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Billy Bronner is, to all appearances, every inch the 1950s American dream: handsome, clever, captain of the high school football team, looks good enough in tight jeans that people can even forget he's Jewish. Then the new guy on the block, the enigmatic Leonard Nachman, turns his head, and over the summer Billy discovers a new world of romance and love in a man's arms. But when Kit O'Reilly, Billy's best friend and shadow, comes home after spending the summer with relatives, he finds Billy acting differently. Soon enough, it becomes obvious that this change is related to Len, and Kit will have to decide if he'll accept the relationship Billy and Len have forged, or if he'll push Billy and their longtime friendship away.

Summer Song Details

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From Reader Review Summer Song for online ebook

Trisha Harrington says

At first I could not get into this story because it looked like Kit was going to be the narrator of the book. I thought his section was okay but not great. When Billy and Len started narrating the book was when I really enjoyed it. This book was really good and I fell in love with both Billy and Len over the course of this book. I'm not sure why I loved it maybe because of the year that this book was based in and I find a love for characters who defy the rules of the time. The ending was very sweet and I did a little dance when I read it. I was so glad with the HEA that I could not have done it better myself. :)

Kathleen says

As I was reading this book, no matter what was happening or how good things were going, I felt there was an underlying melancholy but I cannot put my finger on any one thing that caused it. Throughout the whole book, I truly expected one of the characters to get beaten or die horrifically or for there not to be an HEA. I don't know if was my mood or the author's brilliance in portraying the uncertainty of dealing with being gay in a time when it was literally illegal (we'll go with author's brilliance). In the last chapter I almost died and stopped reading at the first "story." So glad I kept reading and got to see my HEA. Overall, I loved this book. It had a great period ambiance, the first person POVs switching about was used well and that is difficult to manage, and the story was compelling. 4 stars!

Erastes says

This is a rather ambitious book which works on most levels, but falls down on others, but it's a very brave attempt and shows the author's disregard to write within "normal" parameters.

The book is told from four points of view, Billy Bronner himself, his best friend Kit, his love interest Leonard and Kit's girlfriend Caitlyn. They are all told in first person present, with the exception of Leonard's which is done in the form of a diary, so is more past. I admit that this isn't my favourite way of delivery, but done well it can be very effective and to be honest it is done well, with gusto and determination, even if it was a little confusing, because unless the chapter was a diary entry, it took a paragraph or two to work out who was "talking," and as Caitlyn's POV doesn't come in until over half way through the book it was a bit of a jolt—I couldn't see what her point of view added to the story, actually and the book wouldn't have lost anything by losing her chapters. However, the voices of Billy, Kit and Leonard are well-written and pretty distinct. Billy and Kit's are quite similar, but that makes sense because they were raised together since they were very young—Leonard's voice—he's a preppy from a public school from the East Coast, even though he's described as coming from the "North Coast" more than once(!) and his voice is more formal with less slang.

So Kit goes on vacation for the summer, leaving the restless Billy behind and while he's away, Billy—who we are told has a bad boy reputation, but sadly this really isn't shown—meets Leonard on the beach. They get to go swimming and start spending time together, and things move along from there.

There's no "insta-love" – the relationship has eight weeks to blossom and to reach a place where there's no going back, and both young men (both 17 for those who are sticklers for this kind of thing) are entirely clueless as to what's happening to them. After the kissing starts they have to assess their own feelings and

how they feel about this affecting their lives.

An important leg to the 3-way relationship is Kit—and how he discovers their relationship, how he deals with it and how his loyalty overcomes his disgust and discomfort.

Rather stereotypically, Leonard is more aware of homosexuality than Billy, because he went to a public school where these things are done but not discussed. Leonard is more analytical about it all, and goes to books to find out more. It surprised me a little that he relied entirely on Catullus's "pornographic" poems for his research on anal sex—and didn't seek out (once he'd discovered the over-labelled "happy button" inside himself) books on anatomy to find out what it was.

Overall, the voices of 1950's teenagers are pretty well portrayed, if—again—all a little stereotypical. Red Chevies and sprayed on jeans and the like but I felt it was all a little too insular. This is 1955 after all and there was a hell of a lot going on in the world and America at the time. McDonalds were expanding all over California, Disneyland opened in Anaheim, Gunsmoke started, James Dean is killed. Yet none of these are mentioned, the only music that's mentioned is "song by Elvis" not even the names of the songs. Considering that Billy is rather setting himself up to emulate Dean, I was staggered that no-one, not even Caitlyn was affected by his death. I know that teenagers all over the world were pole-axed by that event. The book needed a lot more popular culture to ground itself in the era. It's a bit like writing about youth culture today and not mentioning hip-hop or the hoodie.

