



Stolen Summer

S.A. Meade

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The horror of Evan and Colin's stolen summer may be over but the nightmares remain. Can their love survive the fallout?

The last thing journalist Evan Harrison expects to hear, when he returns from covering the war in Afghanistan, is that his best friend, Colin Williams, is in love with him.

Colin, an Oxford Professor with a poet's soul and a roving eye, turns out to be a temptation Evan can't resist. What he discovers is that sex with Colin is hot, wild and relentless. The two of them embark on a passionate affair and Evan knows he's going to spend his days with Colin - after one last assignment.

A western journalist in Pakistan is too tempting a target for local insurgents. Evan's 'Oh-shit' sense fails dismally when he is taken hostage and spends four months refusing to let his captors grind him down by clinging to memories of the lover he left behind. Freedom from captivity, however, doesn't bring freedom from terror. The legacy of Evan's ordeal results in meltdowns and nightmares that threaten to destroy his life with Colin. He can't even seek comfort in lovemaking because the pills intended to save his sanity kill his desire.

Evan seizes a chance to put his nightmares behind him by taking one final assignment, covering unrest in Jordan. Colin sees Evan's decision as the end of a relationship he fought hard to save. If Evan makes it back to England in one piece, winning Colin back will be the toughest assignment he's ever faced.

Stolen Summer Details

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From Reader Review Stolen Summer for online ebook

Ami says

Evan Harrison is a high-profile journalist. The book opens with Evan in Afghanistan, contemplating about the ones he left behind in England, including his best mate, Colin ... and how Colin seems to be more important to him compared to his current girl-friend, Katy. One night, long ago, when both were drunk, they shared a kiss. And Evan realizes how Colin is one constant figure in his life for almost 10 years. After he leaves Afghanistan, and before being sent to another task in Pakistan, Evan reunites with Colin. Colin "shocks" Evan with his true feeling, that he has loved Evan all these years. Evan decides to embark this new relationship after all. But then, when he gets to Pakistan, Evan is kidnapped ...

I have high respect to those war journalists, imagine being out there, sending over news to other parts of the world, with danger of being killed or kidnapped and tortured. I have not read many M/M romance featuring war journalist, that is the reason I pick this one up.

The romance is written nicely, the way I like it. There is no push/pull angst transition of "straight" Evan to "gay" Evan. They are practically have been in each other's life, and Evan accepts that he cares about Colin more than any other girls.

What I enjoy the most about the story is the description of Evan in those dangerous countries. His friendship with a captain in Afghanistan. His attempt to survive the prison in Pakistan. THEN, most of all, when he returns to England, and suffers from PTSD. How Colin helps him through it all. It's not overly dramatic, it feels subtle, but packs a punch. The love making is not blatant, but still emotional enough.

I have my eyes glassy with tears during the time when Evan decides to throw away the pills that helps him during the PTSD so his relationship with Colin can survive.

While one of my reviewer friend, MandyM points out perfectly that there are probably too many issues in one book, I still enjoy it. I love the writing style ... and the "British" tone is not too much. I think S.A. Meade can be an author I keep my eyes on.

MsMiz (Tina) says

This story was brilliantly written. Evan and Colin have such chemistry and the love just pours off the page. Along with a love story, there is pain, war, living with the aftermath of PTSD and then what happens in the fall out. The combination of war and love was done really well. And for those who know me, I got teary eyed - which is not easy to make me do!!

Baba says

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I touched the soldier's cheek. Some days there were worse things than heartaches.

Well, this was kinda interesting.

I'm not sure if a romance author is doing herself/himself a favor if she/he is making political or religious statements. When I was reading about the interview with Al Masood, the proverbial alarm bell went off. I have to admit I was a bit surprised and I suppose this could or will be an issue for some readers. Everyone knows it's a sensitive topic and as far as I can judge, political and religious statements in romance novels should be avoided.

