



Filth

M. King

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Does gender really matter? Kel and Toni are two damaged people, both trying to find answers. But, where Kel's hopes for the future lie mainly with outreach programs and a new life with his lover, Toni's looking for absolution in a bottle of Mexican hormone pills.

Kel loves Toni obsessively and—though he supports both of them on the money he gleans from turning tricks and indulging less-than-salubrious clients—he struggles with the reality of Toni's burgeoning transition, and her motives for doing it.

While Kel grapples with his worries, and the attentions of regular client Michael, otherwise known as The Sherbet Pervert, Toni has different problems to face. Is there really a correct way to read women's magazines? What about the manifold uses of maxi pads? And just what is this gender thing, anyway?

For all their attempts to build a life together, both Kel and Toni know their survival is precarious. What neither of them realize is just how easily their harsh, isolated little world can be turned upside down and, when chance events push them into unknown territory, both must confront some difficult truths.

Filth Details

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From Reader Review Filth for online ebook

Ilhem says

Buddy re-read and joint review with Laura and Deirdre to celebrate "Filth"'s release by DSP after the closure of Loveyoudivine Alterotica.

This is one of my favorite stories guys! It's food for thought, beautiful language, realism, love, amazing characters, all in one wonderful package.

On to the review...

"It is true; words are just words, but the meanings they carry, the way the world bends around them, that's what's complicated."

The three of us read Filth 9 months ago and we couldn't let the revised version be released without buddy reading it and gushing about it again!

It's 5 stars all over again, which doesn't mean that it is perfect (what is?). It means that we love it so much that we don't care, that we love every single word of it, that we were given characters who will stay with us for a long time, and so so much emotion!

Kel and Toni are already an established couple when the story begins. The road to the happy ending (more an HFN) is not about following a plot that will get them together, but about spending some time in their minds and sharing their journey at the rate of 2 trains of thoughts that sometimes drag and mull over, sometimes get frantic with worry, sometimes fly with pleasure and joy. It is well and truly about words. Words and how we use them to define ourselves and our perceived roles in life. Words to think differently with, to see underneath and farther.

The author's voice is strong in telling Kel and Toni; it doesn't act as a barrier though. On the contrary, the language knows how to be in turn beautiful and blunt, it shades and lights up, deepens and amplifies, provides a denseness of thoughts and a wide range of emotions that owes nothing to unbridled angst and everything to restraint and intensity.

"[...] feel like the person in the mirror was the same person who was watching the reflection. Thinking the small voice in the dark, the one that whispers "I am", would make itself known as more than just "I", and become something the rest of the world could see, and believe in"

It tells gender fluidity with ever-changing pronouns, tells the pain of being unable to define oneself as dictated, the gross and scary reality of living on tricks, fears, the beauty in being able to love no matter what, the courage to love despite the fears, to be oneself, to face what the world throws at you.

Filth is about gender. It has the good taste and common sense to question and study more than answering, and it is almost incidentally so, as it is defined in the end by unconditional love and courage. Just like its characters.

Filth is not a romance, but it is one hell of a love story! One to marvel at and be envious of.

"He just takes Toni as he is, and makes every little piece of him feel loved"

Nina says

It's tough, and it's ugly, and I expected it. Which is why I started reading it with the firm intention of turning right back and leaving it to rot in my ereader a little longer if I realised, during the first twenty or so pages, that it was darker and more intense than what I was in the mood for.

It was, but I didn't. Because I was completely sucked in after meeting the two main characters - two lost souls, as dramatic as that may sound, that scratch and bite and scream and hurt themselves at each other, but can love and be loved in a way that rips you apart.

It's gritty, down to earth and painfully true to life, and the space where things fall together isn't orderly or clear-cut; it's a jagged mess of fear and doubts.

But despite all that, I never for a second doubted that Kel and Toni would work it out, because what they feel for each other is so strong that it can overcome anything each of them does to himself, and the reason why you can feel it in your fucking bones is the fact that it's not rose-coloured and syrupy sweet, but shown in all its twisted glory.

Don't expect to understand it until you read it.

