



Shades of Gray

Brooke McKinley

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Miller Sutton, a by-the-book FBI agent, is starting to see some troubling shades of gray in his black-and-white world. He comes face-to-face with his doubts in the person of Danny Butler, a mid-level drug runner Miller hopes to use to catch a much larger fish: Roberto Hinestroza, a drug lord Miller has pursued for years. Danny has no interest in being a witness against his boss, both out of a sense of twisted loyalty and because he knows double-crossing Hinestroza is a sure death sentence. But he reluctantly agrees to cooperate, and as he suspects, it doesn't take long for Hinestroza to figure out the betrayal. Miller is surprised to discover Danny's not the career-criminal lowlife he expected; at the same time, Danny finds himself helplessly attracted to Miller's innate goodness. They barely begin to explore the sparking attraction between them when Hinestroza's hitman tracks them down, and then they're on the run, both for their lives and for any kind of love.

Shades of Gray Details

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From Reader Review Shades of Gray for online ebook

Simone says

So. Many. Feelz...

WHY THE HELL DID I WAIT SO LONG TO READ THIS???

At first glance, this seems to be a typical crime story. FBI Agent blackmails a criminal into testifying against his boss, they fall in love, boss gets wind of the deal, both are on the run and were miraculously saved. End of story.

Nooo, not this time. Obviously, Shades of Gray has a crime plot, but first and foremost it is a romance. A beautifully written love story between two men on different sides of the law. You feel the chemistry between them virtually sizzling, but it is not just pure blind lust. From their first time together there is a tenderness, that grabbed my heart.

Miller and Danny are far from perfect, and yet for me they are.

Miller Sutton, a somewhat disillusioned and job weary FBI Agent, who lived all his life in denial about his sexuality, about who he really is.

Danny Butler, a drug runner whose bad choice got him to be delinquent when he was a teen, but who came to terms with it along the way, until some events -some decisions- made him question his choice.

Then there is said druglord who does not accept betrayal in any way and sends his sadistic killer after them...

Both men have to realize in a painful way that not everything is black and white. Not their situation and not the other person.

I never thought I would cry over a crime story someday... There were scenes in this book that were hard to take. I had tears streaming down my face while at the same time, I felt pure white-hot rage. And the apparent hopelessness of their situation honest-to-goodness made my chest constrict.

It makes me sad that the author apparently has chosen not to write any other books, but I cannot not be more happy that I met Miller and Danny. I loved them both so hard, well, maybe Danny a little bit more. ;-) I know, I know... I'm late to the party and I could not add anything else that has not already been said in other reviews, so I will leave it at that.

In case you are as late to the party as me, read this book, you won't regret it! This goes straight onto my favorites shelf!!! Highly recommended!

Lorraine Lesar says

4.5*

No shades of grey where I'm concerned, this was pure silver and very enjoyable. I didn't care that there were some big dubious plot-holes, ie Danny and his plain stupid decisions he made that even a novice criminal would be cringing at, no, it was the somewhat cringe worthy sex scenes that took the carat and got it downgraded to a silver read, rather than a gold one.

Mirjana **DTR - Down to Read says**

*****4.75 Black & White Stars*****

"It's always our mistakes, the things we aren't proud of, that are the first ones to stand up, ready to be counted."

Where do I even begin to explain how much I loved this book? Let me start off by saying that I cannot believe this is Brooke McKinley's debut book! This is one of those stories that page by page creeps up on you, digs its claws into your heart and simply doesn't let go until the last word.

Danny Butler is on the wrong side of the law. He works as a drug runner for one of the largest drug lords in the world. He's been under surveillance by the FBI for over nine months and he's finally been brought in to turn as an informant. He's given no choice really. Word will spread to his boss that he's been arrested, can he risk saying no to the FBI and take his chances that they'll believe he didn't snitch? Or does he try to do the right thing and help the FBI put away the only man who has ever shown faith in him? Believed he was worth something, even if it was to do his dirty work? Was loyalty still an admirable trait if it lies with the wrong person?

Agent Miller Sutton has been working on this case for almost a year. He needs Danny's help to close the case. He'll do whatever it takes. He lives his life a certain way, with everything contained in a nice, neat box. Feelings have no business at work, and work is the only place where he feels like he isn't failing. He's spent most of his life denying any true emotion to creep into his neat and orderly world.

