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# Learning Not To Drown



## Synopsis

Family secrets cut to the bone in this mesmerizing debut novel about a teen whose drug-addicted brother is the prodigal son one time too many. There is a pecking order to every family. Seventeen-year old Clare is the overprotected baby; Peter is the typical, rebellious middle child; and Luke is the oldest, the can't-do-wrong favorite. To their mother, they are a normal, happy family. To Clare, they are a family on the verge of disaster. Clare: the ambitious striver; Peter: the angry ticking time bomb; and Luke: a drug-addicted convicted felon who has been in and out of jail for as long as Clare can remember—and who has always been bailed out by their parents. Clare loves Luke, but life as his sister hasn't been easy. And when he comes home (again), she wants to believe this time will be different (again). Yet when the truths behind his arrests begin to surface, everything Clare knows is shaken to its core. And then Luke is arrested. Again. Except this time >different, because Clare's mom does the unthinkable on Luke's behalf, and Clare has to decide whether turning her back on family is a selfish act—or the only way to keep from drowning along with them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up—Great SAT scores, a summer lifeguarding job, and good friends are not enough to keep deep family secrets from ruining Clare Tovin's life. The high school junior is shadowed by Skeleton, a sardonic and mocking presence always reminding her that her beloved older brother, Luke, cannot be trusted. Ignoring Skeleton, Clare follows her mother's lead, at first, excusing Luke's

criminal activities that land him in prison as, "being in the wrong place at the wrong time." Luke's genuine affection and caring for his little sister also endears him to readers, as he drifts in and out of town, always welcomed with open arms by Clare's mother and father, but not so much by brother, Peter. Myopic and unreasonably strict with Clare, her parents are quick to ground her for minor infractions, a double standard never enforced with the boys. Clare's lifeguarding job and friendships with Drea and Ryan, allow her some normalcy, and pride in accomplishment as she mentors a young bully who cannot swim. When Clare's mother yanks her away from her friends and job to visit her grandmother, and later withdraws all of the savings from Clare's bank account to bail Luke out of jail, the teen finally stands up for herself. The addition of Skeleton, and flashbacks, as literary devices, is clever and allows Clare to learn the truth about her stifling home life, and conflicting emotions about Luke, at a realistic pace. Multilayered and suspenseful, this novel is a page-turner. Vicki Reutter, State University of New York at Cortland

No closet is going to contain Clare's "Skeleton." Her older brother Luke's drug and criminal transgressions guarantee that she will never be far from scorn in her small hometown. Clare's parents and brother Peter all suffer in their own individual ways, while Luke calls the shots that define the family. Clare has strong friendships, college dreams, an affinity for swimming and knitting, and an unabashed love for wayward Luke. She also believes deeply in the power of compassion to change behavior. In her first novel, Shinoda creates a fragile, tentative world around a damaged family that struggles desperately for stability and any sense of normalcy. The omnipresent Skeleton gamely partners with Clare as she navigates her balance between home and the outside world of parties, lifeguarding, and the end of high school. Readers will be inspired as Clare develops a resilient hold on self-compassion and looks confidently ahead, waving farewell to her Skeleton and all it represents. Grades 7-12. --Gail Bush

I'm not much of a reader, and with all of my responsibilities, I don't spend much of my leisure time with a book. However, I thought I would give this one a try. Best decision, it captivated me right from the beginning. I enjoy taking a few minutes a day to sit down and be drawn into the story a little more, which is a lot to say coming from a person who actively avoids reading.

Last night I finished reading this book, it's the writer's debut novel and I've enjoyed it, it got me intrigued from the first chapter. If you're after some easy reading, this is the book for you.

Read it on vacation. Really enjoyed it. Loved the switching back and forth from the past to the present and the use of the skeleton metaphor. And mind you, this isn't really my type of book either. I'm more of a "Game of Thrones", Tolkien, and biographies kind of reader. Read it on a recommendation. Highly recommend.

I loved this book! I couldn't put it down because it just kept pulling me in!

Very moving book

Wow. I got angrier and angrier the further I read - I just wanted to help her. Well written with a good message for our youth, and their parents. Great independent read for middle/high schoolers.

Wonderful, heart wrenching story about a young girl and her twisted family. Clare learns a lot of hard life lessons through experience. Anna Shinoda brilliantly weaves the past with the present to tell a gripping story of survival :)

This book is amazing , I admire the author for having the courage to write such an incredible touching novel and I look forward for her next book .

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