



Preloved

Shirley Marr

Download now

Read Online ➔

Preloved

Shirley Marr

Preloved Shirley Marr

If you had a second chance at love, would you do it all over again?

Amy has enough to deal with for one lifetime. A superstitious Chinese mother. A best friend whose mood changes as dramatically as her hair colour. A reputation for being strange. The last thing she needs is to be haunted by someone only she can see.

Logan is a ghost from the Eighties. He could be dangerous. He's certainly annoying.

He might also be Amy's dream boy.

Preloved Details

Date : Published April 1st 2012 by Black Dog Books/Walker Books

ISBN : 9781742031903

Author : Shirley Marr

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts, Romance, Contemporary, Mystery, Supernatural, Fiction, Cultural, Australia

 [Download Preloved ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Preloved ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Preloved Shirley Marr

From Reader Review Preloved for online ebook

oliviasbooks says

3.5 stars. *** *You might come across something you consider as spoilers reading my review.* ***

"Amy, remember that if you get lost in a forest and the ghosts trick you into thinking every direction looks the same – take your undies off, put them over your head and spin around in a circle. Then your path will be clear."

Shirley Marr's second novel, *Preloved*, is thoroughly peppered with indispensable pieces of wisdom like this endearing warning the heroine's mother sends her daughter off to school with. Shirley states at the end of the book that she has all these sayings from her own mum, who may or may not resemble Ivy Lee, a tiny Australian woman of Chinese descent, who operates on a very fixed believe system rooted in ghosts, good and evil spirits, reincarnation and consequently the repercussions of what you do in your present life on what or where you will be in your next one and the time in between. In addition she is a bit forgetful, easily distracted, slightly wacky in general and not the kind of person who cuddles and coddles relatives and friends, which is her case is obviously a culture thing. In spite of that I could seamlessly relate: Although *my* equally strange and distractible mother - who I am by the way very grateful to for putting so much effort into trying to raise me and my siblings right – pulled her various rules and wild convictions out of a Christian hat. I used to cover my ears and hum to myself, for instance, when other kids started to recite horoscopes from a teen magazine, because "attempting to look into your future will have bad consequences" - and I admit that I still feel kind of queasy today when someone insists on learning my zodiac sign. My mum and I reintroduced hugging into our relationship when I left for university and did not spend so much time with her anymore. I was never called by anything else than my five-syllables-long name (which I do not really mind, but which I noticed when other parents called their little girls "snail" or "bunny" or "treasure" or shorted versions of their given names), and I always resented her tendency to add each and every knick-knack somebody gave to her to the dust-gathering clutter on bookshelves and cupboards and grinded my teeth to dust because of her very annoying habit to tell me exactly what to do and what to change - when all I had wanted was letting her know how things went for or against me in my world. Maybe that is the reason why I feel particularly attracted to mother-daughter stories – in all likelihood you know my huge adoration for *Saving Francesca* by Melina Marchetta - and I instantly liked both generations of Lee women in *Preloved*. For inherited wackiness notwithstanding Amy is unquestionably sweet and funny and warm. She connects very interesting daydreams and she fantasizes a little about making out with a nice and nerdy gamer boy. (I especially appreciated that this potential love interest is described – by himself – as being rather chubby and not so quick on his feet, and that his being overweight does not render him unfit to star in the heroine's romantic fantasies). Amy is very reluctant to act upon her attraction and I understood that her hesitation derives from witnessing her father's excessive alcohol consumption and the destruction of her parents' marriage laced with ugly fights and unresolved financial matters. But as the remainder of Amy's off-putting behavior, her self-fabricated state of one-weird-friend-only-loneliness, is concerned, I have to say I did not get that at all and the feeble hints at a possible cause at the end did not convince me or help me understand: Why again did she put her friendship with kindergarten buddy Nancy Soo, who is still caring and clever and snarky, wonderful to talk to and solid enough to lean on, on ice? Why does she spend her time with self-centered boy-magnet Rebecca, who every girl despises for a reason, when there is no benefit in the form of confiding in and relying on each other included in that friendship? Why does she almost revel in her outsider status and utters strange and incomprehensible things when she is obviously on the brink of being suffocated by her physical and mental loneliness? Shirley's dedication at the beginning of the novel - "*For everyone who prefers abnormal to paranormal and a bad romance to a love story*" - certainly rings true: Amy Lee's spiritual episode in *Preloved* is no ghost-and-girl-love-story, 80s ghost boy Logan Feldmann is no Jesse de Silva (view spoiler), and Amy's haunted moments just make the lonely parts in her ache with a longing for

touch and laughter, for closeness and romance. The exclusive relationship with someone only she can see beckons strongly to her, because Rebecca's attention is only available as long as no potential admirer claims it. Logan's attention wanders, too, but only Amy can hear and help him, and his demeanor shows that her well-being and her future matter to him, as well. His questions according to his own past make Amy, who is into preloved films and music and clothes anyway, suddenly want to unravel the knots that hinder herself to live freely, as well. Still, to find my way as a reader through the glittering prism of Amy's far-flung motivations and actions and puzzling school events like an 80s week was quite difficult and occasionally exhausting. The plot jittered and jumped, and I, I tagged along – because in some way Amy's fate had become important to me. Before I end my musings I need to say something about the **language** and something else about the cover:

As a non-native speaker, who during the 80s experienced the English language solely in the form of textbooks designed in the 70s, I am not really able to sort slang words used by fictional characters according to era, social standing or even an author's creativity. Therefore my impression that Logan's constantly "spewing" of especially fitting vocabulary left a rather forced/artificial bytaste might be the result of being a foreigner with a limited grasp of a multi-faceted language. I even sometimes fear that my own colloquial German is still too saturated with expressions of the decade I started my school career, which outs me automatically as a pretty dated person. As far as the rest of the book's style is concerned I need to stress how much I enjoyed that Shirley's unique brand of humor haunted every single paragraph. For someone like me, who loves her comments and reviews here on Goodreads.com, 270 pages of her "abnormally" good writing in one go is definitely a treat to savor. This review of Preloved is actually meant to be a recommendation.

The **cover** of Preloved

is one of the most beautiful and alluring ones I have come across this year. I fiercely love it and already tried out the dots-of-light-effect on some of the pictures stored on my phone. It also looks more magical than the cute but rather dully colored cover of the modern Cinderella retelling If I Have a Wicked Stepmother, Where's My Prince?.

.
That – apart from the 43 long days between dispatch and deliveray – makes it a tiny bit hard to part with the copy again.

... But I am determined to go though with my plan to pass the book to someone else – although I am not sure exactly how. Maybe someone is willing to swap it – internationally – for something on my wishlist or my want-to-own shelf? I guess if nobody contacts me within a week or so I will decide on a Giveaway or an preloved-books-offer at Amazon Germany.