It's an unconventional novel in many aspects.

You never do get to find out all of Kel and Toni's story, but M. King is proof of the fact that you don't need the author to lead you by the hand in the exploration of her creations' past for you to know them and understand them deeply, from the inside out and from the outside in.

Even the secondary characters are painfully real, and as lovable as they are frustrating, because they are, in the end, only human. And if an author can make me see her characters as concrete, fleshy human beings, she's got my wholehearted respect until the end of time. If she can also write like a motherfucking pro and show you places and the inside of a mind that doesn't understand itself with just words, she can take all my money and half the rooms in my house for more of this stuff.

The last scene is one of the most beautiful things I've read in my entire life. And yes, I'm definitely one to use hyperbole time and again when it's not needed, but this is not one of those times.

There is an intimacy so raw and tender that it stops being scary, and it just turns into radiant, aching beauty. And it made me think that if this is what you get after everything Kel and Toni have been through, it just might be worth the pain.

Christina says

4.5 Stars

Filth is a raw and powerful book about courage, acceptance, pain, fear, love, hope, and strength, with the underlying theme of gender. How do we identify ourselves? How does the world identify us? Does it matter what words we use to define ourselves? Why is there this constant pressure from society to decide which part of the spectrum we fall under? These are questions that plague Toni and Kel.

This isn't any easy story to read. Toni and Kel live a tough life. It's gritty and dangerous. They live in a world of drugs, prostitution and poverty. Their journey together is full of violence and abuse, both emotionally and physically. This is a highly co-dependent relationship. Toni is emotionally all over the

place. He flies off the handle over everything; he's insecure, needy and doesn't always know what he wants. He was always told he wasn't a manly man and now Toni feels like she's not woman enough, even though at times she doesn't completely want to abandon being male. Kel is Toni's rock. He makes Toni feel safe. He's strong and seems to be the voice of reason. He's always there for Toni, whether it's paying for Toni's electrolysis or putting up with Toni's best friend, Danielle. He loves Toni, but he's struggling with Toni's transition. He's not only trying to accept Toni, but he's also dealing with his past, his present made up of turning tricks and his uncertain future with Toni. He tries to be supportive, but his frustration gets in the way.

As I mentioned above, in the beginning, it looks like Kel is the pillar of strength, but we learn that Kel is just as insecure and needy as Toni. Kel doesn't outwardly express his emotions like Toni does. It's subtle, but Kel depends on Toni just as much as Toni depends on Kel and when Kel faces a crisis that could tear them apart, it's Toni who steps up to guide them through it. Kel is aware of how much courage Toni has. His inner-strength is what keeps him going each and every day.

This is an intense read and despite the depressing situation, Toni and Kel always looked ahead. They want a future and they dream. It's realistic without the typical melodrama thrown in to drag it down.

The writing sucks you in. There's no snappy or witty dialogue. In fact, there is very little dialogue at all. It's an introspective look into their lives. It's chaotic at times, but also hopeful. Kel is insightful and is aware of his faults. Even through all their confusion and sometimes my own, I always had a sense of how authentic their feelings were. Nothing felt forced.

The story alternates between Kel and Toni's POV, along with the constant changing of the pronouns. Both Kel and Toni use them interchangeably. Like everything else in this book, it's not clear cut. It reflects acceptance and confidence, but also confusion and pain. They are such simple words, but the weight they carry is clear and I love how King brings this to life.

The ending was simply beautiful. The awareness and realization was simple in a sense, yet very profound. It was such a deeply personal moment between Toni and Kel. The journey is no where over between them, but I believe their strength will get them through whatever lies ahead.

Ilhem says

How difficult it is to give you a fair idea of what this book is packing! There is so much to say and I don't know where to begin.

Filth is talent and the power of words dedicated to the discovery of two human beings, to a story that grips you from the author's note to the very last word while it carries you along the flow of Toni's and Kel's trains of thought : erratic, worried, scared, lonely in their own chapters and their use of flitting pronouns. Until ugliness catches up on them and violence hits hard and the thoughts that left you a little numb turn into questions awaiting unique answers.