"Everything set out in neat little boxes, all black and white, exactly how he liked it. Good and evil, right and wrong, innocent and guilty. Stay in the right box and it would all work out in the end."

Danny and Miller are holed up in a safe house waiting on the capture of Danny's boss. In this bubble, the two begin getting to know each other and Danny's easy way starts to get under Miller's skin. He finds himself opening up to Danny, something he's never done with anyone. Even his fiance. Now, for those who have problems with cheating in books I'll put my thoughts under a spoiler and you can decide for yourself. Please note that I am one who does not read books with cheating, and frankly I didn't know there would be any in this book. (view spoiler) Little by little both men start opening up to each other about their pasts and what brought them to this point in their life. But underneath all of that is an undercurrent of sexual tension and the knowledge that the two live their lives on different sides of the law.

"Look at us, right now. Miller the FBI agent getting his answers, and Danny the criminal with a lifetime of bad deeds behind him. That's all we'll ever be."

After denying themselves for so long, they take a leap of faith and give in to their desires. But what neither expected was to feel so much more. However, this relationship is blooming under the dark cloud of Danny's past. His boss has found out he's going to snitch and a hitman is after them. What kind of a life could they have on the run? Should they just embrace their moment in time, knowing that there is no real future?

"This is the best, most real thing that's ever happened to me. I've spent my whole life jumping from one bad choice to the next. Choosing this, with you, is probably the only decision I've ever been proud of making. I'll never be sorry."

Miller is starting to realize that maybe the world isn't so black and white. Maybe everything can't fit into a nice, orderly box. As he learns more about Danny and what led him to this point in his life, Miller starts to evaluate his own decisions, fears and sacrifices. Has he been denying himself endless possibilities because of his own insecurities and single-mindedness? Could Danny be the person to color his black and white world?

"Danny, whose body made Miller forget the world and whose soul, even marked with shadows, made Miller believe in something beyond the stars."

"That somehow that man, with a felony record and no hope for the future, with a body marked with scars, with a brave, strong heart, was the person Miller had been searching for his whole

life without even knowing it."

Things are easy to dream about when stuck in the safety of motel rooms, just the two of them. But what happens when Danny's past catches up with them? When Miller has to decide if the actions and decision made in the arms of his lover can shine in the bright light of day? Do these two genuinely have a future or is it a pipe dream made by two men who wished they could be what they were when they were together? Can they live with the decisions they've made?

As you can tell, I could probably gush about this book for paragraphs on end. I simply could not put the book down. It elicited every emotion from me that I look for in a story. I got mad, I laughed, I was frustrated, I cried, I swooned and I screamed that it just wasn't fair. This book is easily going on my favorites shelf and one of the best books I've read this year. I can't wait for more from this author!

In parting, since this has been such a quote heavy review, I'll leave you with my favorite.

"Why, why's it so goddamn good?"
"Because it's us, Miller. Because it's us."

Lauraadriana says

So after my **fifth** read I felt I should write a review that does this book (or how much I FRIGGIN LOVE IT!) justice. To start I'll say, that yes this book is not perfect, there are things that are far fetched, some are unlikely for the premise of the book, but I don't care! I LOVE IT! I come back to it time after time, because Danny and Miller are just such special characters to me. This book was an early M/M read, and it has not lost its charm one bit. It can still make me smile, cry and curl my toes and leave me DESPERATELY in love with the main characters.

Danny Butler is a man whose poor life choices have finally caught up with him, and the reckoning is coming from the hand of Special Agent Miller Sutton. Danny has lead a hard life of crime, prison time, yet he can still open himself to love without reservations, and with a guilessnes and wonder that is just beautiful. His character just steals my heart. Every. Single. Time.

Miller is a man who has built a life on lies, mostly to himself about his desires, who he is, what he wants. And those lies they can't hold up anymore, because in the presence of Danny. He can literally do nothing but fall.

This book has a simple plot for all its FBI Agent/Criminal Saga premise, because what it is, its about love, how to let it take you, how to keep it, how to earn it and how to give it. Danny and Miller together are

intense and amazing. Danny holds NOTHING back, he is there, all of him, and Miller, he's just in awe that something so beautiful can be possible with another person.