Limonessa says

Shirley Marr always manages to surprise me.
4 stars and review to come.

So I'm reading Preloved and incidentally I see Kylie Minogue on the paper today:

Look closer... she's wearing these:

Another detail:

Apparently, the shoes spit fire.
She really is stuck. In the 80s, I mean.

Mimi Valentine says

This book defines the word adorable, brings a new definition to the word contemporary, and manages to mix hilarious and heartwarming scenes with the perfect degree of effectiveness! In other words, **Preloved** stole my heart and I'm not demanding it back anytime soon.

Preloved revolves around Amy, your classic sidekick girl. She's in love with *The Princess Bride*, has an amusingly superstitious Chinese mother, and has best friend that she believes will be the heroine of a story someday. Except instead — by some fluke chance — Amy is the one who ends up with the ghost-inhabited locket. Thus beginning her hilarious journey!

I couldn't have loved Amy more than I already did if you paid me to! She was quirky, and funny, and strange, and absolutely the kind of girl I'd admire in school. When she meets Logan (the swoon-worthy ghost from the 80s from the locket ♥) her world is turned upside down. Yet she deals with it exactly how any girl would! First she questions her sanity. Then she tries to help him out, because who wouldn't try to aid the sweet albeit slightly infuriating ghost?

Shirley said, "It's more a bad romance, less of a love story." And that's so true! When the boy is a ghost and the girl isn't, you can't expect a happily ever after — although I was craving one anyways because of how attached I became to the characters. But HEA or not, the ending is bittersweet and perfect in its own way. I turned the last page with a smile with my tears.

Adorably sweet, funny, and heartwarming all the same, **Preloved** is a book I loved with all my heart! I loved all the characters, from Amy to her best friend to Logan and more; I loved the way it dealt with family as well as the difficulty of being friends with a diva.

This book is a contemporary read with a touch of ghostly romance. Would I recommend it? Absolutely and completely and totally, I would! :)

BUY or BORROW?: Do yourself a favour and buy this book ASAP! It will definitely bring a smile to your face, and it will give all sidekick girls hope that they'll be the main character of their own story soon as well! :)

(Original review at Mimi Valentine's YA Review Blog)

Amanda says

Preloved by Shirley Marr is set in the fictional town of Middlemore (loosely based on Perth, Australia). Amy Lee is 16 and lives with her mother above their vintage store, Buy Gones. Amy attends Middlemore High school with her best and only friend Rebecca.

Rebecca drops by one morning, dressed as Kylie Minogue, because their school has been raising money for the end-of-year ball by holding fancy dress days once a week in exchange for a donation and this week the theme is the Eighties. Amy is dressed as Princess Buttercup from *The Princess Bride*. On their way to school they meet a trio of Jason Donovans, aka Michael Limawan and two of his mates. Amy tries to get them to leave and in the process she knocks Michael, Rebecca and herself into a fountain. It's then that she discovers a silver chain attached to a small locket and she keeps it. From the moment she opens the locket she starts seeing a boy hanging around, dressed in Eighties clothing, but no one else can see him. It turns out he's a ghost named Logan and he died in 1988. At first Amy wants to get rid of him but then she starts to enjoy his company and wants to help figure out what happened to him.

Amy is such a funny main character. She thinks of herself as Rebecca's short, awkward, Asian friend, always the sidekick, never the star but she is so much more than that. She's funny and loyal, fierce and full of love for her mum and her best friend but she doesn't feel like she knows who she is. She is a little bit awkward, isn't very confident in herself and after her mum divorced her alcoholic father when she was eight, she stopped believing that love is really possible. She holds quite a grudge against her father, he didn't allow her mother to take any of her possessions, he doesn't support them financially and he now has a new girlfriend. Amy is always thinking of the perfect script for when she finally bumps into them one day and she can tell him exactly how she feels.

Amy reminded me of Lane Kim from *Gilmore Girls*. She's into music, especially older stuff, her mother owns a vintage store, she has one best friend, she's unique, interesting and she's not an Asian stereotype although she thinks her old childhood friend, Nancy Soo, is the perfect example of the typical Asian stereotype. I would definitely have wanted to be Amy's friend and I was happy when she and Nancy reconnected because while I liked Rebecca, she wasn't always as good a friend to Amy as she could have been and there was more to Nancy than came across in her school persona.

I loved Amy's mother, Ivy, as well. Unlike Lane's mother in *GG*, she wasn't super strict but she was always dispensing Chinese superstitions and warning Amy to be wary of ghosts, my absolute favourite was "Amy, remember that if you get lost in a forest and the ghosts trick you into thinking every direction looks the same - take your undies off, put them over your head and spin around in a circle. Then your path will be clear." Amy responds with a thanks that I imagine was delivered in perfect deadpan style. My only issue with the relationship between Amy and Ivy was the lack of affection. Amy often craved a hug from her mum but is afraid to initiate it and I was pleased by the growth in their relationship towards the end of the book.

Logan, the friendly Eighties ghost, was hilarious and turned out to be a really good thing for Amy because he helped her discover who she is. I love that he introduced her to Eighties slang and referenced really old advertisements like Mr Matey bubble bath. And he scores bonus points for reciting the words to Magic Dance (aka You Remind Me of the Babe) from *Labyrinth*!

I couldn't understand Amy's need to get rid of him when he first appears, a boy from the Eighties is hardly the scariest ghost that you could get stuck with so I was glad she decided to keep him around for a bit longer because his past is a mystery and we get to play detective with Amy and discover what happened to him all

those years ago. My only issue with Logan was the number of times he said 'fair dinkum!'. It's such an old Aussie saying and I can't imagine a teenager ever saying it but then I was a baby in the Eighties, maybe teens used it all the time.

There were a lot of pop cultural references in *Preloved* and it made the book a lot of fun. In the first few pages we had Kylie, the Princess Bride, Labyrinth, Jason Donovan and later on Rainbow Bright and Bananarama. I did wonder how many of these would be recognised by teens reading this book, I'm sure most won't have heard of Bananarama or Mr Matey but for non-teen YA fans, like myself, it was like a trip down memory lane and *Preloved* is one of my favourite books of 2012.

Just like in her previous novel, *Fury*, Shirley has created strong, memorable characters in a beautifully written, funny, sweet story about a girl who wants to believe in love and find out who really she is.

The cover for *Preloved* is gorgeous, it features the dress that Amy wears to the ball. I love the matte finish of the cover and the pretty pink and sepia tones of the image. It suits the book perfectly but Shirley has shared some of the draft covers that were considered here - all of them are lovely, but I think they made the right choice.

Preloved is released April 1, 2012 but it's already in a few Dymocks stores and you can order it online through Fishpond. I recommend it to all fans of Aussie YA, realistic fiction and fans of the Eighties!

