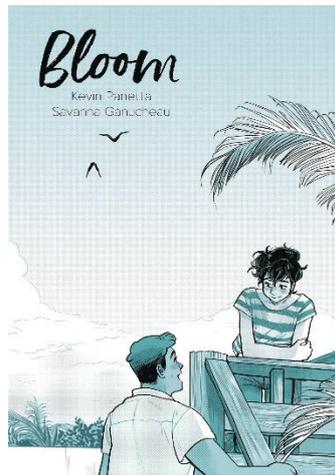


# Bloom by Kevin Panetta & Savanna Ganucheau

[Young Adult]



What a breath of fresh coastal air in beach-glass blues whose depths you can sink into!

There's the ghostly glow across Ari's face as he lies in bed, tentatively hopeful about a bravely sent text message, and fireworks viewed from a hillside during an early intimate moment. Repeatedly, Panetta & Ganucheau display a profound understanding that there are pivotal moments in all our lives that will linger with us forever. Accordingly, they let those scenes play themselves out during the satisfied silence that follows. And at a full 350 pages, they're afforded plenty of space to do so.

BLOOM is as much about the broader aspects of any friendship as it is about the romantic affections gradually stirring in young Ari's heart for the first time ever in his life towards any other individual.

We can surely all relate to that initial bewilderment: the butterfly-in-your-heart which can take months to figure out; the gut-churning hollow during any brief absence and the yearning for more in the meantime; the not-knowing whether your acute sensations are reciprocated in any way at all. How do you even broach the subject? Will it ruin things if you do...? See David Bowie's oh so eloquent 'Stay'.



It just so *happens* in this instance to be towards another lad called Hector with a balanced maturity well beyond his years which makes him almost unknowable to a turbulent mind like Ari's. Ari has no idea what he wants other than to escape what he considers to be the confines of his family bakery business for a creative life in a more culturally fertile metropolis. Hector, meanwhile, is a beaming ray of practical and positive sunshine, and is the first to see the best in others. He admires Ari's parents practising the delicate art of stretching pastry dough in perfect harmony and with consummate skill.

"I would love to have something like that... To be on a team with someone, and to be better together than you ever could be alone."



Hector has a clearer idea about what he wants because he's experienced what he *doesn't* want: a relationship which wasn't in synch but unhealthily reliant and cloyingly clingy. When Ari learns of this during a snatch of overheard conversation, the casual, unguarded candour of the conversation startles him as much as its revelation, but it neither alarms Ari nor turns him into a self-aware sea of raging hormones. Partly because he's not there yet, but also because *here come their friends!*

All of which I applaud! To their enormous credit, the creators avoid alienating clichés but dot down markers instead which we can all recognise in our own and others' lives, regardless of our sexuality:

The first romantic physical touch (was yours accidental or stolen?) when Hector unexpectedly grabs Ari's wrist – superb visual focus, there – in an exhilarating, co-conspiratorial "Let's get out of here!"; the rooftop flat-on-your-back star-gazing experience (it may have been cloud shapes or ripples in water for you) in which one learns from the other's prior thoughts or experience. And then there's the incremental bonding over shared pleasures, like Ari and Hector baking bread together, wherein sweeping, organic border panels burst forth, demarked by blooms of floral bunting.



I won't list which mandatory stepping stones are refreshingly omitted for fear of spoiling surprises. Instead, two of the elements I most respected were Hector not settling for second-best, and – having learned from his past – his firm-but-fair attitude in putting his foot down on a brief outburst of early emotional blackmail before it establishes itself as a pattern in this brand-new relationship too.



Ari has a lot of growing up to do – but didn't we all? – plus his circle of friends on occasion behave badly, so please don't mistake this for one long cheesy grin. I've read those books and they bored me rigid. There are harsh times ahead for almost everyone; but also good times, resilience and cake.

