



The Boy on the Bridge

Natalie Standiford

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A new breathtaking novel from Natalie Standiford about love and trust during the Cold War.

Laura Reid goes to Leningrad for a semester abroad as Cold War paranoia is peaking in 1982. She meets a young Russian artist named Alexei and soon, with Alexei as her guide, Laura immerses herself in the real Russia--a crazy world of wild parties, black-market books and music, and smuggled letters to dissidents. She must keep the relationship secret; associating with Americans is dangerous for Alexei, and if caught, Laura could be sent home and Alexei put under surveillance or worse. At the same time, she's been warned that Soviets often latch onto Americans in hopes of marrying them and thus escaping to the United States. But she knows Alexei loves her. Right?

As June approaches--when Laura must return to the United States--Alexei asks Laura to marry him. She's only nineteen and doesn't think she's ready to settle down. But what if Alexei is the love of her life? How can she leave him behind? If she has a chance to change his life, to rescue him from misery, shouldn't she take it?

The Boy on the Bridge Details

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From Reader Review The Boy on the Bridge for online ebook

Lyd's Archive (7/15 to 6/18) says

Note: This book uses the word "g*psy" as if it were not a slur which, I have been informed, it is. If you're sensitive to this, don't read this book, but I do know that some people are unaware it is a slur in the first place

2.5 stars

The Basics

This had a little depth but most of it was shallow and sappy with simplistic writing and it could've been a lot better had we taken the historical element a bit more into account. It seemed accurate, but just not in focus most of the book. A lot of the beginning seemed like a joke, to be honest, and the barriers between Laura and Alexei seemed to be conveniently ignored at certain points. A particularly stupid moment was when Laura snuck Alexei into the foreigners-only shop *in disguise* and - despite a serious 39-clues-type blunder, they somehow pull it off.

Laura faked a light laugh. "He's full-blooded Irish. Skip O'Rourke is his name. His ancestors came from, uh, Tipperary."

(Note: If you're a security guard, be suspicious if only one person talks your entire encounter with said person, especially if said person tells the other person to shut up.

Trope check

*mysterious, chivalrous foreign boy

*"Then I well go without [a mustache] too. For you."
For her! So Continental and un-American. So romantic.*

*INSTALOVE

*rebel artist types

*guy's main positive attribute is his looks

*"I can't live without you"/ "What if we're separated forever," etc. cliched romance terms

*reveling in stupid sh*t

The way he pronounced her name - Laoora, oo, oo - did something strange to her.

She could see the bones of his face better. He looked younger, even younger than her was, but definitely more handsome.

*best friend who sticks to the rules unlike rebel MC/ is shallow/comic relief

"Where is the passion?" Laura moaned as the wind bit at her nose. "Where is the soul?... Where is the beauty?"

Is that what you came here for? I came for the wild punk rock scene. You think you're disappointed...." Karen stopped just outside the university gate. "I'm going to find a bakery or something. Loaf of black bread?

"You're not the only one who thinks she's in love. Some ballerina's got Dan wrapped around her bony little finger. Clara has fallen for a dissident folk singer, and Mark Calletti, the world's

biggest geek, is in love with three different girls."

*"Forbidden" romance

The Americans had been warned during orientation, before they'd even arrived in Leningrad, to beware of falling in love. For most Russians, there was only one way to leave the Soviet Union, and that was to marry a foreigner.... "Be on guard," her chaperones had told them. "Don't fall for it

but Alexei is *special*

"Okay, it's a little suspicious. For everybody else. Alyosha is different

(view spoiler)

*Russia, the land of magic, ballet and lost unicorns

*"No one understands our true love"

All this book really is is tropes. There's a bit of depth, but the cheesiness of other parts ruins all potential "feels" and that stuff

Wendy says

Rated four stars because of how entertained I was, in an odd way. I loved the Soviet setting; all this is something I haven't seen before. But the writing, in general, I found a little awkward, and most of the characters fairly flat--the Russians more full-realized than the Americans, but then, most of them are third-tier characters. I wondered if, possibly, the author was too close to the story to write it effectively as fiction. The setting is described so well, but the dialogue and plotting falter.

But since I have a couple of parallel stories (study abroad, foreign romance), I realize I can't read this without projecting, too. I squirmed when the relationship began to fall apart, but it felt real; the turnaround didn't, really. Alyosha remained a sort of pathetic figure to me (I believed Olga's version of him, not his own), and so Laura seemed a little pathetic, too.