Shirley Marr says

What did you think? asks Goodreads. I'm the author! I wrote this book! It's as awesome as this book...

I lie.

Nothing can be more awesome than that book.

My book has an 80's flavour, but it's never going to be as rad as that blond dude's haircut and his grey+grey colour scheme.

In my own words...

Preloved is a ghost story. It involves past lives. It's about a modern teen girl and a dead teen boy from the 80s. It's more a bad romance, less of a love story. And it's more abnormal than paranormal! Since it references the 80s, it might also have stonewash denim and a Choose Life t shirt in there somewhere too. I hope it's funny and dark and sweet in its own indie way.

I hope you, well, love *Preloved* and please be as honest as you like in your reviews. My rules you already know - I don't give stars to my own book (cos it's up to you, not me). I try and read each and every review (thank you). But not the threads that start under them (I consider those personal spaces, who wants an author and their ruddy 2 cents worth there huh?)

As per tradition... here is some trivia :)

Cos I love trivia.

14 Things to Prelove about Preloved

1. The cover is designed by Gayna Murphy, who also designed the Australian cover of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*.
2. One of the working titles for *Preloved* was *Excellent Used Condition* (if you're an eBay Bunny like me, it'd make perfect sense).
3. At the Melbourne Writers Festival I was asked if I would write a paranormal book. I jokingly said that I would write one about Chinese Vampires.

[image error]

I wasn't serious about the vampire part, but I became obsessed afterwards about the "paranormal" and "Chinese" part. That's how I started writing *Preloved*.

Considering that it was *Twilight* that led to *Fury* being written (in a completely wholesome non-*50-Shades-of-Grey* manner, see here), I sometimes wonder what is happening inside my head.

PS - if you've ever seen the cult Hong Kong movie *Mr Vampire* ... there's a scene I wrote in the book which is a sort of homage.

4. My editor for *Fury*, Melissa Keil, wanted me to write a "romance" because she said she had "read a lot of online comments (for *Fury*) that suggest you should write a romance". If you are that culprit, please own up.
5. *Preloved*'s unofficial tag-line is "Less Paranomal, more Abnormal" courtesy of Megan Burke.
6. The suburb Amy lives in might sound familiar because someone you know likes to badmouth it. See if you can spot the one sentence that connects Eliza to Amy.
7. Belle from Belle's Bookshelf won a cameo to be in this novel. See if you can spot her!
8. All the Chinese superstitions in this book really exist (I didn't make any of them up!) and they come from my mum.
9. To write Logan, my research consisted of spending hours watching videos of Kylie Mole and other great 80s Aussie slang "users" like Alf Stewart.
10. Rebecca is named after Kylie Mole's best friend Rebecca (who incidentally, was played by Kylie Minogue). This makes sense in context of the novel (or maybe not).
11. Stacey and Logan are both named after characters from my favourite 80s childhood series, *The Babysitter's Club*. I chose Logan because he's Marianne Spier's boyfriend in the series and my editor is called Maryann.
12. For the edits of the final draft, I returned back to my mother's home to work at the kitchen bench while she cooked, so that I could feel the connection that Amy and her mother share in the novel.

13. I am an accountant in real life. I have never seen any YA featuring a scene in Accounting (bah to English and Biology class) so I wrote one.

14. I swear this is a genuine spoiler. I mean it! (view spoiler)

Let me leave you with this article I found in the local paper while I was doing the final edits of Preloved in Augusta in the south of Western Australia. I love how Augusta is kinda stuck in the 80s and still has a video store, I mean that in the utmost of affection (that's why I went there to do my final edits). HAHAHA - CAR'N Cowaramup!

[image error]

...

Earlier on the ranch...

I'm running a Goodreads Book Giveaway for Preloved! Up for grabs are two signed copies.

Look, Empress Shirley has even stamped the books with her Imperial Chop (yes, I am so Chinese I own a personal chop)

[image error]

If you're wondering what the characters say (and what my Chinese name is), it's Sher-Li Mah :) So I'm Just Shirley in any language.

If you're wondering what shade of nail polish I'm wearing, it's called "Legs Up to There" by Australian-made, cruelty-free brand Chi Chi. Note that the name, when applied to my own stature, is 100% false.

And of course the giveaway is opened internationally.

You know you want it. So go forth!

...

The very first copy of Preloved has arrived. I put on a tutu to celebrate.

[image error]

karen says

i am sneaking this one in in the middle of my readventurer challenge - shhhh...

wow, i seem to be on a roll with reading sweet sweet books lately. and i don't mean this to be disparaging, but this book is truly a sweetie-pie almost-love-story.

and at first, i wasn't into it, i must confess. blame my need for the darkness and the edginess, but this one was so fast-paced, and was reading like the younger-range of YA, and i kept peering at it, trying to make out some of the bitchiness from *fury*. my bad.

this is not *fury*. this is its own thing. and it is a good thing.

shirley marr has created a great character in amy - her best friend rebecca is the siren, the untouchable, calculatedly aloof and apart, fostering her own image of being cooler-than-you, making all the boys fall for her and all the girls jealous. except amy. amy knows she is not in the same league as rebecca, and she doesn't really want to be. she doesn't care about boys, or clothes, or trends, she is busy just being who she is, dealing with the indifference of her father after her parent's divorce, and her mother's encyclopediac knowledge of chinese superstitions; mostly involving ghosts, helping out in her mother's vintage rummage store, and dealing with being stuck at that age where you want to be a kid but also recognize that your mother's eccentricities are not helping out the finances so hot, so you gotta step up. holy run-on sentence. sorry, kids!

so, when she accidentally releases a ghost from a locket intended for rebecca, and finds herself in the middle of a mystery involving star-crossed lovers, reincarnation, and a whole lot of 80's pop culture and slang, she is more comfortable than your average teenager with the idea of a ghost suddenly popping into her life. and she starts to understand what all those 80's crush movies are talking about.

it is a great personal-journey book. amy starts off as a pretty emotionally closed-off, independent character, not judging herself based on her appearance, or trying too hard to make friends other than rebecca, but the reality of the independent character is that it is a lonely road. having a crush on a ghost really only makes the loneliness more apparant. but her realization of this, and her blossoming into a more solid amy are fantastic, and it is hard not to fall in love with her, especially when all the backdrop is feel-good 80's pop music that makes you automatically root for the girl in glasses.

nothing like *fury* at all, but unlike that one, you will feel pretty good when you finish it, full of the flowering of possibilities.

quick, though - what is a cheesymite scroll??? i GIS'd it, and i got this:

and i am told it is filled with cheese and vegemite?? and amy eats this with strawberry milk?? i have ~~survived~~ eaten vegemite, and i suppose it is one of those acquired tsastes, but i cannot even picture eating vegemite with cheese, let alone the deliciously cloying hyper-sweetness of strawberry milk. but maybe it is an australian delicacy...but a note on the food in this book - holy cow, i gotta get me to australia. popcorn with icing sugar? yes, please, even though i don't know what the heck icing sugar is. but i know i want it.

and i also want someone to call me miss matey someday.

if i thought i could exist in the heat of that place, i would be there already. but there's no way. i wouldn't even make it one step out of the plane before i would erupt into a fireball, without even getting to taste icing sugar. sad.

at least i will have the books. and these amazing candy bars shirley sent me.

thank you, wonderful ladyface!