I have to say also, Elvis didn't have a hit until 1956, so. Oops.

That being said there are some great "real-teenager" moments like the following from Leonard: "I was going to say something else but I can't remember what it was" (after he'd been describing Billy). There's also a hilarious moment which made me laugh out loud when Billy describes himself as a free radical—typical teenager using the wrong term, to sound clever. However some—and quite rarely—of the prose slipped into modernisms—To name but two – Billy calls Leonard "passive aggressive" which being a phrase from the 70's – no teenager of the era would have done. Similar "skank" is not a word used of women of these era.

It does tend to go on a bit at times, with the characters saying the same thing over and over again—and the whole pre-prom thing was tedious in the extreme. A more judicious editing needed, I think. There were a couple of boo-boos early on which jarred me and made me wonder what kind of research I was going to encounter. The very first diary entry was 31st June... and then when the 4th of July is mentioned there's no mention of the celebration at all. No picnics, no fireworks—considering that Leonard lived on a busy beach, that seemed rather incongruous. He and his mother went shopping—do shops open on the 4th? Leonard bewails the fact that photos can't show the colour of Billy's eyes and that was a bit odd, because colour photography was well advanced by this point in time, and French homework changed into Spanish.

The major problem I had with the book, and why it didn't get a four or a four and half which it could easily have merited (with better research too), was the entire lack of conflict. Granted there's a fair bit of angst from all four participants, which can get a little wearing over the course of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the book, but conflict? No. I was reading the story with the feeling of the sword of Damocles hanging over me, because everyone was talking about how dangerous it was for them to be doing the things they were doing, but no-one actually cares to do much to disguise it. The couple are constantly wandering into conveniently empty schoolrooms, making out on a secluded beach that only Billy can access, dancing together in a restaurant with no-one commenting, kissing in the dark where ONLY Kit ever catches them.

No one at high school notices their preferential behaviour, despite the fact that it's obvious not only to Kit but to Caitlyn too. There's a character introduced early on who I thought was going to be trouble, but he's also clueless about the situation. There's no "normal for the time" paranoia and homophobia. Leonard even has to look up the law to find out what is illegal and what isn't. Now, I can understand that kids in school and suburbs might not be able to get hold of literature explaining things, but I'm damned sure that everyone

knew what a queer, faggot, fruit, pansy [insert your word of choice here] was.

It's all a bit Happy Gay Days, a bit Grease without the harder hitting issues that Grease managed to deal with. I think the author liked her characters so much—and that's understandable, they are all nice nice kids, that she simply couldn't bear to have them beaten up, insulted, suspected, arrested, or in fact anything nasty happen to them at all. Which is a shame, because the ending didn't have the same happy punch as it should have had because they didn't go through the mill, or even drive anywhere near it. Even in the epilogue it's only said that "they had a couple of close shaves." That might actually have been the case for some gay men—I'm sure it was, but it doesn't make for a gripping read.

All in all this is an enjoyable book, and I'm sure the lack of external conflict won't worry most readers. I could see this book having sold to the mainstream, were the mainstream sensible enough to publish it. Recommended, but you might be mildly disappointed.

Lori says

I really enjoyed this book but have to agree with some of the other reviewers who said it was a little too "wordy" and certain things didn't seem appropriate for the time frame the story is set in. I found myself questioning whether a teenager in the 50's would have compared something to dental floss for instance. Those type of things disrupt the flow of the story for me and is probably one of the reasons I don't really like historical books in the first place.

I have a dear friend who could have written this book from first hand experience. He met the love of his life in the 50's, on a beach, and they were together for 50 years before his partner passed away. Coincidentally, David will be speaking tonight at a special "It Gets Better" fundraiser about what it was like to be a gay teenager in the 50's. So, this story was special to me because it made me think about David and the strength and determination it must have taken for the two of them to stay the course. How they lived as "roommates" and never got to bring the other to work functions or other social events where a date was expected and required. How much they had to deflect, deny and depend on close friends to keep their secret. David lost his partner but he didn't lose his spirit and the joy on his face the other day when he told me he had a new boyfriend, a much, much younger boyfriend, was a beautiful thing to see.