Laura I couldn't sympathize with too much in general, with all her flouting of classes and encouraging her friends to lie for her--and she skipped the BOLSHOI BALLET!--unforgivable--but I recognize her as being realistic. I just wouldn't have wanted to be her friend.

Ash Wednesday says

4 STARS?... okay 4 STARS

There are books that a few pages in, you know it's going to be special. There are those that are easily identifiable as epic by the majesty of their words, those that masterfully manipulates us to care for the hero and heroine that any hurt, joy or triumph they experience in the pages, we make it personal.

And there are those that makes us go through hair pulling levels of frustration, gut-wrenching moral turmoil and the raging urge to grab the characters and smack them silly... and still, after turning the last page, you can't give it the 2-stars you've been wanting to slap it with from page one.

Guess which one this is?

The *Boy on the Bridge* has three protagonists: Laura, an American exchange student studying Russian languages; Alexei (Alyosha) the Russian artist who saves Laura on the bridge one day; and Leningrad in 1982 when the Cold War is at its peak and the imminent fall of communism is starting to show its symptoms. The most evident in this book being the increasingly disillusioned masses trying to escape the nightmarish reality they are waking up to by marrying their way out of the country.

The way this was delivered, you'd be hard pressed to label this as a romance. Until the very end, I was questioning the characters' motives, not only Alyosha but also Laura. The circumstances of their meeting alone was suspicious and how Alyosha drew Laura in his world and what he stands to gain from the relationship, makes him untrustworthy and his feelings for Laura dubious in my eyes.

What's interesting to me was that Laura never came across a victim in this scenario, though her naiveté and blind faith in Alyosha's profession of love was a bit of a challenge for me to swallow. Initially, I couldn't understand what it was that drew Laura to Alyosha. It's easy to automatically label their relationship as insta-love and simplify Laura as someone starry-eyed and hypnotized by the idea of falling in love in Russia, a place she has long associated with Drama, Passion and Soul.

But if you dig deep, she was getting something out of the deal too. In that she's getting something out of her relationship with Alyosha (to the point of making him sound like a rebound over someone) that she never got from being in a perpetual state of disappointment over the banalities of freedom and the frustration over the men in her life.

Laura felt uncomfortable. She hadn't said it out loud, but when she talked about an inner life she was worrying about herself: the gaping void she felt inside herself that she wanted to fill with something real, something good. Something she hadn't found at home. The larger life she had come here looking for.

So for a stretch it was a question of "who's using who" for me.

But just to be clear... **I understand why she did the things that she did AND I STILL DON'T LIKE LAURA.** Because she really was astoundingly immature and uncharmingly foolish for a nineteen year-old, and the fact that she survived as an exchange student in communist Russia during that particularly tense political climate, FOR FIVE MONTHS NO LESS, is beyond belief. Yes, even with a friend as awesome as Karen.

"That's how you know its true love. When he can't live without you."

Karen shook her head. "That's how you know it's obsession. Or something else."

And no Laura, you can't "see" someone's love thru his painting. *insert copious amounts of eye-rolling here*

Maybe this was the norm in the 80's and kudos to the author for keeping it real but if it is, I'm just so happy to have been nineteen in the 90s (dial-up internet, FTW!).

I think I'll remember this book as the one where I felt no sympathy for any of the characters, was frustrated with how everyone was acting, hated the relationship between the protagonists and even the supporting characters (I wanted to punch Olga on the boobs... seriously) but still couldn't give it anything less than 4 stars.

That's how good of an ambiguous mindscrew this was.

I know, I make as much sense as 80's facial hair (which doesn't).

ARC provided by Scholastic Press thru NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

Sarah says

I quite liked this, it's definitely different and is written in a way that feels intimate, despite the third person. I loved that it was truly historical and felt rooted in the time (the 1980s) and didn't lazily fall back on music references to create faux authenticity and nostalgia. Rather, political, social and cultural realities are woven into the story, and it was never info-dumpy. I felt like I was experiencing 1980s Leningrad right along with the main character, Laura, and felt as simultaneously swept up and confused by Aloysha's motivations as she did.

A warning to readers: the book summary reveals an important plot point that doesn't happen until nearly the end of the novel, which is too bad, because while there are loads of signs that the thing that happens will happen, it would have been nice to only suspect it and not know for sure based on the summary.