Monica says

2.5 STARS!

Okay, I don't usually give half stars, but today is an exception for this book. I want to be straight - this is not a supremely negative review. I did not hate the book. In fact there were some really nice things about it. But it just doesn't quite make it to 3 stars for me. The main reason?

I think it was the writing style and language used. You know, there are some YA books that *really* work across the age board, but I feel this one in particular was aimed directly at young teens. It was like I was reading directly from my diary from when I was 13-14 - which is fine, except I would no longer want to read those diaries except to laugh at my over-dramatic, boy-obsessed past self. Marr was able to really capture the language and thought processes of a teenager, but it was *too* much for me. Give me a 16-year-old like Katniss Everdeen and I will digest the story much better!

Some positives! Love that it was set in Australia. You never get to read about vegemite or milo in a YA novel. The characters were fairly endearing, if not a *little* irritating (especially Amy's best friend - what an awful person!). Logan particularly was well written and lovable. Marr also captured Amy's insecurities & shyness with a kind of uncomfortable truth. Amy is not like Bella Swan, who manages to be shy and awkward and simultaneously adored by the entire school. This was more like real life, where you kind of cling to the one person who gives you attention, despite how they treat you, and when a boy notices you? That's all you think about. Props to Marr for being able to portray her main character like this.

The story did feel a little too unrealistic to me, with characters accepting strange things too quickly and exploring past lives etc without too much question - however it was a nice little book, an easy read and a recommendation to younger readers.

Melanie says

See more reviews at [YA Midnight Reads](#)

4.5 stars

"There is no ending to this story because, as I've realised, stories don't have endings, only beginnings."

Amy hasn't had the easiest life. She lives with her superstitious single Chinese mother with barely enough money to feed themselves. Her 'best friend', Rebecca doesn't exactly help either; her mood changes as rapidly as her hair colour. Rebecca seems to attract all the boys, and Amy has always just been that nameless girl who follows Rebecca around at school. Yet, when Amy finds and opens a locket in the middle of nowhere,

her life seems to look a little brighter. Because who pops out of the locket is a ghost boy named Logan, who died in 1988; and despite the weirdness of it all, Amy and Logan have more in common than they thought and find comfort with each other's company.

What makes this book so much fun are the pop-culture references. The school Amy attends, Middlemore High School, likes to have dress up days in the middle of the week, and the theme they had most recently was the eighties. So Rebecca dresses up as Kylie Minogue (and of course a bunch of the guys dressed up as Jason Donovan, seeing as they are oh-so in love with Rebecca), and Amy dresses as Princess Buttercup from The Princess Bride. HOW AWESOME IS THAT? I wish my school would have such random dress up days. Because one of the main characters is from the eighties (Logan), we are introduced to a lot of the slang back then, as well as the music--and even the ads that used to play on the TV back in those days. It just made this book even more engaging.

Amy is such a brilliant character. She's different, a little strange but such a fun character to read about. She's never thought much of herself, and being stuck with Rebecca who apparently looks beautiful doesn't help either. She's not even an Asian stereotype, and sometimes she worries that her mother wishes she was just like Nancy, who is basically THE Asian stereotype. I didn't like Rebecca at all, for that matter. She's so up herself--she knows she's beautiful and tries to act superior from everyone else, and that is one of my biggest pet peeves ever so MUCH RAGE TO YOU, REBECCA. But, that didn't shake my love for this book at all, because it was probably the author's intention to do that.

Guys, we have a mother who is actually present in the book. HURRAH! I absolutely loved Amy's mother. She wasn't treated as some plot device in the story, and gosh, she's such a sweet and intelligent mother. No shame in saying that she was one of my favourite characters in the book. Amy's mother is quite important here, and I really appreciate the author for creating such a realistic dynamic between the two. EXTRA POINTS FOR YOU, MS. MARR!

In all, if you love the eighties, you'll love this book. If you love pop-culture references, you'll love this book. If you love Aussie YA, you'll love this book. I'M 99.99% SURE EVERYONE WILL ENJOY THIS BOOK. NOW GO GET YERSELVES AT COPY.

~Thank you Shirley Marr for gifting me this copy~

Wendy Darling says

Join us on the blog today for a Poolside Birthday Party Vlog with the adorable Shirley Marr! We have **three copies** of PRELOVED to give away, along with a beautiful sterling silver **locket necklace** just like the one in the book.

I had a horrible sensation in my stomach only because, like, a billion things could go wrong when you try to tell a girl that her Eighties-flavoured boyfriend from a past life was trying to hook back up with her.

Preloved is the story of 16-year-old Amy Lee, a girl who lives in the fictional Australian town of

Middlemore with her Chinese mother. On her school's Eighties Theme Day, she's dressed up as Buttercup from *The Princess Bride* and battling her love/hate relationship with her best friend Rebecca when she accidentally stumbles upon a silver locket with a picture of a boy from the 80s inside. Her life gets complicated when the boy's ghost appears and begins to haunt her--but not for the usual reasons you might expect. First of all, Logan wears his collar popped. And he's persistent. And he's annoying. But as Amy grows closer to her ghostly companion, her heart begins to yearn for the things it cannot have. Because Amy wasn't meant to pick up the locket at all...Rebecca was.

Distilling the essence of what this book is about doesn't even begin to hint at the reading experience, however. Written with fast and funny prose that is bubbling over with good humor, this is a ghost story that doesn't happen to be scary and a love story that doesn't happen to be about dating. Amy has a lot going on in her life even before Logan appears, since she feels overshadowed by nearly everyone in her life, even though she deals with it with amusing offhandedness. She describes herself as Rebecca's "short, awkward, Asian best friend. Which did have its advantages, because everyone instantly believed I was O-Ren Ishii from *Kill Bill*, with martial arts skills." She's also trying to figure out who she is, since she doesn't quite fit in with the nerdy Asian kids at school, but also chafes at her mother's superstitious adages and old-fashioned beliefs.

While *Preloved* is chock-full of Shirley Marr's trademark humor and moves along at an entertaining clip, it is admittedly very different from her first novel *Fury*, which had a darker, more subversive edge. The plot is a little looser and more free-form as well, and the madcap zaniness of many of the scenes seem more suited to younger YA readers. There are also so many 80s pop culture references that it will be interesting to see if most 13 - 18 year olds will respond to that.