As it is, I was never ever in Pakistan nor Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, our Federal Department of Foreign Affairs issued a Travel Warning for countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan (among other countries of course). I still remember the Swiss couple who was being held captive in Pakistan for more than nine months in 2011/12. Despite the warning they were traveling to Pakistan. I will freely admit that I was among those Swiss people who thought the same: "What a bad call." As a matter of fact, I don't care if some parts of a so-called "dangerous" country are considered safe. I still don't feel the need to travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan. Further, I am not a Middle East expert. Having said that, I will refrain from commenting the author's statements. On the other hand, I'm enjoying my pastime by reading romance novels. And yes, I did enjoy *Stolen Summer*. Very much so. Mind you, I will only review the romance between Colin and Evan and how I felt about Evan's captivity and PTSD.

Dear Evan,

After covering the war in Afghanistan you come home and your best mate, Colin Williams, is declaring his love for you. It's not so surprising, isn't it? You two are embarking on a passionate and hungry love affair. But pretty soon it's more than an affair. As it is, it's a matter of the heart. You are sure that you want to spend the rest of your life with Colin--after one last assignment in Pakistan. That said, off you go but unfortunately you don't come back as scheduled because you are being held captive for more than four months. **It's the time of your *Stolen Summer*.**

Evan, it's damn hard for me to witness your captivity. It's bad. Your pulse is pounding but so is mine, that's for sure. You are terrified and only Colin's love and all those good memories are keeping you alive. I believe you, Evan, this is such a bad place to realize that you are in love with Colin. I am rather impressed with your stress management techniques (press-ups and sit-ups). You are trying to adopt a daily routine. Well done, Evan. Hygiene is totally non-existent. Mind you, don't expect any niceties such as toothpaste or mouthwash or decent meals either.

Well, the real problem is not your captivity though. The real problem is the whole fallout after you came back home. We all know that no one walks away from a hostage situation without scars. All around you, life carries on. But you cannot go on like before your captivity. You suffer from panic attacks and terrible nightmares. You are not ready to leave your house. All you want to do is crawl into bed and stay there. Avoid any noise and crowds; avoid the real life.

Sometimes you are back in *that place* again. You feel things crawling in your beard and beneath your clothes. And all the scratching in the world can't get rid of the constant itch. Months of dirt and filth are ingrained on your skin. You stink and your hair is heavy with grease. Evan, I completely understand why you want to crawl out of your own skin. I really do. Finally you take a shower; you scrub your skin until you bleed. Whatever you do, though, you cannot get clean. Ah, Evan, I'd like to hold you. It's intense, raw, very believable and sad. I am so sorry for you.

I know you cannot forget what happened, however, you have to deal with it eventually. You totally depend on Colin. Then again, you can't let your loved ones carry you forever. Sometimes you are just a self-absorbed arse. Having said that, there comes the moment when you have to pull out the finger and sort things out for yourself. Colin did save your soul and sanity. He put you back together. Without Colin you are nothing, Evan. You owe him a lot. Ultimately **you** have to put yourself back together.

Evan, I was a little bit annoyed when you went off to Jordan. I just thought it was all about the rush again. Admittedly, you were employed by the paper and your boss sent you off to another last assignment. But still. I was not happy with your decision. And why ask Colin anyway since you made up your mind already??

I really liked your story, Evan. Your creator has a very engaging writing style. Your hunger for each other was incredibly palpable. Your love was passionate and I enjoyed watching you two together--in and out of your bedroom. *grin* Further, I think you are two very likable characters. I don't intend to being mean, however, I have to admit that your captivity and the heavy case of PTSD are the best aspects of your story. It was very well done. You know I was *there* with you. I felt for you. I hurt for you. Ultimately I am so glad everything turned out well for both of you.

I wish you and Colin the very best.

Take care.

Baba

What I disliked

Just some minor issues:

I don't know how many times Evan brushed Colin's hair away, and during the first half of the story Evan told how Colin smelt--numerous times. A little bit repetitive for my liking but really nothing major though. Another matter was the lack of psychological counseling. After being diagnosed with PTSD I would have expected more and better counseling. Seeing a family doctor and prescribing some anti-depressants is not good enough.

The ending was a bit too corny for my liking.