I elaborated here: <http://cleareyesfullshelves.com/blog/...>

Shainna says

A bit disappointing but somewhat cute until the whole obsession thing crept in and then it was a bit Twilight-y.

For starters, I have an issue with the cover. It takes place in Leningrad where there are a ton of bridges. If you like bridges, go to St. Petersburg, they're phenomenal. Just make sure you're on the right side of the city before certain bridges close down or you will be stuck on the other side of the city and no way to make it back. So out of all those bridges, they pick Red Square, which is in Moscow?? Sure, there's a scene that takes place in Moscow, but they're not on a bridge.

The author's bio talks about her visiting the Soviet Union, and her website shows some photographs from that time (of which it makes this book read a bit more like an autobiography and that makes it a bit uncomfortable) but I'm really confused as to *why* Laura went when she seemed to hate everything. And if it is a bit autobiographical, why did Standiford go? Not only is everything bleak and dreary (understandable, Stalinist architecture is pretty ugly - for a good spoof of that, see *The Irony of Fate*, and it is winter in the

book) but she hates most all the food, even the ice cream. I put the book down at that and said, "WHAT?" because Russian ice cream is possibly the best ice cream I have ever had. If they were serving it when I was there, that was what I had for dessert. I will say that she's right about pelmeni and shashlik - those are amazing. Laura says that she likes the darker side of Russian history but she ends up going for all the fluff. I never found her "reasons" to be believable. Her understanding of Russian was oddly first semester-ish (he calls her rebyonok which he tells her means "little fish" - it actually means "baby", as in "infant"), she doesn't know the words for "glass" or "tea", has a limited grasp of Russian Literature (she says Raskolnikov killed the pawnbroker because he thought he was a superior man - no, he killed her and her sister because he was broke and tried to convince himself that he was a superior person to them, so it was ok that he killed them because he was more important.) She skips classes to hang out with real Russians, where she clearly does not explore the "dark side of Russia", which is everywhere in the USSR. Over all, Laura was a pretty boring character and a bit annoying.

The love story is weird. There's the it's true love/no it isn't problem but it's really *not* true love. Had it been true love he would have told her about the Americans before her, he would have been able to let her study and not put her student visa at risk with all the rule breaking. it was very, very creepy.

It was a shame that Karen was introduced because I would have much rather read about her than Laura. An African American in the Soviet Union! Her experiences would make for a much better book than a love story between an American and a Russian. Not to mention Karen knows the subjects and genuinely seems to care about her studies. She might have issues with the USSR, but she had her head in the game. She made the book for me, I loved it when she appeared and was sad that she wasn't in more of the book. Seriously, why wasn't this book about her?

Leslie says

This is one of those books for me where at the end I didn't know how to really feel about it. It took me some time to finally settle on a rating since it fell into that grey area in which it wasn't horrible, but yet it wasn't the best I've read. I settled on the rating because it was well written young love story set against the backdrop of Communist Russia in the 1980's where the Cold War was at its peak.

With this serious setting, Standiford did a great job of using the love story between Laura and Alyosha to illustrate the harsh conditions of Communist Russia during 1982. The fact that our young couple had to be careful with how they communicate to each other and how they must be wary of anyone that may be willing to report Alyosha's connection to an American reflects the oppressive nature of the regime. She doesn't browbeat the issue to the reader. Instead, it's seamlessly blended into the narrative, always on the fringe reminding the reader of the serious consequences if their relationship were to be discovered by the government.

As if this fear isn't enough, this setting adds another strain to their relationship. The book doesn't skirt around the idea that Alyosha may be only using Laura to escape his life in Russia for a better one in America. The way Standiford was able to illustrate the conditions of that time, it was easy to see the possibility of it. But, as you acknowledge this, you also can't help but feel the Laura does, that Alyosha is actually genuine in his love for Laura. So as the book draws to it end, I kept on going back and forth regarding his true intentions for Laura. It's not a true black and white situation.

I'm sorry to say that one of the things that got me irritated in this story was Laura. Maybe because I'm older

and see things differently, but as the story unfolded along with her relationship with Alyosha, I found her to be irresponsible in her behavior. To me, there were times where she came off as being flighty and brattish. Especially when her friend Karen was trying to warn her about getting involved with him. It kind of made me irritated with her. But perhaps, it was because she was young that she behaved the way she did. And the seriousness of the situation in Russia just heightened the serious consequences of her actions. Either way, my irritation at her behavior took a little bit from enjoying her love story.