It's about gender, the build of self, the raw reality of living on tricks, about what you make of what the world throws you and many things I forget here. Ultimately, it's about uniqueness, courage and unconditional love.

So, there is Toni : ***"this perfect crocus of a human being"*** .

And there is Kel : ***"The type of guy who keeps everything locked up inside him until he trusts a person."***

Once that starts to happen, it's like daylight coming in through a broken window, like colors fracturing

off the glass and dancing together in unexpected places. They start out pale and fleeting, but as the sun gets warmer, they grow stronger, until they're dazzling and bright" .

They're unique and they're beautiful.

Note:

This was a buddy read with Deirdre and Laura. I thank them for their companionship in this journey.

Laura says

"I think of you as you"

I don't have the words right now to express my love for this book. Just know I loved every word. Savored every word. Beautiful writing and a beautiful love between two people who truly saw each other down deep.

I highlighted and bookmarked my whole way through this book--line after line and page after page. This line traveled with me today.

"It is true; words are just words, but the meanings they carry, the way the world bends around them, that's what's complicated."

Ilhem & deirdre--Thank you so much for introducing me to this book and author. These characters, words, and story fit right in my heart.

Kassa says

Filth is a fascinating study in gender, love, pain, and sheer strength. This is an absorbing and engaging story to read yet the main characters, Kel and Toni, are anything but easy. Though the subject matter is intense and moving, the story doesn't ever feel depressing or heavy. This is not an angst filled novel with drama at every second but there is a quiet intensity that comes through. This tension keeps you glued to the story, turning page after page with no clue what will happen and where the characters will end up. There is an overly optimistic feel to the ending but then again the characters approach their life realistically with a strong thread of hope.

Filth has been on my radar since Val gave it a glowing review earlier this year. The story is a character study between the steadying force of Kel and the complete chaos of Toni. Kel and Toni live in an unknown city on the edge of poverty. Kel turns tricks to support them while Toni works part time at a local independent bookstore. They met at an outreach center and there was an instant attraction. Now a year later, Kel is struggling with the weight of their relationship, Toni's decisions, and his own deep love for Toni. Toni recently decided to transition to being female and the illegal Mexican pills, mood swings, expensive treatment, and outside influences are straining an already rough relationship. Kel is not sure he can hold on despite his adoration for Toni and at this pinnacle point, a terrifying event happens that forces both Kel and Toni to evaluate their lives independently and together.

For 2/3rds of the novel, the pace is chaotic and frenetic. Bouncing between Kel and Toni's third person perspectives, the chaos that reigns over Toni sets loud and often difficult obstacles. The last part is quieter, introspective, with a thread of peace, calm, and even happiness that comes over the two. Kel is the stabilizing force and often the narrator for the reader. He has incredibly intuitive insight into Toni and often relays how the story wants Toni to be seen. Kel adores and loves Toni but struggles with Toni's issues. Even before the transition and dangerous pills, Toni's always been damaged. Their relationship is made up of angry, often violent fights, wild mood swings, bitter words, and quiet resolutions. They survive by burying their feelings, problems, questions, and rarely even listening to each other.

Kel is seen as the stabilizing force, the caretaker, the steady strength. He makes sure they have enough money to live and support Toni's pills and electrolysis appointments, even while he's not sure he'll be around much longer. Kel is gay, not bisexual at all so the thought of Toni turning into a woman bothers Kel on many levels. He sees Toni as running from his life, his issues, and many of Kel's insights are meant to convey to the reader more depth about Toni. This is especially helpful when Toni takes over the narration and is a bundle of contradictions, pain, and need. He's all over the place; often picking fights that he knows are wrong but he can't stop himself. Toni often becomes inconsolable over minor issues, freaking out when predictable events occur. He's difficult to appreciate and understand, thus Kel's more even handed frustration and even hints of desperation are a good contrast. Just as Toni is revealed as having such inner strength and drive, even amidst the chaos of his battered emotional and mental health.

