PARENTAL ADVISORY – EXPLICIT CONTENT

SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT
AVAILABLE AT TEXAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

BOOK REVIEW
My Mixed-up Berry Blue Summer
By Jennifer Gennari

To Hewson, Maggie, Sarah, and Indira, my first readers. And Breauna, who had to face grown-up bullies.
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“I just don’t feel like it.”

“What a lezian,” one of the other boys said.

I stiffened.

“That would be her momns,” snorted Sam.

Their loud laughter landed like a punch. I only have one mom, I wanted to say.


“Don’t worry, man,” Sam said. “We’re going to take back Vermont.”

Take back Vermont? I was shaking and red-faced. What did it mean?


“Vermont doesn’t belong to anyone!” I stepped toward Sam, as close to the cliff’s edge as I dared.

He didn’t flinch. “No freaks allowed.”

“Let’s go,” Luke said. He grabbed my clenched fist and held on.

With my arm stretched like a lifeline to his, we moved fast, shoving branches, crushing over logs. I was glad for the dark woods. Sweat ran down my face, and I wished I had jumped, jumped into the cool lake, away from Sam.

It was like the end of sixth grade again and the softball game that had turned me into an outcast. Lauren had called someone “***,” and Mom told her not to use that word, and Lauren’s mother said, “Don’t tell my child what to do,” and then Eva yelled, “We won’t keep quiet about homophobia” and Lauren’s mother yelled, “Stay out of our lives, stay out of our bedroom!” And then Eva just had to say, “As if what happens in our bedroom affects you!”—and I wanted to die.

That was when a line had been drawn. You were either for us, people or against them. Mom and Eva and I had looked like the players nobody wanted on their team. Lauren and Tina were on the popular side, that’s for sure. I remembered, too, that Mom and Eva had been stung by the silence. Nobody said anything, not even Tina’s mother. I had thought she was Mom’s friend—they were always talking about teachers, going together to PTA meetings. It didn’t make sense.

Everything had been easier before Eva moved in. When Mom needed a break, it was Joe who came over and played Chutes and Ladders with me, and Monopoly, too. Sometimes he’d bring over sheets of butcher-block paper and we’d draw. I’d add eyes to his interlocking swirls and lines. And then he’d give them funny names like Impatience and Confused, and make up stories about our drawings. I was usually asleep by the time Mom got home; it never mattered who she was with. But then Luke’s mom had moved out, and Joe was around less. And then Mom met Eva.


Luke fell in step next to me. “Don’t let those guys bug you. That’s just talk.”

I pictured Lauren’s mother’s angry face. “What about the sign?”

“Maybe it means the Abenaki are going to take Vermont back from us white men.”

I looked at him strangely.

“Oh—” he slapped a branch away—“Vermont’s got to go back to the days of no electricity and wood-burning stoves.”

I started to catch on. “No, it means let’s take Vermont back to when everybody had to grow their own food and shovel snow by hand.”

“Let’s go back to the days of outhouses!” shouted Luke. “A ban on indoor plumbing!”

I laughed. “That’s it! That’s what they want! No more toilets and hot tubs!”

“We’ll have to wash in the lake,” he said. “Race you!”

We broke into a run across the meadow. Blue lights flashing outside the marina stopped us.


A cop was talking to Mom and Eva. Joe was there, too, looking sleepy. Mom must have dozed off and woken him up.

“Oh, June, there you are,” Mom said, and pulled me in for a hug.

“You were worried?” Luke and I always went wherever we wanted. “You said come back at lunch.”

“I did, I did,” But Mom didn’t let go.


“Thank you for your time,” Eva was shaking the police officer’s hand. “We’ll keep an eye on things,” he said.

Joe patted Luke on the back. “You go home and let these gals talk things over. I’ll watch the shop for a bit,” he said to Mom and Eva. “Remember, I’m just a boat ride away.”

It was strange enough that Eva hadn’t gone to work—we’d been gone an hour at then Luke’s mom had moved out, and Joe was around less. And then Mom met Eva.


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to hear his plan for the day.

I yanked my Stillwater Marina T-shirt over my bathing suit and pulled my brown hair into a ponytail. I didn’t bother looking in the mirror. I was the same June, never mind the changes other people saw. I clambered down from my loft to the kitchen.

“Good morning, June,” Eva moved her plate over. “I was just finishing up.”

“That’s OK. I grabbed a bowl and the Cheerios and sat at the other end of the table. I still couldn’t get used to her being here.

In between us was a bowl of sliced strawberries, courtesy of Mom, I was sure. I took a handful for my Cheerios. Strawberry-blueberry-cherry. I wanted the strangest fruit mixture for my pie.