The only other real issue I had with this book, was the abrupt way it ended. To me, it felt like it needed an epilogue. It just seemed the story just ended like as if someone turned off the TV while the scene was still playing. I just thought it needed to have a more well rounded ending. But since I got an uncorrected proof, the final product may have rectified that issue.

So at the end of all this, I was left feeling ambivalent about this book. It wasn't horrible, but it wasn't the best. In the end, I decided to give Standiford credit for how well written the story was. In addition to how well she painted a picture of life in Communist Russia. You really got the sense of the oppressive life and conditions there. I can't help but feel that my perspective on the book would be more different if I were younger which the book may or may not have been intentionally geared towards.

*I received this uncorrected proof edition from Goodreads First Reads Giveaway

Ashling says

I received the ARC at BEA.

I think I must be getting old. In junior high, even high school, I would have thought this story was so romantic and heartbreakingly beautiful. But now (at the wise old age of almost-27), I thought the story was a bit over-the-top and melodramatic, like a soap opera.

The Boy on the Bridge is a romance set in 1980s Soviet Russia, when the KGB reigned supreme, and the food was apparently terrible. The story focuses on Laura, an American exchange student doing a semester in Leningrad. While there, she is "rescued" by a handsome, young Russian named Alyosha, and they practically fall in love with each other on the spot.

The Ups

The setting/time - One of the things I did like about the book was the setting. I've read very few books that take place in Soviet Russia, so that was very interesting.

The concept - I think this book had a great concept behind it. I just felt like it could have been developed more, which would have made the book a better read.

The secondary characters - I love Laura's friend Karen, way more than I like Laura. She's a no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is friend, and I thought she was the perfect opposite of Laura. While Laura's got her head in the clouds, Karen's trying to bring her back to Earth and knock some sense into her.

The Downs

Laura - As a main character, Laura is definitely not my favorite. She makes some really stupid decisions, she mopes a lot, she's constantly doubting the man who's supposed to be the love of her life, she breaks pretty much every rule. Overall, she's just an annoying character.

The writing - In pretty much every writing class I took in high school, we were told "Show; don't tell." And I felt like this book did a lot of telling.

The romance - Laura and Alyosha's romance was pretty much insta-love. They knew each other for what felt like two hours, and suddenly they're madly in love with each other. No tension, no build-up, just instant love. I understand why the romance was being rushed on one side, but it was too rushed for it to be believable.

The melodrama - My biggest problem with this book was that it was so melodramatic. Every other chapter something crazy and over-the-top was happening. Or the way Laura and Alyosha would talk to each other was cheesy. At one point, Laura has to go away for a week, and Alyosha tells her "I will wilt without you." Wilt without you? I almost threw the book across the room when I read that line.

The saddest thing about this book was that it could have been so much better. An extra hundred pages could have made room for more character development and building some romantic tension. I think that the story felt rushed, and a few more pages could have changed that, or having Laura go to Russia for a whole year rather than one semester would have made the story more believable. And cutting back some of the melodrama would also have instantly improved the story.

As it is, *The Boy on the Bridge* was just okay, but it wasn't the most terrible book I've ever read. It just caused some major eye-rolling. I still plan to give some of Standiford's other novels a shot, such as *How to Say Goodbye in Robot*, because I've only heard good things about them.

Jen Ryland says

Natalie Standiford's *How to Say Goodbye in Robot* and *Confessions of the Sullivan Sisters* are huge favorites of mine, so I was super-excited to read this.

Boy on the Bridge immersed me in an intriguing and completely foreign world: 1982 Leningrad. College student Laura Reid is participating in an exchange program, spending a semester working on her Russian and soaking up the culture.

What I loved most about this book was that the setting was such a unique one for YA. I was fascinated to learn more about pre-Glasnost Russia -- food shortages, strict rules banning fraternization between Soviets and foreigners, and a high level of paranoia. I also loved the way the book depicted the foreign exchange experience in general -- the constraints that come with living with other American students while trying to experience a foreign country.

When Laura meets Alyosha on a bridge, she escapes her protective bubble and gets a glimpse of real Russian life -- every exchange student dreams of. But in this case, there's a catch: Laura is repeatedly warned by her chaperones and fellow students that many Russians are so desperate to escape their country that they will feign romantic attachment to Americans as a means of doing so. Of course, Laura falls in love. She's convinced that Alyosha loves her too.