Still, adult readers will likely appreciate the flashback to a more innocent time and the trip down memory lane, and it's hard not to be won over by the author's writing style. Her sharp observations about human behavior and quick character sketches are right on target, such as when Amy observes that her nemesis Nancy "Fancy Pants" Soo is "stereotypically good at maths" and "exactly the sort my Chinese mum would love to have as a daughter. Me? Until recently, I thought an algorithm was a type of dance move."

I would love to see the author delve a little more into emotional themes in her next novel, however. There are so many flashes of deep feeling in *Fury* and we skate around the edges of some serious emotions in *Preloved*, but I'm convinced there are even more depths to be plumbed that the author hasn't shown us quite yet.

"I see you, this girl who lives inside herself, invisible to everyone, even to herself. You're hungry for your mother's touch, hungry for your missing father. You're hungry for life and you're hungry to be a proper character in your own story."

There is an appealing sweetness and sadness in Amy and in this book, and there is also an additional love story that I didn't expect--specifically, the one between Amy and her mom, which is actually my favorite part of the story. I've known a lot of Asian mothers and the loving exasperation with which Amy deals with her rings very true. What may seem a bit of an exaggerated cultural caricature isn't really exaggerated at all, nor are the occasional emotional blackmail, Amy's consciousness of her potential unladylike behavior, her expectations for her daughter, etc. It's a pleasure to see the wry closeness between the two of them, as well as how the relationship changes and develops as the two of them learn more about each other.

I thought about Mum's vintage shop. How she believed that if she found something broken and lovingly put it back together, that someone would come along and love it again.

Isn't that a lovely way to look at things? And it makes the title of the book, as well as Logan's situation, all the more poignant. Amy is a very different character than Eliza from *Fury*, but she too embraces what life throws at her, even if they both do a little kicking and screaming at first. When it comes to smart, flawed, memorable characters and vivacious prose, Shirley Marr's flux capacitor is totally functioning at full throttle—and I can't wait to strap in for the next ride.

Rated 3.5 out of 5 stars

This review also appears in The Midnight Garden. An advance copy was provided by the publisher. Recommended for fans of Meg Cabot's Mediator series, Babe in Boyland, Pink, Geek High, So Over You, and for younger YA readers.

About the Book

This Aussie YA title is available in Australia and New Zealand, as well as through Fishpond.com. Check back with us next week, however, because Shirley Marr is stopping by our blog as part of the Preloved Blog Tour! We have an autographed copy of the book to give away as well as a beautiful prize for one of our lucky readers.

Check out my Preloved Inspiration Board on Pinterest, too! It might give you a little feel for the mood of the book.

Make Amy's Preloved Snack!

I was very intrigued when I read about a popular Australian snack that Amy likes to munch while she's watching *The Princess Bride*: popcorn with icing sugar! After much discussion with my GoodReads pals, especially the helpful Taneika, I decided to make a batch, except I thought it'd be fun to make the the popcorn pink and give it a little subtle flavor as well. Since Amy drinks strawberry milk in the story, it seemed like a no-brainer to make strawberry popcorn.

If you'd like to try it out yourself, download the 4 x 6 recipe card for **Preloved Strawberry Powdered Sugar Popcorn** on our blog.

Heidi says

Amy's always been the sidekick to her best friend Rebecca, and she likes it that way. She doesn't have to worry about all the guys loving her, and all the girls hating her; she can focus all of her energy into being Rebecca's go-to gal and dealing with her superstitious Chinese mother. Amy certainly wouldn't have planned to find a locket containing the ghost of a boy from the 80s that only she could see—especially not when that locket was meant for someone else. Now Amy has to deal with Logan, who see just might want to kill if he weren't already dead, but just might love a little too.

Preloved was a cute and surprisingly touching story about connecting with one's identity. I expected a light hearted paranormal romance, a story where the sidekick finally got a taste of the limelight, but instead I got a story about a girl learning to embrace her culture, her family, and a life outside of the bubble she'd been happily living in so long. Preloved was certainly light hearted, but not in a completely fluffy way, and I found the incorporation of Chinese mythology both unique and fascinatingly fun.

Sadly for me, Amy was one of those characters I was never really able to love. She's too abrasive when it's not wanted, too convinced that it's her lifelong role to be someone else's second, and she never really gets out of the mentality that Rebecca has it all and that's how life should be. Rebecca was just a horrid friend, and I was disappointed that while Amy moves beyond being the moon that revolves around Rebecca's world, she doesn't wake up and realize Rebecca's pretty terrible. Rebecca is one of those girls who cares immensely about looking like she doesn't care at all, and very carefully cultivates a personality of intrigue and mystery, constantly placing Amy in a secondary roll with no idea that this girl deserves her own story.

I pictured Rebecca and Amy kind of like this:

Only if Rory was a terrible self-absorbed friend all of the time (rather than just some of it) who always had a crazy hair color and Lane was Chinese instead of Korean and her mother was super Chinese traditional instead of Christian. Amy's mom totally has the crazy vintage store and single mom thing down, which isn't too far from antiques and a father that stops being mentioned after season one!

So it should come as no surprise that despite all physical descriptions, I pictured Logan and Stacey like this:

But since it was Amy who was awesome enough to dress up as O-Ren Ishi while Rory Gilmore dressed up as Gogo Yurabi (also awesome), I feel the Gilmore references have to stop here lest things get too muddled.

ANYWAY the whole concept of Preloved is pretty cute. Amy's mom owns a vintage shop, where she likes to refer to the items she sells as preloved rather than pre-owned. The term takes on all sorts of new meanings as the story unfolds and Logan appears from a locket that used to belong to his girlfriend Stacey who just happens to look exactly like Amy's bestie Rebecca. So where does Amy fit into this mess, especially when she's pretty sure she's falling for this non-corporeal being?

Well of course Amy's Chinese mother has spent a lifetime warning her about all of the things she shouldn't do lest she attract a ghost...she just never told her about that one. And Logan isn't a vengeful ghost or a hungry ghost, he's just a [gorgeous] teenaged boy looking to get his girl back. Which brings us to the whole concept of reincarnation and the possibility that Rebecca really is somehow this Stacey girl that Logan's so hung up on.

I really loved Preloved's take on reincarnation, and honestly hadn't heard many of the beliefs about it before. In Amy's culture, the idea of reincarnation is partly a coping mechanism, but it's also this really sweet belief that everyone gets a second chance, and that in each lifetime we have the opportunity to make our own decisions about who will be in our lives and who we will be as people—each lifetime is a fresh opportunity, or the chance to make up for your past.

Preloved became very much about Amy connecting with her mom, and others in the Chinese community

through their beliefs and sayings, as well as a look at the reality that so many of us idealize another time. Amy looked back at the 80s as a perfect and quaint time, whereas Logan looked at the present and was shocked that the problems of his day hadn't yet been solved.