Lady*M says

We need more books like this one in this genre. It's a bloody honest book, to borrow the word, told in that reserved British voice that just emphasizes the drama. Evan is *such* a man - in his boldness, thirst for an adrenaline rush, stoicism and - stupidity. I wish we had the opportunity to hear Colin's voice as well, especially during Evan's absence, battle with PTSD and separation. The beginning of the new relationship, the sensuality of true love, Evan's constant fear in the captivity, men's troubles when he returned, their lowest point and reconciliation - it was all beautifully written. I can't wait to see what will S.A. Meade come up with next. A bloody good work!

Kaje Harper says

That was excellent! This book has all the elements that could make a melodrama - a friends-to-lovers somewhat-GFY romance that is damaged after far too short a time, war, hostage-taking, captivity, PTSD. But in S.A. Meade's hands this is an intense, believable and understated story. Stolen Summer has a realistic plot and deeply felt emotions that are more poignant for not being overdramatized. This has to be one of the best depictions of PTSD that I have read, with all the consequences it has on the characters and the relationship. Evan and Colin are hot and sweet and real together, and I was pulling for them all the way, throughout a story that I could not put down. Recommended.

Susan65 says

For a first time author, SA Meade did a wonderful job of telling the story of Evan, a journalist who covers war torn Afganistan and Pakistan, and Colin, his best friend and a University professor.

Evan and Colin are best friends who realize in their 30's that the reason they can't seem to find the perfect woman is because they are perfect for each other.

After a few months of bliss, Evan takes an assignment in Pakistan, where he is kidnapped and held for four months. After his rescue, he suffers from panic attacks and PTSD. Colin is the faithful boyfriend who devotes his time fixing Evan, both body and soul. Unfortunately, the sex takes a back seat when the meds cause erectile issues...uh oh.

Evan, stubborn bastard that he is, decides to do one more trip to the middle east and Colin kicks him to the curb. He loves him but he can't live with the worry.

The ending, when Evan and Colin reunite, is very poignant and sweet. And Evan better not run off again or Colin will kill him himself...lol

The writing was a little choppy in places and the british slang always throws me but overall it was a good story that i thoroughly enjoyed.

Tami says

Hm... I like the writing and the start was very strong.

But what I disliked right away: How the (ex-) girlfriend is the homophobic, mean bitch from hell. And how the impending doom of the journey to Pakistan is so clearly outlined, it takes away all the suspense. And then the real disaster seemed quite anticlimactic. Maybe it's only me, but the whole kidnapping part was - well, kind of boring. Not that I expected or wanted blood and gore, but it somehow was much milder than expected and it didn't touch me much. I was bored although this part was not very long.

What I also disliked was the near constant weeping, sobbing and crying. I am the last person to begrudge someone a good crying fit and I also think men have the same right to tears without losing masculinity points, BUT, it was just too much. It felt as if the protag was constantly either just drying his tears, or starting to cry. That also diminished the impact of his supposed pain for me.

I think my main problem with the book was, that I didn't warm to the 1st person narrator. I felt detached and wasn't overly interested in him. I also felt that there a lot to be desired in the story and the plot (e.g. why not start a therapy instead of taking pills that ruin your life? Why is there no other journalist to do the second trip? Why so hesitant to break up with a girl that you don't love and who cheated on you? and so on...)

When he went to Jordan after what had happened the last time he travelled into a hostile, unstable country, I also lost any interest in a HEA with his boyfriend. My only feeling was "serves you right" when the protag was all miserable (including some heavy crying) because his boyfriend didn't accept his decision and left him.

And then an all-knowing elderly neighbour shared some wisdom with the clueless hero and voila HEA (I don't like this plot instrument much, as I find it quite unbelievable that people would discuss their most private feelings with strangers, but hey that's probably just me). And I would have liked the boyfriend better if he stuck with his decision to kick the egoistical and whiny protag to the curb. But so, the protag groveled a bit, offers marriage and all was great again in time for a sappy end.

Vio says

** Spoilers**

The relationship between Colin the college professor and Evan the journalist is interesting, angsty and romantic, they become lovers after ten years of friendship. Evan the adrenalin junkie who after his experiences in Afghanistan, should never have gone to Pakistan, his complete and utter disregard for Colin's concern or opinion was selfish. Evan is captured and held hostage for 4 months and very lucky to make it out alive, suffering from anxiety attacks and flashbacks it's a long difficult healing process, Evan eventually recovers with Colin's loving assistance.