~♥I_Luv_2_Read♥~ says

I could not stop reading this book! I started it way into the night, last night and read continuously until my eyes closed of their own accord around 3:45AM. I was back up at 7:30AM and hurried my kids out the door to finish this book!!

It was such a sweet and funny story! I loved it all the way through. (Even with tears at the end...Happy of course!)

M says

I enjoyed this book way more than I think I ought to have done. It's a concept that's been done to death, I'm sure; you know - secret gay high school romance, so I'm not really sure why I was so taken with it (actually,

it may have to do with me being high on some potent antihistamines, and antihistamines always make me emotional for some reason).

It's written from the first-person perspective of various characters, and this can be hit or miss, but I liked it here; getting to know the characters from inside their own heads and I liked them all, to varying degrees. It's set in the 1950s, but the only reference I have of American high school in the 50s is in *Grease*, so I can't comment on the veracity of the setting. Thing is, it's not an outstanding piece of literature, but I so loved it. It's such a lovely, if slightly sappy story.

Monica says

I really enjoy reading books based back in the 50's because I just love reading about that time, now put in the fact it's a m-m romance makes it even better. Because back then it was taboo and those having those feelings were taught it wasn't natural. I just enjoy reading books like this and knowing that the book showed the difficulty people had back then when dealing with feelings for others. I enjoyed reading the story of Billy and Len. Wish there was a book about them during the years after school and 2005. How they dealt with all the changes in this world with homosexuality.

Dan C. says

I've read a lot of m/m fiction between reading my wife's work for Dreamspinner and doing galley proofs for them as well. This was a book I had the distinct pleasure of proofing. I can't recommend this book highly enough. The characters are well written and motivations never seem contrived. Blaydon tells an intriguing story set in 1950s California, back when LGBT was just a random set of letters that don't carry the meaning they do now. Best friends Billy and Kit are returning to high school after a summer apart and something seems off, especially when Billy starts acting strangely around Leonard, the new student at their school.

What I loved most about this book was how it effortlessly blended the story of Billy's love for Leonard with its ramifications on his friendship with Kit. I felt very invested in both relationships and thought that Blaydon did a great job of showing how a close friendship between men - regardless of orientation - can be fraught with some of the same difficulties that you see in romantic relationships.

Summer Song is her first book for DSP, but I'm eager to read more from Blaydon.

Don Bradshaw says

I absolutely loved this amazing coming of age story. Set back in 1955 during senior year of high school we meet the four main characters, Billy, Kit, Leonard and Caitlyn. The story is told from the varying points of view of these four characters which leaves the reader with a special insight into their lives. I thoroughly enjoyed the way that Billy and Len's romance grew slowly. There was some angst due to the fact that Kit felt abandoned. The language and spirit of the year was carried perfectly through the story. Ms Blaydon made the characters feel real and put me right into the story through the use of the changing POVs and the amount of detail that she put into every scene. The HEA ending was perfectly done with Billy, Len, Kit and Lyn in 2001. Highly recommended coming of age story.

thelastaerie says

3.75 stars.

Very enjoyable read and a very sweet YA romance. The challenge of the writing is that it's told through 4 POV, and two of them (Kit and Billy) are very similar, so it is not as distinct as it should be.

However, it's hard not to be touched by Billy and Leonard's love for each other and it's driven not purely by hormonal needs, but wonders, curiosity and passion. The friendship between the 4 characters is also something to be celebrated and the writer did a great job letting readers feel their connection.

My two problems with the story is that, while it's supposed to set in 1955, the world building doesn't really ring true. I don't know, you see those words like they go out for milkshakes, Billy drives a Chevy etc... But still I can't picture it in 1955. For a vivid portrayal of a similar era, "Boys on the Rock" is way superior in that aspect.

The other problem, which I kinda also grateful for in a way, is that the story CHOSE to stick to the sweet and easy path, it avoids the hard issue - self loathing, hostility, fear (touch on that a bit) and legal issue, all the heavy conflicts that being gay and falling in love with a guy would entail in 1955. And I also think it would have been a better story if it stops at the end of the Homecoming party, I don't need to know how it turns out 50 years later. Let say, I'd rather use my own imagination.

But still, I enjoyed it quite a lot.

