



Whistling in the Dark

Tamara Allen

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New York City, 1919.

His career as a concert pianist ended by a war injury, Sutton Albright returns to college, only to be expelled after a scandalous affair with a teacher. Unable to face his family, Sutton heads to Manhattan with no plans and little money in his pocket but with a desire to call his life his own.

Jack Bailey lost his parents to influenza and now hopes to save the family novelty shop by advertising on the radio, a medium barely more than a novelty, itself. His nights are spent in a careless and debauched romp through the gayer sections of Manhattan. When these two men cross paths, despite a world of differences separating them, their attraction cannot be denied. Sutton finds himself drawn to the piano, playing for Jack. But can his music heal them both, or will sudden prosperity jeopardize their chance at love?

Whistling in the Dark Details

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From Reader Review Whistling in the Dark for online ebook

Erin says

The main appeal of the book is that it's a gay romance that takes place in the Jazz Age, and it is a very sweet book. Its main flaw is pacing; it kind of just goes on and on, and a lot of things happen, particularly in the second half of the book, but I think there are just too many plot threads, and everything gets wrapped up in a nice bow, and this is a book that could have stood to be shorter.

There are also some instances where I feel like we, the readers, don't get enough information for some scenes to make sense. In the first chapter, for example, Sutton gets arrested for lewd conduct or public indecency or something similar, but all he did was talk to a man. The man propositioned him, yes, but I couldn't figure out what Sutton did that would make the cops come after him. This happens 3 or 4 times in the novel.

That said, I found it interesting for two reasons:

- 1) This is the only gay romance I've read without any sex in it. By which I mean, Jack and Sutton are definitely sleeping together and have had multiple partners in the past, but in the sequence of the novel, the sex is implied or we fade to black before the good stuff happens. I actually found this refreshing. About a week ago, I read an online discussion of sexuality in gay romance novels that came to the conclusion that most of them have too much sex, to the point where it overshadows the emotional development of the characters. This book is the exact opposite of that.
- 2) I've done a fair amount of research on the 1920s for a novel I'm writing. I don't claim to be an expert, but from what I know of the era, Allen got it right for the most part. The slang, the cost of things, some attitudes. I think Jack exemplifies the era in a way that I hope was intentional: he's deeply haunted by his experiences in World War I, but he puts on a cheery exterior. He's flirty and fashionable, he spends money he doesn't have, etc. It's partly of why the exuberance of the Jazz Age was unsustainable: all of the dancing and booze and joy masked deeper problems, past horrors, the coming financial crisis, etc.
- 3) Sutton is really weirdly naive. He's so wide-eyed and surprised by everything Jack exposes him to, and yet, he's had affairs with men before. What I find interesting about him (and about most of the male characters in the novel, come to think of it) is that he's gay without having a name for it. He knows he's different, he's had plenty of people tell him he's wrong for feeling the way he does, he's gotten arrested for it (and kicked out of a dance club... and is basically disowned by his family) but he doesn't have any doubt about who he is or what he wants, he doesn't hate himself, he just accepts it for what it is. Which strikes me as unlikely, but what do I know?

So it's an interesting book, and I clearly have a lot to say about it, and there is a Big Misunderstanding at the end of the novel that I could have done without, but it's presented and resolved quickly, so it's relatively inoffensive. Thumbs up, generally.

Kaje Harper says

This was a wonderful book, that had the truth and flavor of a historical without any loss of immediacy and connection. Sutton is sweet and honorable and a little lost, and will go straight to your heart. Jack is wild and

determined and wounded, and carries on with gallant courage behind the mask of not giving a damn. There are moments of humor and moments that will break your heart. I haven't read anything by this author yet that hasn't been beautifully written and emotionally satisfying. Highly recommended.

Nina says

This is probably not going to be a proper review - not even a bullet one. I am so tired. And I even have *things to do* today.

All I'm going to say is that this is a beautiful, heartwarming, *believable*, almost flawlessly written novel that is as much a story of friendship, finding your place in the world and overcoming all sorts of hardships (I can't seem to find a way not to make it sound terribly cliché) as it is a romance. The only reason why a. it took me two weeks to read it, and b. I only rated it 4 stars is that somewhere around 60% the narration lost steam completely, and I had to literally force myself to read on for a few dozen pages until it picked up again. *It was worth it.*

That said, that might have been largely due to my mood and to the fact that I was reading two other books in the meantime.

It's lovely, sweet, fun, funny, sad and every other emotion in the spectrum and I feel the deepest affection for all of the main characters even now. The simple fact that it had me devouring the last 60 pages with a hesitant smile on my lips and my fists clenched, in a place and time where I was most certainly *not* supposed to be reading, warrants top marks.

Come on. You know you want to.

ttg says

4.5 stars - I'm going to start by explaining why this book has been on my TBR pile since June 2012. The thing is, I've read other works by Tamara Allen...and I've LOVED THEM. To pieces. With immense and overflowing joy that makes me want to go outside and sing (badly) to my poor neighbors and to the café downstairs and to the overworked clerks at the drug store across the street. "There she goes again...reading Tamara Allen," they'll say as I serenade in the paper towel section to the handsome Brawny mascot about Allen's rich prose and witty dialogue.

I loved *The Only Gold* and *Downtime*--they are awesome historicals, so having an "Allen in my pocket" as it were with *Whistling in the Dark* was like having one last piece of chocolate that you were saving for a rainy day, or a bad day, or the last day on earth. Something to treasure and hold on to, because at only a handful of books, Allen's backlist isn't huge, and I wanted to hold on as long as possible to a book of hers I haven't read yet.