Did Evan learn his lesson? Of course not he then decides to go to another hot spot, I was totally shocked and just did not get it "I kept saying to myself are you insane you are going to lose the best thing that's happened to you and for what".....I didn't care how much money he was going to get for this story, once Colin expressed his objections and told him of his fears that should have been the end of it in my opinion, even Colin's ultimatum did not sway Evan from his single mindedness. I actually felt like thumping him, I am not sure what he was trying to prove maybe he had to go back one more time to fully heal!

One issue I did have was while Evan was imprisoned for those 4 months you never got to hear Colin's side of the story how he was coping with Evans kidnapping nothing, absolute zilch. I was disappointed in this part of the story I really wanted to know what was going on with Colin as well.

Absorbing, suspenseful and nicely written!

Sara says

Goodness. I adored this book. Why hadn't I read it sooner? This was lovely. I am going to hop on a small soap box for a moment though. 'Kay? So, I know this is labeled as gay for you on a lot of shelves but I wouldn't call it that. I think, or believe, both Evan and Colin are bisexual and have fallen for the same sex

when the opposite wasn't working. They'd both dated and had relationships with women but, the feelings between them have been there off and on for ten years, this wasn't a flip deal of "today I'm ordering cock off the menu instead of vagina." No, for me, this was a proper journey with friends to lovers, an intimate and emotional of journey of two best friends falling in true love and all the good and bad that comes with it.

Told in the POV of Evan Harrison, we meet the journalist while on the job on Afghanistan deep in the chaos of the Middle East post nine-eleven. Evan loves his job; the thrill and rush of the third world countries and being able to tell the stories of the struggles with patience and empathy. Yet, while he enjoys it, he wishes for more from back home. His current girlfriend Katy does fine while Evan is away in all areas and though it should bother Evan it doesn't. What does bother Evan is not having contact with his best mate Colin and that the memories of what could have been and what Evan secretly longed for carry him through the days on the job when there is not human contact from back home. Yeah, Evan longs for Colin, dreams about shared intimate moments with Colin and could care less about who Katy is possibly shagging during his absence.

When Evan returns home, the issues with Katy are at a standstill and he takes the time to hang out with Colin when he comes down for a visit. This visit was amazing. The way the boys are as mates is natural and easy going. They really are the best of friends and yet when Evan tells Colin about his next assignment that will take him to Pakistan, a question is asked during a night of drink and honesty and Colin does what he has to, to turn their friendship around and then some.

I had to risk losing you to let you know.

This story was told beautifully. The writing itself was gorgeous but the relationship between Evan and Colin was amazing. There is no telling of the size of anatomy, or holes that are so tight etc. You don't need those overused details because while the sex is hot, it's intensely intimate, sensual and real. These two are so real and you feel the emotions flow through them and off the page. You feel Colin's love for Evan; the ten years he hid his feelings for him and fell in love with his best friend. You feel Evan and his quiet, quick acceptance of Colin as his lover because it never felt wrong and felt like home. You feel it. You don't need measurements between these two, you want the connection they have each and every time they touch and you get it. You so get it and it's so beautiful.

While this story has is gorgeous moments it does have its angst. As the blurb tells you, Evan is taken hostage while in Pakistan and his time as a hostage is heartbreaking. There is not a lot of physical torment that happens to him during this time, but the mental suffering he endures it what could break a person down. If it weren't for the memories of Colin that Evan holds onto tightly, he wouldn't make it.

But I thought of all the days I had missed. All that time we could've spent together had slipped past. They had stolen my time, they had stolen our time. I was missing it all.

The authors style reminds me of poetry at times, the way it is written. There are lines you would normally want to blend together with a comma if you were an editing freak, but after you read them, you understand the way they are written, with an eloquent flow of words leading you to an amazing realization, you get it. You just do. I did and I loved the quiet soliloquys of Evans as he watches Colin sleep or simply watches the light come through a window. It's gorgeous and emotional and brilliant.