I do have to say that *Preloved* is the first YA book that has ever made me feel really old. I found the way Amy talked about the 80s to be pretty annoying, but a large part of that is the reality that I was around for a lot of that first hand. In the end I found *Preloved* to be both fun and well crafted, but not quite the perfect book for me.

Here's one of my favorite bits from the beginning:

I learned a few things that day.

One: if I hadn't scared bloody Michael Limawan and his two Lord of the Rings super geeks away, they would have told me that Frodo would tell you never put on a cursed piece of jewellery.

Two: there was a reason why that necklace mysteriously appeared on Rebecca and not me. Because it was intended for her. Rebecca was supposed to be the star of this story, not me. In the correct circumstances I would have been regulated to the sidekick status Rebecca said belonged to me, and I would have been happy with that. I'm cool with the stereotype.

Three: most importantly, I wish my mum had told me something like this: "Amy, do not pick up old locket and put them around your neck, even if you are distracted and not thinking straight because you'd just been attacked by three Jason Donovans and your best friend was on the verge of possibly breaking up with you forever. You don't put on an old locket, because it might just have a ghost inside."

Molly says

Delightful mix of sweetness and sadness.

Thank you book, for pulling me from the one-day-and-a-half reading slump, caused by Charm & Strange (fortunately I bounced right back up)!

"I unwrapped the fresh flowers left on the front mat and arranged it in the basket of the vintage bicycle that Mum kept out the front. I wasn't even sure the bike even worked; it's only ever served as a glorified vase. Like most of the things in Mum's shop, Buy Gones, it was old or unwanted or broken or all of the above.

And pre-owned.

Or as Mum preferred to call it, preloved"

Amy Lee is a 16 year-old from (fictional) Middlemore, Australia, and she (as it usually goes in this kind of book) hasn't had it easy lately. After her parents divorce she moves out with her superstitious, quirky, Chinese mom. They made a life for themselves above their vintage store... and they do their best to move on. One the day her school organizes the "'80s dress-up day", Amy leaves her home dressed as *Buttercup*, from the '80s movie *The Princess Bride*. There is a scuffle involving her friend *Rebecca* (dressed as Kylie

Minogue) and a bunch of her admirers (all dressed as clones of Jason Donovan) ... Amy offers (unwanted) assistance to her (a little obnoxious) *bestie* ... they land in the square's fountain ... Amy finds a locket, and the rest is destiny.

“Whenever my mum decided to give me advice, it often sounded like this:

“Amy, don’t bring an open umbrella into the house, because a ghost might be hiding under it.”

“Amy, don’t touch the sleep on a cat’s eyes and then touch your own eyes, because you will see ghosts.”

“Amy, never tweeze the hairs off the tops of your toes, or you will see ghosts.”

If only I had listened to Mum.”

Rating 3.5

This book was what it promised to be a delightful, light YA coming-of-age story with a likable female protagonist (Amy Lee), an adorable superstitious mother (Ivy), with a sprinkle of young paranormal romance, in the form of a teen ghost from the '80s (Logan), complete with not-so-relevant supporting cast of friends (Rebecca, Nancy and Michael), a ghost pet dog (Mister Fozziebum), a haunted locket, a mystery of long missing teenagers ... and a very price-y stuffed owl named Ollie.

“Looking for someone?” said a voice behind me, making me jump.

It was the boy. “How did you get here so fast? You were just–”

I turned back around and started walking away from him quickly.

“Hey, take a chill pill, right?”

Chill pill? What was with the awful Eighties slang? The next thing I knew, he’d be cracking out a “grouse” and an “ace”. And Eighties dress-up day was supposed to be over.”

Maybe I expected a different kind of book after reading *Fury* more of this....

“I ran because it was the only thing I could do.

I left a trail of invisible red footprints.

I knew they were red because they were made from my blood, as the contents of my heart dribbled out.”

and less of this....

“The white light is over there.” I stabbed my finger towards the door of the dining room, trying to convey to Logan as violently as possible to get the heck out of here. “I’m now guiding the spirit towards the light.”

Mum watched me with her mouth still open, fascination on her face.”

... but in the end it was a cute mix of both. I'll sure keep an eye out for Shirley Marr.

“My mother had told me stories about hanged ghosts with long red tongues lolling out of their heads, wandering ghosts looking for their murderers, water ghosts looking for someone to drown in their place. All of them lost and aimless. But what she should have scared me with was a story about a shut down, defensive and sarcastic girl who couldn’t move ahead with her life because she was dead on the inside.”

“Back in my day,” said Logan, “music had two sides. The first side was the one that contained all the hits, all the popular tracks. Then you had the B-side, which was where the musicians could be creative, even experimental. Life had a nice symmetry, back then.”

.... and then, that *swoon* ending...

(view spoiler)

Lovely book, on second thought maybe deserving of a higher rating, like rounding it up to four stars ... done.

Oh, P.S.

Did I say I loved Amy's mom?

“Usually, I would run out as fast as I could, but today I found myself pausing in the kitchen doorframe, waiting for Mum to leave me with one of her ghost warnings.

“Amy, remember that if you get lost in a forest and the ghosts trick you into thinking every direction looks the same – take your undies off, put them over your head and spin around in a circle. Then your path will be clear.”

“Thanks not so much,” I said. Yes. I could scare away the ghosts. Along with every bushwalker and picnicker in sight. I wasn’t sure what the penalty for public indecency was these days, but I’m sure it involved incarceration.

“Your mum is cool,” said Logan as he followed me out to the front.

“My mum is weird,” I said”

Jo says

You know what it’s like when you have a conversation with one of your bffs and you think “Oh mate, I wish someone was filming this because we are so ridiculously hilarious”? That’s how I feel when I talk to Shirley Ms Marr. If I could bottle Shirley’s Ms Marr’s personality and put it in a super soaker so I could spray passing gloomy people I would do it in a heartbeat.

Preloved read like a transcript of one of our conversations.

But instead of it being one of those private joke conversations that you feel like you'd have absolutely no idea how you'd jump in... *Preloved* is one that welcomes everyone as opposed to excluding them. And it welcomes you with colourful cocktails and delicious treats. Also, it would encourage you to be as silly as possible. And talk about Jason Donovan all the live long day.

~~Shirley~~ Ms Marr... actually, OK... I know as an OFFICAL BOOK BLOGGER [OBB] I should be polite and refer to the author as Ms Marr but I never said I was a OBB and it makes me uncomfortable so I'm just gonna call her Shirley. Because that is her name.

And believe you me, normally I call her Twirley Shirley, Shirley Tuesday or SHIR-LEY* (to the tune of Blondie's Call Me) so just calling her Shirley is actually me being an OBB and professional and the like.

Anyway...