The romantic aspect of the book was a bit more confusing for me, and I'll be curious to see how other readers come out. The book is told in third person from Laura's point of view, with no insight into Alyosha's feelings or thoughts, so there is no way for the reader to know if he loves Laura or if she's just a means to an end to him.

If you are a reader who needs closure, you may take issue with what, to me, seemed like a frustratingly unresolved ending. Is this a bittersweet coming of age story about a girl who is cruelly duped? A romantic story about love against the odds? An existential statement about the fact that we can never truly know what's in someone else's head? I don't mind books with ambiguous endings, but in this case I feel a little like all the evidence was dumped in my lap for me to sort out. I think the book would have packed more of an emotional punch for me if there had been more resolution.

(view spoiler)

Kiersten says

See more of my reviews at [We Live and Breathe Books](#)

The Boy on the Bridge follows a college girl named Laura, who is visiting Communist Russia as part of a study abroad program. Laura was fascinated by Russian history when she was young, but once she's studying there, she's disenchanted by all the government restrictions and how little the dramatic history of the country came through.

Until she meets Alyosha (aka the boy on the bridge). When Alyosha saves her from a gypsy attack, Laura gradually grows closer to him. At first they just meet up for coffee so Alyosha can show Laura around Leningrad, the city she's staying in, and so she can practice her Russian, but as the story progresses, their love story unravels.

I received an uncorrected proof of *The Boy on the Bridge* at Book Expo America this past June, and I didn't really know what to expect from it. I thought the cover was pretty (Russia, cool!) and the blurb seemed sort of interesting, although quite clichéd. When I started reading this book, I wasn't especially pulled into the story. Sure, it wasn't bad, but I wasn't eager to read it either. Through most of the book I was in this state of apathy. Only at the end did I get really into it and eager to see the fate of the characters.

Laura, for one, was very bland. She was this American girl here to study Russian and ended up dating some handsome Russian stranger, which was predictable at best. Of course, this was in the premise of the story, so it's fine – there's nothing wrong with that. It was just the way that she immediately saw him as this savior who embodied the spirit of Russia. It was so... *ugh*. She didn't even think it was strange that a perfect stranger came up to her, saved her, and gave her his number. It was baffling, especially given that, as Laura herself acknowledges throughout the story, the KGB often arrested citizens for fraternizing with foreigners. Then Laura starts skipping classes and breaking rules to see Alyosha more, jeopardizing her studies. That, I just couldn't stand. Maybe it's just me, but I would never give up on my education or risk expulsion just to see some random guy I won't see when I go back home. It was just absurd.

Then there was Alyosha, who I didn't particularly care for either. It was sweet how he spent all his time showing Laura around and teaching her about the culture, but he was too... nice. He was always like, "Yay, Laura! I'm so happy to see you!" and his life just revolved around her. It seemed so fake. Probably the

biggest downfall of *The Boy and the Bridge*, for me, is that the romance could have been so much more. I like a romance that makes me feel like I'm in love along with the couple, but this one just didn't do anything for me. The relationship was so abrupt – they never argued or had encounters that tested their relationship, they were just all lovey dovey for no apparent reason.

There were also parts throughout the story that just didn't seem tied up in the end, which always bugs me. For non-spoilery example, we never find out what happened with Tanya or how Alyosha has an apartment all to himself. Then there are parts that just seem random. At one point, Laura and her classmates are at a bar and she randomly asks them if they think the soldiers have inner lives and they talk about souls. It was just a weird conversation to have.

On the other hand, Natalie Standiford does a great job immersing the reader into Communist Russia. In all my past history classes, the only touches on communism were to talk about wars related to communism and attempts to end communism. Getting to see into the everyday life of communism was really interesting. The way Standiford had the characters explain the general dissatisfaction with the state of society and how the government could do whatever it wanted was so shocking. I loved how authentic it all felt – the character's reactions, the living arrangements, the food, everything.

Overall, I didn't quite find *The Boy on the Bridge* spectacular, but it was far from bad. The historical aspect definitely stood out to me as positive, and I feel that I've learned a lot about the time period by reading this book. Unfortunately, the plot kind of just fell through for me. I wasn't gripped by the story or the characters, so it didn't really leave a huge impression on me – I didn't even care what happened to them until the very end. However, if you're interested in how life was in Communist Russia, I definitely recommend it. Although the romance is rather, for lack of a better word, lame, the world is so interesting that it's worth the read.