Book Utopia says

Christopher "Kit" O'Reilly has been best friends with Billy Bronner for nearly thirteen years. He knows Billy better than anyone else in town, even if everyone thinks Billy walks on water. But when they start their senior year, something's different. Kit has been gone all summer, and the Billy he comes back to is more distanced than he'd been in the past. He quickly discovers it has something to do with the new kid in school, Leonard Nachman. Billy claims they had a fight, but Kit learns the two hung out together for most of the summer, and begins to fear Leonard has replaced him as Billy's best friend. Jealousy rears its ugly head, but there's little Kit can do about it, especially after he finds out the truth of what really is going on.

Set in a small coastal California town in 1955, this YA novel is told in alternating 1st person POVs, beginning with Kit, and then switching to Leonard, Billy, and even Caitlyn, Kit's girlfriend. It's a fresh approach to a young man's sexual discovery, both because of the time period involved and because it concentrated as equally on the friendships involved as it did the romance. The author's prose is dynamic and invigorating, even in the multiple POVs, and this goes a long way in creating such a memorable, enjoyable reading experience.

As an emotional experience, however, I have a mixed reaction. I adore 1st person narratives, because they play straight into how I read. I'm very immersive. When a story or a voice is done well, I sink into the character. It's why I have difficulties with authors that headhop, because I dislike that jolt that comes from being yanked out of one person's head and into another's. My interest in reading this sprang from the absolutely phenomenal voice I read in the excerpt on the publisher's page. It's the first chapter, told from Kit's POV, and it's so vital, so real, I completely disregarded the facts that I don't care for YA and that I often find historicals dry. I was that sucked in by Kit and his confused emotions as he tries to figure out what's going on with Billy. Color me a little surprised, then, when in chapter four, the POV shifts to

Leonard's diary, and then to Billy's POV in chapter five. Each voice is distinctly different, which is a credit to the author's skill, but I'll be honest. I didn't have the same reaction to any other character's POV in the entire novel. I found myself reading more on the surface whenever I was in a perspective other than Kit's, unable to get deep into the emotions of either Leonard or Billy like 1st person should allow. I was the most emotionally invested in Kit and Billy's friendship than I ever was with the romance or sex, and every time it jumped to them – while it afforded me more depth to what was going on – I yearned to get back to Kit and how he was going to deal with everything. I suspect my commitment to Kit is due to a combination of my passion for his particular voice, and the fact the first three chapters are in his POV. I was firmly entrenched in him before any of the others came along, and it very well could have colored my overall reactions.

As characters, I just never felt that I got to know either Billy or Leonard as well as I did Kit. Yes, I identified best with Kit, but Billy is idealized by everyone else in the book. He's adored and respected by everybody, and it's difficult to get a true bead on him, even when we're in his POV. His POV voice rambled in ways Kit didn't, and his feelings never seem as urgent. Leonard suffers in the same regard, this enigmatic figure that didn't really leap off the page for me for much of the story. Again, though, that's likely a result of how everybody else in the book views him, including Kit. The one time I actually felt far more attached to both of them was during the whole sequence where Leonard is researching sodomy, and his attempts to introduce Billy to it. Those couple chapters stood out from all the rest as warm, funny, sexy, and emotional, as the rest of the chapters did not.

I enjoyed the setting quite a bit, but occasional historical inaccuracies pulled me out of the moment. There aren't a lot, but they do occur, one even on the first page when Kit refers to expensive nonstick frying pans. Teflon wasn't approved by the FDA in the US until 1960, so those pans would not have been available until 1961, six years after the story's start. Probably because this one happened so early in the book, I was more alert to the possibility throughout the entire story (like the use of "passive-aggressive," a term coined by the military in 1945; I had problems believing a teenaged boy would be familiar enough with it during a time of limited information access to throw it about so casually). Some readers might not even notice them, or be willing to excuse them away, but they did lessen my overall commitment to the time period.

All that being said, because of how much I truly loved Kit, and felt for his dilemma throughout the entire story, and because the world itself is vivid and fresh, I have no problems recommending this. Even those not necessarily interested in the YA angle might enjoy it. The sex scenes are explicit and occasionally quite hot, which makes it as much of an erotic romance with high school seniors as the primary love interests as it is about discovering self-identity.

Mark Kendrick says

After perusing the winners of the 2010 Rainbow Awards, I decided to pick up this story. There's a good reason why Summer Song won in the Best Gay Coming of Age / Young Adult category. This is one sweet tale.