I really enjoyed this book. I have to admit that I wasn't the biggest fan of *Fury* because even though I loved the actual story, I pretty much hated every single character and it kind of put me off. Thankfully *Preloved* was stuffed to the brim with wonderful, wonderful characters that I would like to best friends with. Except Rebecca, but we'll talk about her later.

As much as I loved Logan, and I really did, my favourite relationship in *Preloved* was between Amy and her mum. It's so brilliant to see parents get a role in YA fiction. I know I always seem to rabbit on about how I want to see sibling relationships in YA books, but I also want to see more parent relationships. Sometimes I feel that authors kinda get stuck when they're faced with the prospect of portraying parents and decide to just shove them away or send them on holiday, but luckily Shirley didn't and she the relationship she created between Amy and her mum was just lovely to read.

Also, I've got to give out a shout out to my man Michael because I adored him. But that's all I'm saying on that.

And, I really loved that Amy lived and worked in a vintage shop. Yes please! I love love love vintage clothing and I could (and have) spent hour upon hour trawling through racks of second hand dresses and wishing I could afford to buy them all.

As with books, my favourite type of clothing is the ones that have been worn before. The ones that have been.... *Preloved*.

Like Amy, I also have a locket that my big sis gave to me for my 18th birthday. It's not only my favourite piece of jewellery but it's also become my good luck charm. Unfortunately (or kinda luckily!), when I opened the locket, I wasn't met by a dashing ghost.... But there was a fingerprint in it.

A FINGERPRINT FROM THE PAST.

Another thing that both surprised me about this book was how much I learnt about the Chinese culture. Admittedly I don't know much about the Chinese culture except from what I've learnt from talking to Shirley and the Gok Wan documentary that was on a couple of weeks ago.* I just loved all the snippets that Shirley wove into the story. Obviously the culture and the history means a great deal to her and it's an important part of her life. But it never felt like it was just shoved in because Shirley knows about it and wants the reader to know that she knows about it. It felt natural and seamless and I adored it.

OK, I'm going to start off my quibbles with a confession. And it's going to be shocking and people are going to recoil in fear.

I'm not that fussed about the 80s.

I know... I know. What kind of sick individual doesn't like the 80s?!

Well.. um me.

When my friends and I play the “If you could wake up in any era, which would it be?” everyone tends to get giddy and yells THE 80S! really loudly and then start to sing Journey.

But I’m the kid that mutters ‘50s America’ and starts to hum ‘I Walk the Line’. So even though I’m not completely opposed to the 80s and I did find myself laughing at certain bits (My name is Jo and I am in love with Kylie’s poodle perm), I can’t help but think that a lot of the well-researched references were lost on me.

And I know we weren’t necessarily supposed to like her (were we?!), but I really disliked Rebecca and I wished she would just do one. I always root for the underdog and I just had no time for her.

Also, I really wished we’d spent more time with Amy and her emotions. I know that’s weird because if you’ve ever read any of my reviews before I am more than likely to partake in some book flinging if the heroine/hero gets all wrapped up in a duvet of SAD FEELINGS and wallows but I really wanted to see Amy do that... just a little. There were so many moments where I thought that this book would have been spectacular if it had just delved a little bit deeper into the emotions. Amy was very quick to make a joke out of things and move swiftly on... which is fine because that’s pretty much exactly what I do but I think I would have connected a bit more with both her and the book if we’d dwelled.

Just a bit.

But other than just those three minor things, I really loved this book. It was tinged with nostalgia, full of humour and served a well-needed jolt to the supernatural genre.

*And those are just the names I want to admit to in public.

**Actually, if you watched said documentary... remember that bit where he goes into that shop and buys all of those paper items? Like a paper iPad? And then burns it in the graveyard? Amy and her mum do that too! I got so excited because I knew what that was for! It’s such a lovely tradition... unless you burn it wrong and have to get your Chinese translator to help you out to stop you burning down the whole of China. Man, I love Gok Wan so much.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher.

You can read this review and lots of other exciting things on my blog, [Wear the Old Coat](#).

Steph Sinclair says

I have to admit, *Preloved* truly surprised me. After finally getting a hold of *Fury*, I wasn't entirely sure how

Preloved and I would get along because Paranormal Romances with ghosts usually make me want to roll my eyes. However, in *Preloved's* case it worked really well for me. In fact, there is something really special about Shirley Marr's sophomore novel because while the blurb sounds strictly PNR, it gives off a very strong contemporary feel at the same time. I actually found myself enjoying *Preloved* more than *Fury* at times. You have your relatable characters, familiar setting, and a pinch of abnormal. What more could you ask for?

The 80's was an interesting time in history. It taught us all to "kick off our Sunday shoes," that anyone can become a "dirty dancer," how we shouldn't fear the "Thriller," how it felt to feel "Like a Virgin, touched for the very first time," and that you aren't truly a boss until you can pull this number off in leg warmers:

I'm still working on it.

Confession: I internally groaned when I saw this book had a heavy focus on the 80's. I mean, it's the 80's! Mulletts, leg-warmers, bad perms, leotards! Need I say more? Thankfully, it didn't happen like that. Logan is a ghost from the 80's who happens to show up after Amy, a very lonely girl, acquires an old locket. Except the locket wasn't meant for her, but instead her beautiful, hipster, best-friend Rebecca, who Logan just happens to love. She initially sets out to help him connect with Rebecca, who bares a shocking resemblance to Logan's old girlfriend, but it turns out to be much more than she bargained for.

If I were to describe *Preloved* in two words it would be sugary sweet. I love self-discovery novels. They have a way of reminding me of times when I was naive, innocent, and unsure of myself. Amy is the kind of protagonist that is entirely relatable because she's a broken, teen girl searching for her identity in the world. I could easily connect and sympathize with her and not once did I grow impatient with her character. She's the kind of main character that continues to grow on you as the novel progress until you realize it's time to let her go, but your aren't quite ready yet. The supporting cast fell a little short for me mainly because I just didn't care for Rebecca and Nancy wasn't around long enough for me to properly form an opinion. However, I did like both Logan and Amy's mom, both important plot points on Amy's every shifting graph.

The romance wasn't something I was expecting to enjoy since it does contain a love triangle. But this one was unique since it was, but it wasn't. While most of the novel Logan expresses interest only in Rebecca, she never felt like a real contender in the race for his heart. I didn't feel the same "Oh, who are they gonna pick?" urge that I normally feel for say, a novel like *Unearthly*. But the relationship between Logan and Amy is one I couldn't help but cheer for. The way he affectionately called her Ms. Matey and blushed in his ghostly form really was the icing on the cake.

So if you are on the market for a lighter Paranormal Romance that is fun, relaxing, and sugary sweet *Preloved* may be just what you're looking for. And don't worry, I promise there is none of this going on:

Aren't you glad those days are over?

Many thanks to Flannery from The Readventurer for hosting a wonderful book tour for *Preloved*!