This book is so special to me, What is it about Danny and Miller that just draws me back? Why do I love this book so much?...I think Danny's words say it best...

"why's it so goddamn good?" He was surprised at how full his voice sounded, so close to overflowing its steady banks.

Danny stroked his hair, his lips warm against Miller's cheek. "Because it's us, Miller," he whispered. "Because it's us." It REALLY IS them.

It probably won't be too long before I'm back reading about Danny and Miller and listeting to their song on a loop the whole time...SIGHS. I LOVE THIS BOOK. Still one of my all time favorite endings.

RECOMMEND!!!

J *deep in the heart of Texas* says

Loved this one!

It was **THE** perfect mix of romance and suspense.

The build up....the sexual tension....the sexual chemistry. It was perfect. It was believable, it was real....I felt it.

The suspense left me intrigued, kept me guessing.

I wanted more. I didn't want it to end.

~◊~Doxni(ela) ♥ ?? love & semi-colons~◊~ says

4.5 stars

So close to perfect for a book in this genre. This had it all: two very real, complex MCs, a tight plot, nuanced writing, action, fantastic chemistry, and serious sizzle.

I had to keep setting it down, because this was such an emotional ride. Yes, I cried, and I'm utterly in love with Danny.

Why is this McKinley's only book? This one is a must-read.

Lyn says

One of the best debut novels I have read!

Awesomamazing 5 plus star read!!! I wish there were more books out by this author.

I loved this book. I loved both MCs.

I would love to read a story about secondary character Griff.

Kiki says

This book is simply **spectacular**.

I'm notoriously hard to please when it comes to fictional romances. I just don't buy them. Friends come to me with couples they loved in books or movies, and they leave me stone cold. You see, I was never really brought up to be a romantic type. I was never one of those kids who at ten had decided what cake they wanted at their wedding. At ten, I was really into gory anime and cheesy pasta. I also had an emo phase that went on for longer than it should have. (view spoiler)

I grew from being an intensely serious child to an extremely cynical young adult. Romance doesn't convince me unless I can tell that whoever wrote or acted it really and truly put their back into it. I want to feel an author's dedication to the couple they're writing. And I don't doubt that most authors do. It just doesn't translate on the page. Katsa and Po? Meh. Katniss and Peeta? Not interested. Romeo and Juliet? Christian and Ana? Meredith and McDreamy? Jane and Mr. Rochester? Abe and Rebecca*? Allie and Noah? Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy? Every Disney Princess and her Prince, ever? Jace and Clary? Penryn and Raffe? Rick and Lori?

I just don't *care* about any of them. And that's why Danny and Miller are killing me so much. The only other couples I'm this invested in are Macduff and Lady Macduff** and Dean and Castiel***.

Danny and Miller are just such beautiful, broken characters, with this beautiful, broken romance. They're so desperate for each other, and they go on this journey, and...I can't! It's too much!

Even separately, they're brilliant. There's such smooth character development for both of them, and Miller in particular makes such an organic transition from the man he is before Danny to the man after. When you close the back cover of this book (or tap the last page. I read this on my Kobo, which I've since lost, so I can't reread this book until I buy another. Yeah - this book is so good I want to re-read it despite my titanic to-read list) you truly feel as if you've been through a journey of each character's self-discovery. Honestly? This book made me feel like I'd really *achieved* something. Don't wrinkle your nose; you've felt that way. If you say you haven't, you're lying. The best books make us feel this way. As if we've been through something challenging, transported from the hall closet or the couch or the roof of the Chrysler building or wherever you like to read, to the characters' world.

And it's not like the writing isn't worth some serious attention. This book is written with so much passion and heart. The plot is tight, dialogue smooth and slick, and the pacing perfect. The author has such love and respect both for her artistic license and her plot's relationship with reality. Yeah, there's melodrama, but this book really knows when to reel it in. It never oversteps the mark. It's angsty and dramatic, but that's what it's meant to be. That's the beauty of it!