The story deals with issues and the biggest one is the PTSD that Evan goes through. I like that the author didn't make this story violent even though violence was all around Evan and could have led to him being violent. The author takes an approach to the trauma and takes it all inside the mind where most of suffers struggle to make it through the day. The wounds one sustains, aren't always visible to the naked eye and those who are there to mend us, endure wounds of their own in the process.

It's one thing to put a body back together, but it's another thing entirely putting a mind back. People aren't meant to go through what you went through. It leaves scars.

Now I know this seems heavy and at times it was but this isn't sad or melancholy. It's an almost quiet tale with men trying to find their way from being friends to being in a relationship. The fight from both Evan and Colin was so honest and lovely to read. I adored them; adored that they argued, that they made up, that they teased each other, laughed together, cried together and they communicated. Yes, you read that right, even when the goings got tough and the words were brutally honest, these two communicated and that makes a huge difference. No big misunderstanding between them, just the things that happened between two people in a committed relationship when you learn it's not all about you. When you think you are being open to your partner's feelings only to realize you are quite a selfish arse. Yeah, these two are in a real relationship and this book - Evan and Colin, what they have to gain, to lose and go through was tangible.

Stolen Summer was an exquisite read, a wonderful friends to lovers tale where giving in and giving all to love, triumphs.

Td says

Who says romance is dead? Evan and Colin's story getting to know each other as lovers was perhaps one of the most beautiful I've read in a while. Along with that you get an actual story with many topics explored and touched upon yet it stayed right on course and didn't become overwhelming. The bumps in the road, the highs and lows were nicely balanced and mostly believable. Did I think Evan got off(...no pun intended) too easy in the end? Yeah, maybe. I have no doubt Colin won't let him get away with another stunt like that again! Another author to keep an eye on.

Heather C says

?A beautiful romance!

Oh, man, this was a tough read for me, but I loved it! I felt so much for Evan and Colin that it was hard to catch my breath at times. Their story is the epitome of what romance should be. They were so in love and real that it will be a long time before I can let them go. It actually took me longer than I expected to finish reading this because every time I put it down, I was scared to pick it up again. Actually, it wasn't that angsty or distressing of a story, but I was still afraid. Ah, fear is real thing.

Perfection.

ETA: If you are like me and dying to read Christopher and Grace's story, it can be found in Christopher's Medal by S. A. Meade under a different pen name.

Calathea says

Sorry, guys, this one wasn't for me. :(

I was ready to give 5 stars to this book when I was reading through the first quarter. Here it was a wonderful romantic story of two men getting together after having know each other for ten years. On top of it the story was written in a wonderful clear prose that made it fun and easy to read. I loved it! I could absolutely understand why everybody was raving about this book and was glad to have started reading it.

Unfortunately (so to say), Evan and Colin got together after only a few chapters. They were a couple and all tension dissipated (at least for me).

As much as I liked the interesting background of Evan's work as an journalist in conflict areas, the retelling of his time in Pakistan added nothing to his relationship with Colin, so I skimmed a lot. The heralded conflict between the two had been solved before Evan even got to Pakistan.

It got a little more interesting when Evan was back home and had to deal with PTSD (somewhere around 60% of the book). But still the conflicts got solved before they could make any impact. Around this time there came some things into play that didn't make many sense to me, e. g. Why wasn't Evan treated by a specialist? (His doctor had diagnosed PTSD and didn't send him to a psychiatrist.) If Evan's boss was such a good friend why did he ask him to go to Jordan? (He knew what Evan had been through and still asked him.) Why did Evan accept? (I didn't get the thing about depts he owed his boss at all. I would have understood if his motive had been the money so he could quit...)

I also thought that after half of the book the language got a little lax and repetitive. I haven't counted how often Evan brushed the hair from Colin's forehead, one covered the other with the duvet or everything went "tits-up". Although these are mere niggles and I would have read over them, had I been enthralled by the story.

More important for my lack of enthusiasm is the missing of an overall tension. It felt to me as if there was a number of potential conflicts that could have brought a lot of tension into the story if they hadn't been solved one by one in a serial fashion.