The concept of gender is played with here as initially Toni (born Anthony) wants to be female but comes to realize that his gender is neither male nor female. He has desires and needs for both – he feels safe, comforted, and confident dressing as a woman but he has an intrinsic masculine quality that he doesn't want to lose either. The story plays with this not only with the transgender ideal but often mixes the pronouns he and she when referring to Toni. Toni and Kel mix these as well, sometimes within the same paragraph or sentence. Initially it's clear that Kel sees Toni as male and Toni sees herself as female. But this changes gradually and soon the descriptors are used interchangeably by both characters in both dialogue and internal musing.

The writing is engaging and story absorbing. I immediately connected with both characters, felt their pain, frustration, drama even as I didn't always like their actions. Toni is especially difficult and early on, I sympathized with Kel, knowing that he was reaching his limits and would one day disappear. I even felt it was best for him given the dysfunctional and highly co-dependant relationship. Yet when the later action happens (trying not to give spoilers but it involves one of Kel's tricks) and both Kel and Toni reevaluate their lives and their relationship, this feels honest and authentic. They don't make grand gestures, well aside from one, but are determined to change their lives and hopefully together. The story doesn't end with everything worked out but more so of a hope for a better future.

Dani says

3,5 stars. Rounded up because it really made me think.

This was a strange book, a very odd, unconventional novel. I've read it a while ago and have been putting off writing the review. I want to do this book justice but somehow have a hard time formulating my thoughts.

I think what it came down to for me is that this novel took on too many complex, complicated issues at once. A nuanced treatment of almost every one of these issues could properly fill out a separate book:

*The insidious influence of chronic poverty and precarious circumstances on everything – relationships,

mental health, you name it

*The reality of earning your living with turning tricks

*Gender fluidity in a gender-rigid world

*Coming to terms with being trans (or not?) including all it entails: transitioning, hormone treatment, passing, gender reassignment

*The murky dynamics of co-dependent relationships.

Mind you, this book is not dialogue driven, we spend the entire time inside the head of both protagonists, we follow their trains of thought. And those are erratic, at times illogical, repetitive, in the case of one MC slightly manic, highly emotional and often quite lost.

So at times it felt like hard work to not only put together, one by one, all the different pieces of their complex situation but also simultaneously grapple with two totally biased and therefore unreliable POVs. It worked for stretches and at other times it fell flat. Then mostly because I was unable to feel close to the respective narrator and felt oddly detached.

I adored that King dared to tackle the most controversial topic of all: Is Toni really trans or is he/she, as Kel thinks, emotionally unstable and lured by the cathartic promise of the most radical change possible, literally using the transition to shed his old skin and everything unpleasant he associates with his personality and experiences?

Now, that kind of premise is highly, highly controversial and has to be handled with utmost care because it could be argued to erase trans identity and trans struggles. This especially because there are so few good books anyway, so why tackle exactly THIS issue during the already severely limited screen time? In the beginning I assumed that this was only Kel's biased opinion and that the storyline would follow the rather predictable standard line: Kel struggling and eventually coming to terms with the change in his partner. But King added another layer of complexity – and I'm not sure if that worked out in the end. I would love to hear the opinion of a trans person. Considering that I even ask this question, it probably means it did not entirely work for me.

In conclusion, the novel would have benefited from concentrating on one or two of these tension hotbeds instead of tackling all at once. Nevertheless it aptly captured meaningful and poignant moments, especially while describing the sexual and emotional intimacy between two vulnerable, complex, deeply devoted characters.

Sheri says

There are times when a book is almost too much. Can a story be *too* real? There are also times when a story transfers physical pain through the pages. It hurts and you are left aching afterwards. Sometimes the wound is so deep, it scars.

I have a new scar on my heart and its *Filth* inflicted.

Impact.

This story hits and it hits hard. I'm still dazed and though I saw great beauty within the pages, I did not love it. I cannot neglect the outstanding writing, nor can I overlook the exceptional characters. In the same aspect, I can't ignore the explosive relationship between Kel and Toni. I have no problem with rollercoaster relationships, mainly because my experience with them is that they soar more than they fall. However, the immature drama that ricocheted between Kel and Toni bugged me. I don't believe it has anything to do with their age, despite them being quite young. But how they bickered was frustrating, enough that I was distracted.