Billy Bronner, all-American 17 year old kid in CA, has discovered that he's not the straight boy he and everyone else has thought he was. Not after he met Len Nachman that summer. That meeting starts a whirlwind romance that, if you ask me, well-establishes that you're reading about a slice of 1955. As other readers have mentioned here, it takes a few dozen pages to get into the first-person style that Louise Blaydon has crafted. But don't give up! Once you're on, say, chapter three or four, that style flows quite well and you'll be absorbed in the storyline as it swings from Billy's voice, to Leonard's voice, to Billy's best friend's voice, etc.

It still amazes me (am I being sexist?) that straight women have such a flair for writing M/M romances. The wonderful description of first-time love between Billy and Leonard was well-crafted and subtly erotic all at once. You can tell it was written from a woman's perspective since the roughness I would expect from the main characters had a certain feminine softness to it. Do NOT let this detract you from this story! This story has all sorts of hot scenes and emotional content that makes it a wonderful addition to the genre. I especially enjoyed the fact that neither boy had the right word to use for their relationship, since all they had were ancient Roman texts to define themselves. And that was wholly inadequate to describe what they had discovered about themselves and each other.

So, kudos to Ms. Blaydon for making me all verclempt at that dance and at the end, and writing this wonderful little tale about the middle of the last century.

Emanuela ~plastic duck~ says

This was a very sweet story. It takes place in the 50s, when homosexual relationships were illegal, so I've been expecting something bad to happen for pages. There's no angst in this book, it was all in my mind. I am sort of glad for it.

The story is written mainly from three point of views: Billy, the guy everyone admires; Kit, his best friend; Leonard, the new kid in town. There's a chapter from Kit's girlfriend, Lyn. Billy meets Leonard in the summer, while his best friend Kit is away on vacation, and they become friends and their friendship turns into something more day by day. At the end of the summer Leonard and Billy believe that they will separate and this finality brings Billy to kiss Leonard on their last night together. When Billy sees Leonard at school, he reacts in a way that puts Kit on alert: he's never seen his best friend react to someone else in that way.

Billy is a live wire and this is reflected in his narration, while Leonard is more reflective and his thoughts are written in his personal journal. I think the voices of the three narrators were more distinct at the beginning of the book and they melted together by the end of the book. While the romance part is told by Billy and Leonard, it was interesting to see the point of views of someone who was watching the developing of that relationship from the outside. I liked reading Kit's worries about Billy and his future and his hurt because he feels he is maybe losing his friend to someone else. It's like we're seeing the difference between the feelings Billy has for the two most important men in his life, his best friend and his lover. Moreover seeing Kit and Lyn together and knowing that Billy and Leonard can't have that in public is sad and heartbreaking. You can really feel the injustice of that situation.

There were very tender moments. I especially liked when Billy stopped to think to savor what he was experiencing in the moment. I also liked Leonard's hands-on approach to sexual experimentation. Everything they did was so pure, inspired more from love than from lust.

It's a very sweet story, maybe a little bit unreal. There's only a hint to the fact that someone might have suspected Billy and Leonard's relationship, but that the two were able to protect themselves from gossips and attacks. There were parts of the story that dragged on a little bit, but it's a very enjoyable book that I'd recommend to readers who like cute and sweet stories.

Adara says

I had some serious issues with this book as far as it supposedly being set historically in the 1950s. There

were several things mentioned that just didn't fit in with the period (like the use of block scheduling), and every time I saw one, it just grated on me further. That took it down at least a couple of stars in my opinion. I loved the story itself, and I loved the characters - they were very well crafted. And I enjoyed the ending.

The writing style itself also left something to be desired for me. There were gads of descriptions that ostensibly went to defining the characters further, but I found them to be repetitive and unnecessary in several cases - I just wanted to skip past them to get back to the point of the section instead of reading the tangent as presented. I also found it a pain to have to figure out which person was the 'I' at the beginning of each section. It was deliberately obtuse at times, which was annoying. There were also lots of editing errors that needed clean up, which dropped the book further in my estimation. So, while it was a great story, the execution didn't do it for me.

2.5 stars, rounded down to 2. I wanted to like it more than that, but it annoyed me from near start to finish.

Elisa Rolle says

2010 Rainbow Awards Honorable Mention (5* from at least 1 judge)