And you know you've found a conscientious m/m author when there are living, breathing and sympathetic female characters with roles to play within the plot and important ties to the main characters. (It's not like *Crimson Spell* where the women are missing. Sorry, *Crimson Spell*. I love you like an annoying little sibling that really deserves to be punched. I love you like Ontario loves Quebec.) Really, though - Rachel was an incredibly sympathetic character. This isn't just personal opinion; the book actually forces the reader to recognize how much Miller hurts her and not to excuse it. It's refreshing, as the "silly disposable woman only existing to complicate our m/m romance" trope is waaaaay too rampant in this genre. (view spoiler)

The essence of this book is really in the plot. The romance is deeply tied to it, but they're symbiotic. You care about the plot because you care about the romance, and vice versa. There are certainly enough twists and turns to keep you on your toes. One in particular really knocked me off my chair. (view spoiler)

Honestly? This book is just great. It's one of my favourite books. There's some sex and swearing and graphic violence, but don't let these things deter you, my lovelies. I'd recommend this one in a heartbeat. I just really, really love it.

Okay? Okay.

Bonus Time!

(This is a really lame bonus time, but it's like 1 a.m. and I just...sorry.)

*Abe and Rebecca count as a fictional couple because *Breaking Amish* is the fakest shit on television. However, I won't lie and say I didn't watch the first season religiously, because I totally did.

**Macduff snuck into England, raised an army and cut off the King's head to avenge the death of Lady Macduff and his children. Yes, it's mildly archaic, but it's the best and most passionate romantic pairing in any of Shakespeare's works. (Clearly, I am not a huge screaming fan of Shakespeare's.)

***The Dean and Castiel romance is one of the most epic love stories ever told in modern media, and if you say they aren't canon then I'll raise an army, carry Birnam Wood to Dunsinane, and cut off *your* head.

FIN

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

I can't believe I'm DNFing this one at 60%. This has been on my to-read list forever! I just didn't connect with the characters.

This book has a 4.41 rating with my Goodreads friends. That is a crazy high rating from a group of very discerning people (*yes I'm talking about you, friends!*). Perhaps take my review with a grain of salt then. I am one of the few that didn't love this book.

My issues with this one started pretty much right out the gate. For a guy who is used to working with some pretty shady people and has to watch his back, Danny is one careless mo-fo. Starting with letting the police manipulate him (come one, this can't be your first interrogation room! I wasn't even fooled by the stupid police ploys and I'm not a hardened criminal!). Leaving a safe-house to meet up with a friend on the street in the middle of the day?? Don't you think someone could be watching for that? The drug lords want you dead, man, you should be paranoid as \$hit! Drawing a gun on some random guy walking his dog and then just standing there like a dummy while your FBI guy has to scramble for a lame cover story? Just plain stupid. It is no surprise the bad guys were onto you. I couldn't help myself compare this one to *Zero at the Bone*, and you can bet that D wouldn't step one foot in broad daylight for any reason while he was watching his man.

However, for me, the real killer was the lack of chemistry between the two guys. I didn't get why they all of the sudden went for each other. I didn't see the spark. The awkward sex-scenes didn't help either. I could definitely tell that this is Brooke McKinley's first M/M book. I felt a strange lack of heat between the two guys... it was like anti-sexy. Also, for someone as deep in the closet as Miller, he sure went from 0-60 in no time! He went from denial to love so quickly... it just didn't ring true for me.

I don't know, I thought that this book would be an easy 4 or 5 stars for me... I'm really disappointed that it was a miss.

R * A Reader Obsessed * says

4 Stars

There's not much to add to the multitude of reviews that have already sung the praises of this book. By no means the easiest read, this really brought on the feels and the angst.

Miller has lived his life by a set of rules. It's made him good at what he does, and there's no room for exceptions, especially as a successful FBI agent who gets the job done taking down big bad drug dealers. These rules have guided him on how to act, how to live, and how to be. He's bottled up so tight, he hasn't allowed himself to contemplate why he's always felt like an outsider in his own life. That is, until that one person prickles at his conscience and stirs up feelings he's long tamped down. The very picture of how he sees himself is about to be shattered.

Danny's life is not his own. It has no room for soft desires or comforting caring, let alone love. A series of bad choices and unfortunate circumstances have him trapped. However, he's a survivor and a fighter, and though every instinct tells him not to trust Miller, he can't seem to stop himself from falling for the repressed G man.