What I **did** love was the blaring message that pulsed from the book.

Love does not see...Love feels.

It matters not what the wrapping looks like, but what the package protects. Anything of true value lies underneath the skin. This...this message was gorgeous.

I particularly liked Kel's description of his love for Toni. Dangerous. He would do anything for Toni. Toni loves Kel with equal intensity but was blinded by the relentless turmoil in his head. His. I have such a difficult time attaching any pronouns to Toni. I hesitate every time because neither are a perfect fit.

Imperfect.

Another word that strikes me with great significance here. We all have imperfections and true loves exists when our imperfections fit perfectly with another. However, it is impossible to genuinely love someone else when you do not love yourself first. Toni cannot love Kel properly until Toni loves Toni. Here lies the ultimate challenge.

Lotus.

I will forever link the lotus flower to this story. Kel often thought of Toni as a flower bud, tightly furled. Magic happens with a lotus flower. Even in the muddiest water, it can grow strong and beautiful. Their love will thrive, even in filth.

If you are willing to explore a journey of a discovering a lost soul and experience the turbulence such a path takes- take a deep breath, have a seat, and start here. You are gonna be here a while.

3.5 *tragically-beautiful* stars

Full TEAM review [here](#).

Leah says

One of the best books I've read all year. Though I have quite a few transgender and non-gender conforming friends and know, as cliched as it sounds, that gender is largely a performance this book was still quite informative/eye-opening. King's characters were wonderfully developed. I wanted paint Toni's toenails, style

her/his hair, be that empathetic ear "they" needed. And we should all be SO lucky to have a partner like Kel. I just want to eat him up; to be acquainted with such a complex, unusual, empathetic character. Fantastic read; the kind of book that changes you!

Karen says

I have owned this book since its release back in 2013 and every time I decided to read it I managed to squirrel off to something else and now I know why. Let me start by saying this book is incredible. It is well written, it is a story that desperately needed to be told.

Toni wants to be a girl. She wants what is outside to match what's inside. She's probably not taking the best route to get there. Especially the whole self medicating that really had me holding my breath. Such a bad, bad idea. But when your medical plan is non-existent, when there are monetary limitations and when you haven't had the good fortune of finding medical professionals that you feel understand you and are sympathetic to your situation. Sometimes you take what you feel is the only option that's viable for you.

Kel loves Toni and will do anything for him (yes, mostly Kel refers to Toni as him) and by anything I mean Kel makes the money they need to live on and to buy Toni's meds by turning tricks. For Kel it's not about whether Toni wants to be male or female it's about wanting Toni to be happy and safe and whatever that takes Kel's willing to do.

Two people in love, trying to make it work and trying to find themselves at the same time. But for all their faults and problems they both know one thing and that's the fact that what matters most is being with the person they love.

Kel and Toni have so many strikes against them it's simply heartbreaking. They both have addictions that they fight on a daily basis, given all the issues that they have you'd think they'd talk more but honestly I don't believe either of these two have ever been exposed to an environment where open and adult discourse on problems and concerns has ever been something they were exposed too. So sometimes you do what you know how to do. You bury it, you shove all the hurt, anger, frustration, anxiety and everything else deep down where no one can see it, even you, because that's what you know how to do. That's how you were raised to solve a problem. Sometimes it works, maybe only for a little while. But hey, sometimes in life you take what you can get.

Kel and Toni face life to the best of their abilities and when life throws them for a loop they find out what they're each made of and they also see that the other person is more than they had realized. They don't let life's problems and challenges drive them apart instead they draw together and become stronger, better as a couple.

'Filth' is so much more than a simple love story. It's a story about figuring out who you are and how to be true to yourself and listening to that inner voice that comes from your heart and not the one that echoes your self doubts. It's about choices. Choices that affect you, the person you love and your friends. It's about the journey from finding love to making it work and ultimately keeping it.