(view spoiler)

Simsala says

4,5-5 stars

That`s why I`m sticking to the m/m romance genre - for the pleasure of reading books like this!

Edina Rose says

OMG! The "britishness" of this book! Swearing without swearing with the use of "bloody" in every sentence!

This is the story of two men who have been best friends since their university years. They are now settled in

their careers; Colin is an English professor at Oxford Uni, and Evan is a war correspondent for a newspaper. They have always had girlfriends, they present themselves as straight, and Colin is even a bit of a womaniser, though he has been secretly in love with his best friend for years.

After ten years of friendship, they become lovers. It is glorious! Evan has never felt like that in his life and soon he falls in love too. But the two men will have some hard, hard times before finding the right balance in their relationship. Most of the drama is caused by Evan's job and Evan's newness at a serious relationship.

They are many good things in this book: it is well written, the plot is great, the description of the highs and lows of being a war correspondent is well done, the characters are great and well matched, and the chemistry between the heroes is perfect...

Regarding the physical appearance of the two men, the emphasis is made on how attractive they find each other, and not on how universally gorgeous they might be. I liked that.

And when they are intimate, there is no top or bottom attitude. They are both totally versatile. There is no: "It's my turn" talk, or the ex-straight guy fear of anal sex etc. I liked that too. I mean, I always find all this talk and fear kind of silly, like making a mountain out of a molehill.

Now is this a Gay-For-You story? The book does not say if Colin is gay or just Gay-For-Evan, but the ease with which he went into gay sex with Evan lets me think he may have experimented a bit before, though this is pure speculation. Evan is in a different place. He is obviously straight and though he now lusts after Colin, we don't know if he would be attracted to other men. The fact that he still "functions" well with his ex-girlfriend lets me think it is a case of GFY or latent bisexuality.

And the best thing about this book? The conflicts. They were convincing, well-thought, well executed, the actions/reactions of the two MC during the conflicts were proportionate, believable.

Great read!

Lauraadriana says

Writing like *this* is what made me fall in love with this genre. Writing like *this* is why I keep coming back to it. Finding a book like *this* is why I am grateful for friends on Goodreads.

This book was OUTSTANDING. From beginning to end it was written impeccably, the characters grew on the page. From Evan who I knew only too well from the first, to Colin who I slowly began to know and respect as their story evolved.

Evan is a Middle East correspondent for a British Newspaper he loves his job and he loves the rush of jumping into war zones and getting his story. After a pretty bad run in with some insurgents in Afghanistan he returns to London, feeling a little introspective and wondering what it is about his love life that is just off. He knows one thing though. He misses Colin, his best mate from college, who is now a college professor, and the one constant thing in his life.

What is it that he feels for Colin? What is that? Colin let him know during a weekend visit. Colin has been in love with Evan for years, and he just had to let him know before it was too late. It staggers Evan, he's not sure about this, but he knows he loves Colin and he takes a chance. And they discover what was missing.

They were missing each other.

They begin to build something together, there is love there. But there is also Evan's wanderlust, so he has to go chase one last story before he settles to a life with Colin.

But things go terribly wrong and the man that comes back to Colin is not the man that he had said goodbye to. And here is where their story goes from lovely to lusciously good, it's a hard road they travel, and we stumble through it with them. Evan is broken and Colin, he heals him. But it costs him, it costs *them*.

This book was a brilliantly written story about love, hardship, endurance. The incredibly selfish nature of grief and trauma, and the toll it takes on the victim, but also on those who love them. It was very touching and so incredibly personal.

I also thought the views and portrayal of the Arab world, and the effects of the war on people, was done exceptionally well.

This is a love story, it's a war story, its a story about friendship, it's a story about loss, it's a story about starting over, hope and holding on. It's just a DAMN GOOD BOOK. Then again, I should have known I was in in for good evening when the words Evelyn and Waugh came to mind after just a few pages.

This is the first book by this author, and I've made no concessions, no excuses, no allowances, it is just that good.

The bar has been raised.

HIGHLY RECOMMEND.