These two can't deny their attraction, and despite the million reasons why they shouldn't step over the line, they do. This was frantic and desperate and intense. There are hard truths to swallow and not so pretty things to be seen. When push comes to shove, both these men have to realize what's important and what they're prepared to sacrifice to not only survive, but to possibly carve out some sort of implausible reality where they can be together.

Gritty and harsh, peppered with some lovely sexy and tender intimacy, all of which will no doubt make you cheer for these two. It's really a shame this author hasn't written more.

Christelle says

4.5 stars : why have I waited so long to read this book ? So great !!!

Danny, a drug runner, just got arrested for a driving offense and the FBI used that opportunity to make him turn on his boss, a big drug dealer. Miller, a FBI agent, is assigned to this case and has to "babysit" Danny, whose betrayal is rapidly discovered and is being hunted for that. Trapped in a safe apartment for several weeks, Miller and Danny get to talk a lot, and not only about the case, but pretty soon about themselves while dealing with their attraction, a difficult journey for Danny, who believes himself not being worth anything, for Miller, who has denied his gayness his whole life, and for both of them, having to deal with the FBI games and death threats.

Might sound like a typical suspense book ?? Not at all. Like one of the MCs said : "it's just so much more".

What bothers me a bit : there is cheating involved. I get it, but still...

Apart from that, Danny and Miller's journey was...breathtaking, heartbreaking, emotional, eye-opening, hopeless and hopeful at the same time. It felt real, without BS, not an easy one, but so much worth the fight. The cherry on the cake : the sex is hot and the suspense perfect.

I couldn't put this book down and didn't want it to end, but for making sure that an HEA wasn't out of reach for Danny and Miller because they deserved it.

Highly recommended !!!

Ridley says

I know it's not fair to compare this book to Zero at the Bone, but, I can't help it. It's sort of a similar storyline. Where I think Zero was a bit more ambitious, in the end I thought it bit off more than it could chew. Shades of Gray takes a smaller bite and is a bit more graceful about it as a result.

The book opens with Danny Butler sweating, and bleeding, it out while waiting alone in a police interrogation room. A cop pulled him over for running a red light and bags him on a weapons charge, dragging him through a broken window in the process, leaving him bloodied and looking at a long stint in federal prison. He's a career criminal. In the fourteen years since he joined Roberto Hinestroza's international drug smuggling enterprise at 18, he's risen up the ranks and is currently a mid-level drug runner. He's no stranger to the federal prison system, and he's not at all eager to head back, but he's even less eager to roll over on Mr. Hinestroza and take a deal with the FBI. Not only is he afraid of getting killed, he has a sense of loyalty towards the drug lord that he's not ready to abandon.

FBI Special Agent Miller Sutton wants Danny to take this deal, and he's not above playing dirty to get what he wants. He's been on Hinestroza's case for three years, following Danny for over half a year, so he pushes and pulls to get what he wants, implying that he'd let Hinestroza think Danny's working with the Feds even if Danny turned him down. He knows he's being a dick, that he's placing this guy in mortal danger, but that's just what he *does*. He's with the Good Guys. Sad for Miller that he's not sure he believes his own propaganda

anymore. He wins a deal from Danny, so why doesn't he feel like a winner?

Though the plot is centered by Danny informing on his boss, outrunning a hitman and the like, it's not really a romantic suspense. It's more of a character study than anything else. As Miller babysits Danny in a secure apartment, they talk and form a friendship. Approval-starved Danny is attracted to the good in Special Agent Miller Sutton. Closeted Miller, stressed out by living a carefully guarded lie, is mesmerized by the impulsive, comfortably gay Danny. They're clearly attracted to each other early on, but just how would a FBI agent and a drug runner hook up?

I found the romance gritty, but entirely realistic. Not in the way that this is how any of my friends have met their better half, but that *if* an FBI agent were to hook up with an ex-felon informant, this is a completely plausible *how*. I mean, what they're doing breaks all their rules. So why? Why these two? Why now?