Eva brushed a crumb from her shirt. I could have told her everything was in its place, from her cropped blond hair to her nametag neatly pinned on the right: eva brown, wo. I balanced the comics upright on the cereal box, hoping she’d get the message.

“O.K.?” she asked.

I shook my head and remained behind the box.

She turned to the newspaper, rustling the pages. “Look at this headline,” she said, pointing to “Grassroots Organization Backs Candidates to Repeal 82,160 Union Law.” “Has everyone gone crazy?”

I was sick of hearing about 82,160, unions and gay rights. “Mom says not to worry.”

“That’s MJ for you.” Eva folded the paper on the table. “By the way, a package arrived that has to be unpacked—on top of wrapping all those cookies you made last night.”

“I know what needs to be done.” I picked up my bowl and put it down hard in the sink. As if Eva knew anything about the marina shop. She hated boats. I knew how long mooring line was, what kind of oil motors boats need, and what size cleats were best for main sheets. Mom and I knew how much bread to make for sandwiches and batter for giant batches of peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies.

Eva put her dish in the dishwasher. “MJ asked me to remind you.”

“I didn’t forget.”

“Of course. I’m sorry,” she said, glancing at a little milk pooled on the table. I could tell she couldn’t wait to clean it up. I’d leave it for her; my eyes were on the lake.

“Luke’s here.” I banged through the door and down to the dock.

I grabbed the line he tossed my way.

“Hey, June.” Luke was dressed like me in a faded T-shirt and ready to swim. He climbed out of his boat. “Your mom need help?”

“As usual!” I tied a quick hitch around the pier cleat.

“When we’re done, I’ve got a new place to show you,” he said.

“What blueberries?”

“Up.”

Luke and I turned toward the shop. His strides were longer—he was a head taller than me—but I kept up.

“Does Joe need you to hold a piece of sculpture or anything today?”

“He’s still sleeping—he was up late blowtorchering.”

“Eva’s still in the kitchen.”

He looked at me sideways. “Fireworks, already?”

I snorted. “She’s just so perfect.”

“Like me?” He pulled at his faded shirt and made a face.

I laughed. “Yeah, right!” That was one of the things that made Luke so likable—he didn’t care what other people thought. Maybe living on an island was so offbeat, you just had to give up on fitting in.

LUKE AND I found Mom slouched over a book behind the counter, her Stillwater Marina cap pulled low. At the sound of the door, she pushed her cap back and smiled at us.

“There you are,” Mom said, turning down a page as she closed her book. “Help me wrap plastic around these cookies—two to a package. Luke, you put the price tag on.”

“What you say, MJ,” Luke said, and stuck a $1.95 sticker on his nose.


“Did you have breakfast with Eva?” she asked me.

“The strawberries you left were perfect,” I said. “Made me imagine the perfect pie.”

“How about blueberry-pineapple?” Mom said.

I paused to consider the combination, but I shook my head. “I can’t get fresh pineapple,” I said. “It’s gotta be something really good, really surprising.”

Chapter Three

“WHERE WERE YOU?” Eva demanded once we got inside.

I turned to Mom. “Who’s asking?”

“We worry, that’s all,” Mom dropped her arm around Eva. “You didn’t see anybody, anything strange?”

“We were up by the old camp,” I said. I kept quiet about the cliff jumping.

Like a sixth sense, Mom seemed to know. “You’re a long way up from the lake on that trail,” she said. “Be careful you don’t slip.”

“June is not the problem,” Eva said. She rubbed her hands. “Last spring, and now this—”

“We’re OK,” Mom said, catching Eva’s hands. “No one’s hurt, and that’s all that matters.”

“This time,” Eva said.

“Why were the police here?” I asked.

Mom let go of Eva and dragged a flat of berries onto the table. “Here, let’s cut up these strawberries.” She handed me a knife and began hulling and slicing them. I stood there for a moment, knife in hand, and watched them. No one was going to answer my question.

Eva unfolded the newspaper. “There’s another headline, MJ.”

Mom nodded. “Things may get worse before they get better.”

“If they get better,” Eva said.

I didn’t sit down. “What’s going to get worse?”

Eva folded the newspaper again and put it in the basket on the table. “A lot of people are angry since the law allowing same-gender couples to hold 82,160 ceremonies went into effect in July.”

I stabbed my knife into a strawberry. “I didn’t think you cared what other people thought.”

“June,” Mom motioned for me to sit. “Chop.”

I sat down and began thrashing the blade on the cutting board.

Eva smoothed her hair behind her ears. “Some people are trying to elect new senators and even a governor who would repeal the law.”

“They want to erase the law in a sense,” Mom explained.

“Let them,” I said. “The law made people angry. I had seen it twice—once at the softball game, and now with Sam.”