Sierra Abrams says

This book was hopeless. I am so sad about it. I truly thought I was going to enjoy this book. And maybe I would have - if I hadn't been so annoyed and turned off by the writing. It was very juvenile and telling and ridiculous and I wanted to fix the entire thing, rewrite it, actually show things happening.

Honestly, however, amidst all that frustration....I love how unromanticized it was. So much of it was real and raw and that's awesome - it's just that it felt like the story was being told to me. By a very bored speaker at a conference.

No thank you.

Read the full review at [Yearning to Read](#).

Kristina says

I didn't realize that this book takes place in 1982, which made it so much more interesting. Laura is in Communist Soviet Union, and the government has so much control over its people, it sickening. Laura has always wanted to go to Russia and learn more about the dark, bloody past of this country, but the college

program she is does not allow for anything besides what is government approved. When she meets Alexei (who goes by Alyosha) she learns what life is really like for it's occupants.

I loved the connection between Laura and Alyosha. They were so cute together! Sometimes it was hard to figure out what Alyosha's true intentions were. We learn that many Russians would form relationships with the Americans, hoping that they would get married and be able to move to America. I hated not knowing what Alyosha true feelings for Laura were!

I didn't like how much Laura changed after meeting Alyosha. I understand that she didn't have much time with him since the program is over in a few weeks, but at the same time, I hated that she stopped caring completely about her education. She stopped going to class, doing her work and kept missing curfew. I also hated that Alyosha didn't care that she was doing it either. He should have been more supportive of her education, instead of not caring if she failed.

I absolutely loved learning about Russian history. That country really does have a terrifying past! Learning about the history was my favorite part of this book. Also, the writing and the descriptions were so vivid that I really felt like I was transported to Russia.

The ending was definitely bittersweet for me, but I think it was beautifully done! Despite how it ended, I couldn't help but have a smile on my face when I closed the book.

I highly recommend *The Boy on the Bridge*. It is a quick read and perfect for a lazy Sunday afternoon!

Annette says

In 2011 I read *Confessions of the Sullivan Sisters* and was introduced to Natalie Standiford's simple yet elegant writing style, so I was very happy when I heard about the upcoming publication of *The Boy on the Bridge* (releasing July 30th 2013).

I liked that this novel was written entirely from Laura's point of view (third person narration) – giving me 248 pages to be sucked into her world. Most YA romance books alternate between a male and female p.o.v. these days but when you're setting your book in Cold War Russia you'd ruin the suspense if you did that; part of what glued my attention to these pages was my curiosity regarding Alexei and his intentions toward Laura.

Laura herself was an interesting character... you'd have to be pretty special to want to study Russian in 1982.

“She decided... to study Russian, the language of violence, terror and absurdity. She knew she would never be bored.”

- p.14

There were plenty of colorful secondary characters like Lydia who was “hanging on by her fingernails” to life in Russia, a tattered mess, Donovan who “didn't bother with classes... He was dealing on the black market”, and Olga the Russian muse who couldn't decide what she wanted. It was the little things that peppered this novel with magic though: the gypsies on the bridge with their cloth swaddled bundles; the Russian names and folk tales; the personal essays Laura writes while sitting on the crowded metro; the scattered lines of Russian poetry.

“... everything is mother-of-pearl and jasper,
But the light’s source is a secret.”
- Anna Akhmatova’s ‘Summer Garden’ (p.205)

This novel transported me to another time and place, one of censorship and hardship, but also of hope and wonder. Russia in the 1980s – it’s buildings, people and ideas – is an interesting setting for a YA novel, naturally lending a sense of intrigue and mystery to the story. (I would classify this as YA, although there are glossed over scenes of a sensitive nature and mention of drugs.)

“Daylight had fled and blue night pressed against the bedroom window. Outside, a dog howled and a tram clanked by on the way to its last stop.”

- p.121

This is not another YA ‘romance’ book – you would be making a mistake if you let the light-hearted cover fool you into thinking this – it is primarily a coming of age tale which uses first love as its catalyst. Once again Natalie Standiford has delivered something unique, carefully plotted and well written to bookshop shelves.

<http://bookblather.wordpress.com/2013...>

Leah says

<http://theprettygoodgatsby.wordpress....>

As part of her Russian Studies major at Brown University, Laura Reid enters a study abroad program where she'll attend a university in Leningrad for six months, completely immersing herself in all Russia has to offer. Initially she dutifully attends every class and only hangs out with her roommates and the other American students. Everything changes the day Laura has a run-in with some gypsies on a bridge. The women nearly force her to give them whatever money she has with her until a boy comes to her aid.