The hardest thing about this story for me was spending so much time wandering around inside Toni and Kel's minds. Seeing and knowing the thoughts that were going through their minds and that they were or weren't sharing with each other but most of all I was always aware of the intensity of their feelings for each other. It wasn't something that was always out there and on display for the rest of the world or even for each other but it was a constant intense presence in their hearts and minds and it felt like such an intimate part of

each character to be privy too that I'm left with a bit of a dull ache in my heart and an empty spot in the pit of my stomach now that the story is done.

Laura says

"I think of you as you"

I don't have the words to express my love for this book. Just know I loved every word. Savored every word. Beautiful writing and a beautiful love between two people who truly saw each other down deep.

I highlighted and bookmarked my whole way through this book--line after line and page after page. Absolutely gorgeous!

"It is true; words are just words, but the meanings they carry, the way the world bends around them, that's what's complicated."

Ilhem & deirdre--Thank you so much for introducing me to this book and author. These characters, words, and story fit right in my heart.

Jenn says

Oh this book. This book made me so happy because it was thought-provoking, simplistic but complex, with two people each struggling on their own and trying to figure out how they fit together.

What you have is Kel and Toni, both with difficult pasts and difficult presents. Working as prostitutes, recovering from drugs and the party lifestyle, regularly getting tested for STDs, buying medications off the street because the idea of figuring yourself out finally is stronger than waiting and seeing if it's real and if it's best for you. Wanting to figure yourself out so strongly that you are willing to leave much of your past behind to live in a rundown, tiny apartment holed up together praying each day will be better than the last.

"It's a funny thing not knowing who you are. Whether it's a passing crisis, or just nerves, or even a slowly changing point of view, it's unsettling. It doesn't feel safe."

These two individuals are not easy. They aren't easy to read; they aren't easy on each other. They fight – at times verbally, emotionally, and in the past, even physically. They've slept with others to not just earn money to live, but to help each other with future dreams, even if it's the option for a one way bus ticket to get away. This is a story about the forgotten and the people thrown away by society. It's about those people wanting more, but having each other is often enough. It's about unconditional love served to the reader in an unconventional manner. It's kissing your loved one's fingers despite not loving their gel nail polish. It's about bringing home pancakes and packed cheap meat just to see your loved one smile. It's about not running away as soon as shit gets hard or scary.

There isn't a lot of talking, but the thinking is *monumental*. These aren't characters that are going to discuss every detail with each other and have long chats by a fire. You are on a journey with them, they are alone in their heads panicking and fearing and remembering why they love each other, they are sitting comfortably

sitting next to each other late at night, they are rolling away from each other after emotional sex trying to process everything, they are accessing each other's body language and facial expressions. They are growing in both when they are speaking and just as much when they aren't.

Ideas of gender and sex run throughout and even the pronouns switch continuously, which is something I loved. But it never serves anything in this book in black and white terms. This book is about the gray areas, it's about the questions rather than absolute answers.

“Names are hard, though. He doesn't know where to start, who he wants to be. What he sees in his head, when it'll all be over, that person who's smart and brave and clean and free...she doesn't have a name. Toni's not even sure he connects with her all the time, that she's really a part of him, and that gets him so mad.”

I think what I loved most about Filth is that the author never tries to make Toni and Kel broken boys who the reader should pity. She gave them strength and courage and a recognition of their own faults, but a desire to make the best of what they have and hope and work towards a change. If they stay together or eventually go their own ways, I'd be fine with either option. I just want them to be OK, I want better for them, but I'm happy they are figuring things out together.

Highly recommended.

This and more reviews can be found at Love Bytes Reviews

Tina says

Filth is the first book I have read about a transitioning main character. Toni is physically a man. She identifies as a woman. Toni is unable to afford the quality medical care or proper dosages of medication required to undergo such a major change. She buys her drugs on-line from Mexico and decides her own doses according to what she has read on the internet. Kel loves her to distraction. He supports them both by turning tricks. Toni used to work as a rent boy, but Kel can't handle the thought of another man touching his "honey" so he is now their major source of income, while Toni works part-time in a book store.