More reviews and fantastical things at [Cuddlebuggery Book Blog](#).

Flannery says

When I found out that *Preloved* involved ghosts, I immediately wondered what I'd gotten myself into because ghosts and I just don't get along. If a movie with ghosts is in the theaters and my friends want to go see it, my face starts to have this weird twitch and then my voice raises a few octaves. "Oh that one? Oh, I've heard it is, like, TERRIBLE. Like worse than that Adam Sandler movie where he plays a guy and a girl. Worse than the worst Lifetime movie ever was. No I'm not just saying that because it has ghosts in it!" (that last bit is because they know I am saying it solely because it has ghosts in it.) As it turns out, I will have to carve out an exception in section of my ghost hatred for *Preloved*. Here's a very scientific chart to explain my interest in literary and/or cinematic ghosts:

If I was being completely accurate, I'd add a few ghosts or pseudo-ghosts from history that I find marginally entertaining: Kevin Costner's dad in *Field of Dreams*, Marley & Marley from *Muppet Christmas Carol* (ONLY the Muppet one), Slimer from *Ghostbusters*, whatever it is going on in *The Sixth Sense*, and the ghosts from *Heart and Souls* with Robert Downey, Jr. And now I like them in *Preloved*.

Whether or not you are familiar with Marr's debut novel, *Fury*, doesn't matter one iota going into this book because it reads in an entirely different way. Say Shirley Marr's books are *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. *Fury* would be at the serious level of a big fight scene. *Preloved* is like reading a book about Willow meeting a ghost from the 1980s, if Willow were Chinese with a superstitious mother who ran an antique shop. Amy Lee, the protagonist, is someone who would be the "wacky best friend" or "forgotten girl" in most other stories and television shows. Her best friend is always overshadowing her, she isn't really exceptional in any way, and guys seem to look right through her. On a costume day at school, she finds a locket that makes Amy the only person able to see a boy from the 1980s. The plot follows Amy on her quest to figure out who Logan is and why she is the only person who can see him.

Overall, I liked the campy tone and the numerous pop culture references. I liked being reminded of just how far technology has come in such a short time. And honestly, I don't know if there is such a thing as too many movie references in a book for me, especially when it comes to *The Princess Bride* and *Labyrinth*. Another highlight throughout the book was Amy's mother, who peppered the story with her little anecdotes about ways to avoid ghosts or other superstitions. I wish Marr dug deeper into the emotional elements in the story--the moments with Amy and her mother were lovely, but I wish there was more development of their relationship. *Preloved* moved very quickly, which is fun, but it was to the detriment of the story. Near the end of the book, there is quite a surprise, at least it was surprise to me, and the book takes a more serious turn. I'm not going to say I wish it hadn't done that. It was refreshing to be surprised, even if I felt a bit foolish to not see it earlier, but I still think the resolution was too hurried. All in all, the book could've used about twenty more pages of emotional depth. I have a lot of unanswered questions.

I think readers who enjoy humorous YA will eat this one up. It is a fast read with entertaining characters and I learned a thing or two about Chinese culture. Don't forget to enter to win a copy from us (and Walker Books!) and visit Shirley on her blog tour stops starting next week. There will be tons of fun information to be had, for sure.

3.5/5 stars

Anna says

I don't usually bother with the paranormal YA reads most of the time as I'm more of a lover of the contemporary YA stuff and I have more than enough of that at the moment to keep me busy for the next, oh, several decades, I reckon. BUT, when I read a few lovely bits about this one over at Wear The Old Coat, Vegan YA Nerds and The Readventurer, my interest was well and truly caught in it's ghostly looking literary net.

A contemporary/paranormal/possibly slightly historical (?) YA. And an Aussie one to boot. Exciting times, indeed.

I say, 'historical', because there is a very strong 1980s theme (and this was 25 years ago, or thereabouts) (ok, that thought just made me feel ANCIENT, so lets just pretend the 1980s was only like 10 years ago, yeah?) - Amy's dead companion, Logan is from the Eighties. All the teenagers here, particularly Amy, seem to be obsessed with that decade. Amy's mum runs a vintage store which stocks many an Eighties garm. Cheesy slang is spouted on nearly every page. So if you're not that fussed about the Eighties, well, you might get a bit miffed after a few chapters.

This theme is a bit of a blessing and a curse for the book. Yes, it offers a strong hook for much of the action and the retro factor taps in to all the current love for electro and batwing jumpers. I was a little kid back then, a huge Kylie and Jason fan, and I saw The Princess Bride when it was in the cinema the first time around, so this brought a hint of nostalgia for me, personally. But, are teenagers today really THAT much into 1980s culture, to the extent that they have an 80s themed day and prom within the space of a week? That boys would have knowledge on the Jason Donovan mullet-styling circa 1988? I really don't know. Maybe they are. I'm genuinely interested, so someone this age, please tell me whether you know all the words off by heart to Too Many Broken Hearts. I could buy the fact that Amy loved the decade, but all of them? Mmmm.

Let's say something positive now - I adored Amy. She was a brilliant main character - self-deprecating without being annoying, she had very realistic thoughts and fears that I think will ring true for many an 16 year old girl. Always feeling consigned to the best friend shadow role, with lots of angry, bad burny feelings, but not really sure quite what to do about them, using humour as a defence mechanism. All brilliant. And this was made all the better for the exchanges with her mum. A lovely balance of humour, sarcasm and genuine affection. My favourite Mum line -

"Oooh, old age." Mum grimaced. "No way can I do a go-go dancer squat these days."

May be it was the fact these two were so well developed that the rest of the characters felt half-baked and confusing. Logan, for example. He spouts some cringy retro sayings and annoys her a bit, and all of a sudden she's in love with him and I wasn't quite sure how that happened. And therefore not particularly convinced by it. Also, Rebecca? What, just... what? That's it. Was she a bitch and were we supposed to forgive her? Was she popular or not? Would EVERY boy really fancy her if she was such a cow? Or was she a cow? I'm really not sure. Just such a bloody confusing character that did not ring true in the slightest.

I really liked the plot twist in the end - very intriguing (if a bit rushed) and I was really happy that Amy and her mum's beliefs were not mocked - their attempts to overcome Amy's haunting were very moving. But for a book that contains ghosts and vintage shops, it was oddly lacking in atmosphere. I would imagine that sort of setting would be ripe for some descriptive, atmospheric writing, but a lot of it felt very flat.

So, mixed feelings about this one. Great mother and daughter relationship. Brilliant main character, but lacking a certain something. BUT, it does have a reference to Mr. Matey bubble bath, so I can forgive some of it's shortcomings.

Oh, and I love a great YA book cover. And this one has to be one of my favourites. It is so lovely I just want to eat it right up.

This book was sent to me for review by Viewpoint Magazine.