Alexei - Alyosha, to his friends - is an artist and paints movie posters. His love of Western literature, particularly poetry, draws Laura in and soon she's spending every minute of her free time (and not-so-free time) with him. At first these meet-ups are only to work on her Russian - *real* Russian, not the formal, stiff language taught in her classes. With each meeting, however, Laura finds herself becoming more and more attached to Alyosha. Each skipping class or missed curfew brings to mind the university's warnings: don't fall in love. The Russians are so eager to leave the country they'll convince an unsuspecting student to marry them in order to gain entry to America. But Alyosha isn't like that, right?

The Boy on the Bridge started out **beautifully**. Standiford did a really great job of depicting the bleak and dreary life of everyday Russian citizens. The stark contrast of how the Americans were treated was incredibly eye-opening - in order to gain access to special stores (and buy luxury items like bread, cookies, and coffee), a passport is required. Russians are forbidden to enter hotels and businesses, those are strictly for the foreigners. That said, this book takes place in the early 80s. Apart from some references to cassette tapes and one off-hand remark about Nixon, *The Boy on the Bridge* could have taken place today. Nothing really screamed 'Cold War-era Russia.'

Once Laura and Alyosha meet, however, the novel quickly goes downhill - *especially* toward the end. **This is**

a hard case of instalove, guys. Within a few meetings, they're in love. Because the students aren't allowed to be mingling with Russians, Laura has to sneak out to payphones *5+ blocks away* to call Alyosha. Soon she doesn't think twice about skipping her classes and breaking curfew to spend the night at his apartment. He gives her a set of keys and she begins to head over there whenever she feels like it, whether or not he's home.

At one point in the novel the students are spending the weekend in Moscow. She's heartbroken at the thought of being away from Alyosha for a few days, but goes anyway. Much to her surprise - and delight - **he's there**. It was at this point I went into bitch mode and nearly walked away. When he showed up, she hadn't even been gone A DAY. **He was so upset he took a 500 mile trip to be with her.**

THIS IS NOT OKAY.

Things go from bad to worse and I could have kissed Laura's roommate during a conversation where she becomes the voice of reason:

"Laura, this isn't love. Love lets you go on a trip without following you. Love can live without you for a week, knowing you'll come back."

"No, it can't." The afternoon shadows grew long and cold. In spite of the chill, a heat rose up inside her and flooded her face. "That's how you know it's true love. When he can't live without you."

Karen shook her head. "That's how you know it's obsession. Or something else."

"What's wrong with you lately?" Karen asked. "You've been so...reckless. You'll drop anything to see Alyosha. Like you don't care about anything else."

While in Moscow Laura sneaks away for the weekend and she travels with Alyosha to his friends' camp. When she returns she suffers no consequences nor does she care that her grades are seriously slipping - she's even failing a class. All that matters is a boy. Eventually Laura's fears turn into reality when Alyosha proposes. He paints a beautiful picture - both figuratively *and* literally - of them living in a cozy apartment in San Francisco. He'll be a famous painter and she won't have to work. They'll live the American Dream and will always have each other.

Naturally Laura is a little shocked at first. She's only nineteen and still in school, after all. **Alyosha convinces her this marriage is a good thing** and his friend married when she was eighteen, so it's perfectly acceptable! I was so dismayed at the course the book was taking at this point. The beginning was fantastic and I loved every moment. By the halfway mark, however, it was rapidly falling apart and Alyosha's 'love' set off multiple alarms.

The ending wasn't much of an ending, it simply...*stopped*. It felt like it was a scene break or the end of a chapter. Despite my feelings toward the second half of the book, I wanted answers and closure and never got that. I don't see *The Boy on the Bridge* becoming a series, but I wouldn't mind a short story about what happened afterwards. Even an epilogue would have sufficed!

While the romance had me doing some *major* eye-rolling, *The Boy on the Bridge* had an extremely intriguing setting that I'd like to see more of in YA. I'm still not quite sure if this would be considered New Adult -

they're college age and there are sex scenes, but it's of the 'fade to black' variety. I'm disappointed with the way the story ended, but *The Boy on the Bridge* was an entertaining and very quick read that I'm sure many readers will enjoy.