“You don’t mean that,” Mom said, and Eva chimed in, “It’s important to us.”

To you. I thought, but didn’t say it out loud. I sliced another strawberry. “What does ‘Take Back Vermont’ mean?”

“I was hoping you hadn’t seen that sign,” Mom said.

“I’m not a baby.”

Mom set down her knife. “Some people think Vermont will be taken over by gay people if this law remains. They want Vermont to be just for Vermonters, not outsiders.”

“Are we Vermonters?” I said. “That’s the point,” Eva said.

“Did you call the police?” I asked Mom.

“We had to report the sign.”

“That’s not all,” Eva paced by the window. “We found a note on the car about how lesbians shouldn’t be allowed to raise children.”

“Eva!” Mom said. She gave me a squeeze. “That’s why I was afraid for you. But don’t worry about it, June.”

I held on. “You’re my mom.” She’d been born to me. No one could change that. But I knew who the problem was. It didn’t surprise me that Eva was looking out the window.

I sliced a large strawberry fast. When it was just Mom and me, I used to pretend I had a dad who was a salesman, always away. Later, I understood that Mom went out on dates with special friends, and sometimes I met them. But no one lasted. Not until Eva. I threw the strawberry pieces into the bowl. The dad story ended the day Eva moved in. It had been one month, and nothing seemed better.

Mom took my hand and held it tight. “I always told you that I chose you—that I wanted to raise a child even though I wasn’t going to marry a man.”

I nodded. It was a familiar story.

“And now I’ve chosen Eva, too,” she said softly. “You told me.”

“We’ve chosen each other,” Eva said, moving next to Mom, their smiles matching.

“What about me?” I stood up.

“We’re a family now,” Mom pulled me close. “Honey, we weren’t going to tell
BOOK REVIEW My Mixed up Berry Blue Summer By Jennifer Gennari

you until late, but we've talked about it. We'd like to have a union ceremony.

"The new law protects us." Eva said, "and especially you." I pulled back, not listening. "You want to get married?"

That meant Eva was going to be with us always. Triping up around the kitchen, talking endlessly about politics, nosing into my life. Would there be a picture in the newspaper? I imagined Lauren snickering in the hall at school, I saw your mom's wedding announcement, congratulations. And who did they think would come besides Luke's dad? Nobody wanted to see two women kissing—not even their friends. Kissing—anyone was something I couldn't think about right now.

"We can talk about the wedding later," Eva said. "What's more important is your safety." Her pager buzzed. "I've got to go. You two be careful, OK?"

"We're just making pies," I said. "Like we always do."

Mom and I kept halving and slicing strawberries, our knives thudding together.

"No worries, OK?" Mom said, adjusting her glasses on her nose. "We asked Joe if he had heard or seen anything last night, but he hadn't. Someone is trying to scare us, but we think it was some kids who didn't know what they were doing was illegal."

No worries, right. It was an old game of ours, but there was plenty to worry about. The thought of the note and sign as a prank didn't make me feel better. It could have been Sam. He knew exactly what this was about. But he wouldn't go to the trouble—he had been planning to go cliff jumping, right? Yet imagining a grownup sneaking around was even worse.

My head ached, and Mom's silence seeped into me so I couldn't speak. When the bell dinged down at the marina shop, I jumped up to take Joe's place.

"Hey, June, maybe you can try a little harder to be friendly to Eva," Mom added. I rolled my eyes.

I WAS EDGY all afternoon, suspicious of everyone who came into the store. Was there a way to tell if someone hated gay people or not? The way they held their change or chose apple pie instead of raspberry-strawberry? A man from the New York side of the lake bought some gas. Three French Canadians sailed down from Montreal and wanted picnic supplies. They bought two wrapped cookies.

Slowly, after selling marine maps, oil, full pies and slices, I stopped worrying. Most people just saw a kid working the cash register. They didn't know about Mom and Eva. But I couldn't get the picture of their wedding out of my head. If Mom and Eva had a union ceremony, then everybody would know.

Mom finally relieved me in the shop, and I jumped into the lake. I swam hard, washing away all the anxiety of the day, only coming up for air every four strokes. Desk is the best time on the lake—when the calm often returns and the water turns inky black. The sun was casting its last light on Luke's island and the Green Mountains beyond. I floated on my back, thinking of my small self in this giant lake, all one hundred and ten miles of it. It was holding me, gently, like a hug from a friend.

I didn't notice Luke until his rowboat was almost on top of me.

"Watch where you're going," he said. "I almost ran over you!"

"Watch yourself," I roared his boat.

"Hey!" he shouted, and pretended to fall in. We splashed each other and dove for rocks, letting his boat drift in the shallow water.