McKinley's superior characterization answered those questions for me. Through dialog, POV prose and bits of deep POV flashback, we get the full picture of both lead characters and what made them who they are today. Both have a character arc that spans the length of the book. Both are sympathetic, but with flaws and bad decisions aplenty. At the beginning, it seems a bit like Miller is the good guy and Danny the bad guy. But the more we find out about the both of them, the more decisions they make, the more those lines blur.

It's hard to offer examples of the characters without giving away crucial bits of plot. Both plot and character are closely intertwined and paced perfectly. Suffice to say, I could see how Miller could feel so overwhelmed by his life perched upon one lie after another that Danny was the straw to break the camel's back and make him throw everything away and start over. I could also see how maybe Miller needed to do it this way, so that he'd have no way to go back to how he'd been living before even if he wanted to. Those actions and decisions, I thought, turned him into a man only someone like Danny, who is well acquainted with how easily people can screw their lives up, could understand. By the end, Danny has begun to acknowledge the good inside him and live with it, while Miller is just getting used to living with his darkness.

I'm doing a bad job of reviewing this. I can never decently review a five star book. They've got a magic quality to their storytelling that I can never quite adequately describe. But, to sum it up, this was a great character-driven romantic suspense in which the characters personalities, gender and sexuality all played a major role in the plot. Both men acted like men; neither could have been replaced by a heroine and kept this plot. It was a story that could only be told within a m/m framework. It's a rare book that makes me want to re-read it so soon after finishing it.

Susan says

3.5 stars (*I've been stuck in 3.5-star-ville lately*)

Man, this book had the makings to be great. 2 hot characters, opposites attract, closeted g-man, danger, hot man-lovin', tenderness...so, so close...

Let me just say what I did really, really love about this book:

So often in the M/M books I read, the 2 MC's are so selfish in their love for each other. You rarely see that

truly beautiful “I love you enough to sacrifice for you”. (Protection...also a great example). But, I loved this in Danny and Miller. They found a love that was so intense they would give up themselves to protect the other. Big props.

Ok, here are my issues:

(view spoiler)

Despite all this, honestly, I did really love Danny & Miller as a couple and I thought their time together was passionate and intense. It’s an entertaining enough read and I can totally see why so many people loved it.

For me: good not great; like not love.

Gigi says

I actually read this book in 2012. I remembered next to *nothing* about it. (Old lady brain syndrome, which is great for re-reads.) It was in the handful of my first M/M romances. I bought it from Amazon so it saved my old bookmarks. I bookmarked all the sex the first time I read it. Who does that? Apparently, 2012 Gigi does.

What can be said about Shades of Gray that hasn't been said before?

That this story is riveting and edge-of-your-seat worthy?

That the romance is magical and swoon worthy?

That the sexual tension is intense and gut wrenching?

That is sex is spectacular and hot as hell?

That the ending is all rainbows and unicorns and fluffy bunnies?

That it's **huge** bummer that *Shades of Gray* is author Brooke McKinley's only published novel?

I absolutely *loved* this book and recommended it with all my might to M/M romance fans who haven't read it yet. **Fuck yes, 5+ stars.**

Brooke McKinley, come back!!

ETA: Cheating alert: (view spoiler)

Sheziss says

In chess it's called...

Okay, this one is simply EPIC. And it makes me angry because the author didn't write more books! It's a SHAME! She's classified in that imaginary shelf in my mind of ridiculously talented but inexplicably wasted authors sharing seats with the great Jane Seville and G.N Chevalier. If they want to be remembered as THE author OF the BOOK they'll become a kind of Margaret Mitchell in the M/M genre. Maybe that's their purpose. But not for my own good.

I love this book very much because it was one of my first romances in this genre but that's not the reason why I will always remember it. It's because it filled every cup of mine, even those I wasn't aware about. If there was a button to be pushed, this book found it. If there was a question to be answered the explanation was more than enough. If there was a feeling that I had the feeling that should take place then, the feeling appeared just in time. As a angst junkie as I am, I was satisfied with all that distress the book transpired. As a cuddling girl as I am I was also happy with all the brushes and grazes. And witnessing black and white Miller's world and Danny's grey one crashing into each other was just the icing on the cake. But above it all I value connection, and it was provided beyond expectations. It was one of those cases in which every ingredient was present, but the personal touch was the secret.

So, yes, damn good, this one.