Tiff at Mostly YA Lit says

I knew I needed to read this book after reading Natalie Standiford's Modern Love article in the New York Times where she discusses the real life circumstances that *The Boy on the Bridge* is based on: her own life. I was captivated by her story of falling in love and being healed during her study abroad year...and the practical dangers of being in love with a Russian before the fall of the Soviet Union.

Initially, I just didn't believe that anyone could be that naive or unsafe as to do some of the things that Laura does. She misses curfew constantly to spend time with Alyosha, despite warnings that she could be kicked out of the program. She even sneaks him into a shop for foreigners that is heavily guarded by the militia. The adult in me kept thinking how reckless she was being - and then I would think of some of the stupid things I had done when I was travelling abroad.

Me and a friend in Belgrade | One of the many bombed-out buildings there | Me trying horse(!) steak
Part of Zagreb, the big fortress in Belgrade | Tito's grave | Out dancing with new friends | A billboard in Yugoslavian

In fact, in 2006, when I was alone in Belgrade, Yugoslavia during my own European trip, I met a guy in a cafe and he offered to show me around in his car...and I went. In retrospect, that was pretty stupid. Luckily, I had a nice afternoon with him showing me the sights, and I didn't get into any trouble...but I totally could have.

The difference, though, is that I wasn't in a place that was still behind the Iron Curtain, where people were encouraged to spy and report on one another. The entire time I read the book, I felt an unsettled feeling about Leningrad and the people that Laura met. I was just as suspicious as her friend Karen, and probably more paranoid than anyone in the book.

Maybe it was that suspicion that made it hard for me to connect with Laura. While I liked the book, I must admit that I never really believed or felt invested in Laura and her love for Alyosha. I was constantly trying to figure out what their motives were. Their love for each other seemed to spring out of nowhere - Alyosha says I love you almost immediately, and with the warnings from the professors...it just seemed like Laura is trying to find a way to make life better for herself. As much as I was suspicious that Alyosha was using Laura to get a green card, it also felt like Laura was using her purported love for Alyosha to get herself back on her feet after her previous failed relationship.

It's hard to get over that unsettled feeling...and indeed, I don't think that Standiford wants you to. The uniqueness of the novel is in just how precarious Laura and Alyosha's love is. It's fraught with so many problems and perils, from language barriers to deep-seated mistrust of another culture. The brilliance of Standiford's writing lies in her creation of an atmosphere of confusion, and uncertainty in Laura and Alyosha's relationship, and in how to resolve the unspoken elephant-in-the-room of just how different Laura and Alyosha's worlds are.

Books & Sensibility says

Nineteen year-old Laura Reid has always dreamed of going to Russia. She wants to experience the passion, violence and history of the nation's past. When her studies bring her and a group of American students to Russia it is hardly what she expected.

Because it's 1982, and the Russia of her dreams and Communist USSR are not one in the same.

Her days consist of dull classes, harassing gypsies, empty grocery stores and the constant reminder that her US passport makes her an object of scrutiny and jealousy.

Then she meets Aloysha, the titular Boy On The Bridge. As a relationship forbidden by society, the government and their peers grows between the two, Laura has to decide what she is willing to give up for a chance at true love. Because it is love. Right ?

Standiford's writing effortlessly builds the world of 1980's Russia. While the book does have a cultural learning curve there aren't all these obvious "teachable" moments and lets the reader live in the world.

The Boy On The Bridge takes place during the years between the rise and fall of Communist Russia. The time period and setting is far from the norm in today's contemporary YA. The bright spots of creativity and defiance gives the story a tinge of hopefulness in what seems like a bleak situation. It opened my eyes to what communist Russia was like and how Russia's democracy transformed the country.

I would have wanted a bit more growth from our female protagonist. I feel that after this transformative experience in Russia that she comes out on the other side the same as she came in. I didn't get the indication that she had changed as much as I wanted her to.

The plot is very focused on the romance, and parts of the romance can be predictable, but I think the historical aspects are what readers will be drawn too.

One item of note about this book is that the main characters are nineteen and twenty two. Laura is a sophomore at Brown studying abroad and Aloysha has been given his first job out of school, yet this book falls under a YA category. This book is an example of how we can have stories about college students and those early year experiences (studying abroad) without sticking it in the new adult category.

The Boy On The Bridge test the belief in true love, deceit and fear. This is not a typical light fluffy romance and will have you thinking long after you have finished it.