"This one's perfect for skipping," Luke flicked the flat stone hard. We watched it skip three, four, five times.

"Watch this."

"Not bad," he said as it bounced three times.

For a while we were silent, scooping up rocks and skipping them.

"I heard Mrs. Costa's entering her pies, too," he said.

"At the fair?" I thought of her professional farm stand pies—she won a ribbon every year. "But I'll be in the kids' section, anyway. We won't be competing."

"Her pies are pretty good," Luke said.

"Not as good as mine!" An idea crept into my mind. To win the kids' division, I'd have to be as good as Mrs. Costa. Their farm produced the best strawberries, and Mrs. Costa probably used homemade butter in the crust, churned from cow's milk.

"Maybe we should go visit Tina," Luke said as if reading my mind. "Do some sampling of her mom's pies—compare notes."

"I don't know," I said. "Tina and I aren't really friends right now."

He skipped another rock. "You don't think Sam had anything to do with the sign, do you?"

I shook my head. Even though I wondered, too, it was hard to imagine.

"C'mon—I'll flash my green light tomorrow when I'm ready to go," he said, climbing back into his boat. Then he paused. "I'll look for your red light if there's trouble, OK?"

"If we don't stop them, homosexuals are going to ruin our state."

Lauren's mother looked me in the eye. "I hope your mother has told you about the dangers of her lifestyle," she said. "She and Eva could get AIDS! And then you'd be alone."

"They don't have AIDS," I said. "They are just regular people," I stammered in to the silence. Everyone stared at me, disapprovingly. I grabbed my bike. "They're just regular people."

I pedaled crazily, ferociously, away from the hateful crowd. I'm just a kid with a mom who happens to be gay. And then I wished she wasn't. And with that thought, I began to cry, and the wind slid my tears backwards, eddying in my ears.
BOOK REVIEW My Mixed up Berry Blue Summer By Jennifer Gennari

softball game of sixth grade.

I sank low, as if the word “homosexuality” had stuck to my shirt. I hit “home,”
zapping the Free Press site I’d been reading.

Someone had left a book on the table next to me. I picked it up and flipped
pages.

Ms. Flynn came over. “Did you find what you were looking for?”

I dropped the book and pushed in my chair. “Yes, thank you.”

“That’s good to see you—I’m glad you have time to read in the summer,” she said.

“Are you still making pies?”

I nodded. “I was thinking about entering the fair,” I muttered. That didn’t seem
likely anymore; especially now that it looked like Mom was right about lying low.

“What a great idea! I have some exhibitor handbooks and forms right here. Take
one, won’t you?”

I zipped it into my backpack quickly.

“And here’s a book for your mom,” she said. “She’s going to like it. Tell her to
call me. OK, June?”

I pushed open the door, and stopped. A group was gathered around Lauren’s
mother. They were standing near the bike rack. Great.

“I can’t believe the librarian wouldn’t let you post this flyer,” a man was saying.

“A library is for information, isn’t it?”

“Some people don’t know what’s right,” Lauren’s mother said. “Everybody is
against gay marriage.”

Head down, I knelt to unlock my bike, but someone shoved a flyer at me. “Take
this home to your mom and dad, dear,” she said. “We need everyone’s support.”

There, under the black letters, “Take Back Vermont,” it said, “Boycott Gay Busi-
nesses.” It named one of our favorite restaurants downtown and then, below that,

“Stillwater Marina.”

I grabbed at the flyer and stood up, shaking. I wanted to take them all and burn
them. I wanted to shout. That’s not fair! What did we do to you?

“Oh, June. It’s you.” Lauren’s mother’s tone changed.

“Hey, aren’t you the girl that works at the marina?” The man stared at me. “She
doesn’t have a father,” he announced to the crowd. “Her mother is gay.”

I froze.

“Poor kid,” someone said. “It’s just wrong.”

An older man agreed. “Queers shouldn’t have children.”

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PROFANITY COUNT AND OTHER SENSITIVE WORDS

- Bullies – 2
- Homophobia – 1
- Gay – 21
- Civil Union – 9
- Civil Ceremony – 3
- Aids – 3
- Pedophile – 1

RED FLAGS

- Normalizing
- Sexualization
- Grooming

**Normalizing Definition:**

Normalizing a person refers to social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as “normal” and become taken-for-granted or “normal” in everyday life. It is a process whereby behaviors and ideas are made to seem “normal” through repetition or through ideology and propaganda. To Alter, Modify, Convert, Change, Adapt

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the last several years, subjects not consistent with most of the citizens of the United States are being normalized and pushed into our society via social media, TV, music and our public school system.

Not appropriate literary content for K-12 schools