When they met, Kel and Toni were both heavy drug users and drinkers. They moved in together, in a neighborhood far away from their old friends and both got clean, except for the cigarettes. When Toni mentioned to Kel that he wanted to begin transitioning, Kel questioned whether it was something Toni really wanted. It had never come up before, so it didn't seem to Kel that Toni fit everything he had ever heard about "t-girls". They mostly said that they had felt from a very young age that they were born into the wrong body. It did explain why Toni preferred watching game shows on TV with his mom as a kid instead of playing sports. But Kel worried about the safety of the drugs and the influence of Toni's friend Danielle who is already living as a woman and is encouraging Toni through her transition.

Kel and Toni live in a dangerous world surrounded by dangerous people. They have had conflict in their relationship because of what Kel is forced to do to pay for Toni's medications. As long as Kel goes to his NA meetings and Toni takes the drug which is intended to counteract the side effects of the other drugs, things go along pretty smoothly.

But they don't talk to each other. They are deeply in love, but seem to just exist side-by-side without sharing a life. Toni has doubts about her choices and she doesn't talk to Kel about them. Kel bought a book for families of transitioning people and he hides it from Toni. Toni knows that the medications will eventually

have an effect on her exceptionally healthy libido, but won't warn Kel what to expect. Kel has concerns about the behavior of one of his johns and he doesn't mention it to Toni.

When something goes terribly wrong and Toni and Kel are forced to flee, they finally begin to connect. They share their doubts and insecurities. They tell each other the things they have been feeling but were too scared to disclose. Through their forced exile, they come together and form a unit, a real couple who know deep down and can express that they will love each other regardless of what form they take or what they do for a living or what has happened in the past. They gain a deeper level of commitment.

M King writes eloquently about the feelings of despair and loneliness a person feels when they are born in the wrong body. My heart broke as I read about Toni just never feeling "right". When she presented as a man, she felt she wasn't masculine enough. When she presented herself as a woman, she felt she lacked femininity. I kept hoping for a happy medium for her. There are so many young people who identify as the gender they weren't born into. There are so many shades of grey on the scale between being a fully masculine, hairy man and a soft, curvy, feminine woman. If for no other reason than to gain insight into the mind of a "t-girl", I highly recommend this book.

I am unfamiliar with the terms the trans community uses to describe themselves in any one of their beautiful forms. If I have used a wrong term and offended someone, I am deeply sorry. Please comment below so I will not make the same mistake again.

Kristie says

Over at Boys In Our Books, we took on a reading challenge, put forth by Ilhem. This was a difficult book to read for many reasons, but first and foremost, the challenging subject matter and thoughtful and truthful way in which the author presents the two MC's. Our thoughts on the book are here.

I would recommend giving this a read, starting up a conversation, and open a dialogue. You won't be disappointed.

Susan says

About this book – it's a brave piece of storytelling, it's unapologetically honest, and it's groundbreaking. When I see the original publish date, I'm shocked. Why haven't more people read this? It feels IMPORTANT.

About the story – well, it's a LOVE story. But it ain't pretty. It's about 2 young men that are CHANGING...and dealing with how individual change impacts a relationship change. And how confusion, and depression, and fear, and lack-of-acceptance, and anger...and the full spectrum of emotions, really...HURT...and HEAL...and ARE. Does that make sense?

Kel is a care-taker. You get that from the beginning. He's struggling to take care of Toni as Toni struggles to figure out himself, or herself, or themselves. And I don't put those pronouns out there because I'm confused...but because Toni's confused. (and the author does a KILLER job of mixing pronouns up to

represent that confusion...brilliant)

But as easy as it is to love Kel and hate Toni...the author throws in this wrench where Toni shows his own strength...and his own contribution to the relationship. And it's an 'aha' moment for me. I understand more WHY Kel loved Toni. What the draw was.

Look, this book is hard to explain. Yes, it has a trans character. Yes, it has a rentboy character. Yes it has angst and confusion. Yes it has slap-in-the-face emotion. But, it's actually quite subtle in it's writing. It's not pretty...but it's beautiful.

I recommend EVERYONE read it.
