desires. The readers slowly begin to discover that what makes everyone mysterious is aside from the growing roses from Miel's skin is the world of secrets, half-truths, and distorted memories that each character holds. Hanging throughout the novel is the theme of gender fluidity. The story follows the blooming romance between Miel and Sam, who seem to tend to each other's pains, desires, and bodily discoveries of unexpected peculiarities. Both Miel and Sam are foreign to the town, but it is Sam who is sometimes the target of discrimination because of the color of his skin and feminine features. Sam tells Miel the story his mother told him about bacha posh, a cultural practice in which families with no sons, dress a daughter as a son, and as an adult, the daughter returns to live as woman. Eventually, we discover how this tradition has impacted Sam's life. Similarly, we learn about the connection between Sam's life and Aracely, the town's healer. It is clear that the Bonner sisters are white, Miel is Latina, and Sam is Italian-Pakistani, and, although minimal, we can see how they experience life in this town. Las gringas bonitas, as Miel refers to them, are privileged and powerful, while Sam works the Bonner family's fields. The theme of racial experiences or discrimination is not central to the novel, but it does point us to different lived experiences. In the end, the novel is about acceptance and love. It is also about the complexity and danger of strict gender roles, and the freedom to live outside of that. For Sam, his assigned name and gender at birth did not match who he had become. The man he had become is the man who Miel loved. It is important to note the author's personal story at the end of the book. Although she tells us at the beginning that this is a work of fiction, in the end, she explains her

personal connection to Miel and Samir's story. The author grew up listening to La Llorona stories, the weeping woman who, the legend tells, tried to drown her children by the river, and later learned about the story of the bacha posh, a cultural practice in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She also tells us about her marriage to a transgender male.

This book is gorgeous, from the dedication forward. Even when they've fought or pulled away from each other, the amount of love Samir and Miel have for each other -- not always shown in their actions towards each other, but unfalteringly shown in their defenses of each other -- is incredible. And it was beautiful to see them try to figure out that love for each other on page. What they could give, what they could ask, what they had to leave space for. There's so much rebirth here and so much exploration of fear, truth, secrets, giving people space, history, and family. I love how scent and spice and color are used. Samir's moons, Aracely's eggs and onions, Miel's roses, the spices when they cook in Yasmin's kitchen. And there's so much about culture here, and how it mixes. The culture of this particular place, with the lighting of the pumpkins. Miel and Aracely's culture, the history of curanderos. Samir, part Pakistani and part Italian and relating to those in *such* different ways.

Exquisitely written as expected and a truly magical story that has good, authentic trans representation. Loved this, but not quite as much as I loved McLeMORE's *The Weight of Feathers*. Still, both are absolutely excellent reads.

Loved The book

This book is absolutely gorgeous, and is one of the first books I can remember forcing me to savor it slowly. I know I can--and most certainly will--read it again, but the beautiful strings of words on these pages kept making me stop and re-read individual sentences, paragraphs, pages. The care that went into every word of Miel and Samir's story astounds. Everything about this story is magical, and the fact that the fantastical details ring so true makes it such a clear example of magical realism, which is so perfectly suited to a story about a boy born as a girl and the girl reborn from the water who loves him. The adults in the story are richly drawn as well, with their own share of secrets haunting them, and as for the villains--let's just say I won't easily forget them. Easily one of my favorite books this year!

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