But it's Spring Cleaning Week at Boys in Our Books, so I picked it up, ready to move forward.

So, after all that, how did it go?

I loved it.

Allen is refreshingly consistent with her writing and characters—they are solid and real and sympathetic. She has this ability to drop the reader back in time, so everything--from Jack's cluttered Emporium, filled with novelties and exotic treasures, to his messy apartment upstairs with his bare larder, to the jolting New York subway--all feel vibrant and realized, like you're sitting across from the characters, watching them slowly and cautiously reach out beyond their battle scars to find each other.

And find each other they do. Two war-torn souls—impetuous Jack who is juggling his struggling shop, his loan shark shadows, and the night terrors that sometimes take over his body during the day, and Sutton, once richly privileged but scandal, loss, and memories from battle have pushed him to try his luck alone in the wilds of New York. And one bad night, when things look most dire for young, beaten Sutton, Jack's kindred soul finds him, and takes him home, like one more strange, stray treasure found in the back shelves of his shop.

But it's not just Jack who finds Sutton—dreams once thought lost are found as Sutton's musical talent breathes back to life, and he and Jack quickly find that even their little grimy corner of the city can bring joy and light and song to citizens ravaged by war, illness, and loss.

Reading *Whistling in the Dark* is like watching an awesome old black-and-white movie. The dialogue feels placed in that time, with great tempo and funny lines. (Especially when saucy Gert comes on the scene. She's a riot!) And speaking of Gert, it's once again evident that Allen is very skilled at developing and juggling multiple characters and giving them distinct voices and lives, from protective Harry, to flamboyant Theo, to grouchy, suspicious Ida, to lovelorn Ox.

And Sutton and Jack's relationship is a nice slow build, and very representative of Allen's style of having two very different characters meet (like Jonah and Reid in *The Only Gold* and Ezra and Morgan in *Downtime*), not exactly hit it off, but gradually (and sometimes begrudgingly) circle around their commonalities, until finally they realize how fiercely important this once agitating presence has become to them.

If I had one downside for this volume, it would be that I felt the pacing slip a bit during the last 20% or so, and it felt a little bogged down during character emo-time. (I'm never a fan when the "I'm not good enough for you" conflict swings in.) But the rest of the work is such an overflowing joy, that it is still very easy to love this book, just like the others.

And I can write love letters to Allen and sing inappropriately in the drug store all day about how much I enjoy her writing. For those who haven't read her yet, I highly recommend her work, especially if you like historicals, slow burns, enemies-to-lovers, thoughtful and rich characterization, and a strong sense of place and time.

I think Allen is one of the best (and very underrated) authors in the m/m genre. For those who enjoy historicals, her work is a true treasure.

Reviewed first for Boys In Our Books.

Jenre says

Why I Bought the Book: This has a bit of a story behind it. You see, I didn't actually buy this book I was

given it about 3 years ago. I had just started to guest review for Reviews By Jessewave (yes, I have been doing that for three years!) and Wave sent me the book to review because she knew I liked historicals. Then there was a bit of a mix up (as can happen when you're juggling several reviewers) and someone else reviewed the book instead before I got chance to read it. Wave told me to keep the book and write a review on my blog when I read it. Um, well for some reason it's taken me three years to read it, although I've no idea why. I think makes this the oldest book on my TBR pile because before I started reviewing for Wave I didn't have a TBR pile. I would read all the books I bought straightaway. A dubious honour, I know!

Anyway, what a silly lady I am to keep this book on my TBR pile for so long because it's a terrific read.

Plot: The book is set in New York in around 1919-20. The First World War is over, but the consequences to those who fought in the war are still very apparent. Our hero, Sutton, had his hand injured during combat and now can no longer play the much loved piano; our other hero, Jack, who was a communications expert in the war, suffers from paralysing flash backs and Sutton's sister has a fiancée whose shell shock is so bad he can barely function. The recovery from war isn't the main theme of the book but occasionally there are things that happen, or comments from people which brings it into sharp focus for a time before it fades back into the background. As the book begins Sutton has been expelled from school (or College as it probably would be now) after being discovered that he was having a relationship with a male teacher. He's struggling to survive in New York but unwilling to go back home to his rich family in Kansas in disgrace. He manages to get a job in a diner, and becomes friends with Jack and Harry who run the emporium next door (a shop which sells all sorts of odds and ends). During this time Sutton discovers that his hand has healed sufficiently to play the piano again and he gets involved with Jack's schemes to broadcast over the radio.

Characters: This book is truly a character based story. On the surface nothing much happens in the plot. Jack is fanatical about radio and they establish a schedule to broadcast Sutton's piano, Sutton has to face up to his past actions and his family. However, what is important is how the characters are very much products of their time and their reactions to the things that happen. Jack is a charmer, who lives life to the full. He spends his days working in the shop set up by his parents and his nights on the town, visiting the baths and jazz bars with his friends. This is partly because he suffers from nightmares but it's also a way for him to work off some of his endless energy. He also suffers from fears about losing his shop, and being carted off the lunatic asylum because of his flashbacks. It tempers his brash confidence and shows a weaker side to Jack which made me like him a great deal. Compared to Jack, Sutton is a wide-eyed innocent, although he's often annoyed when called that as he sees himself as very mature. The fun of the story is watching this pair dance round their attraction and seeing how their different temperaments soothe something in the other. Jack is less brash around Sutton and Sutton is more sure of himself around Jack. I enjoyed the way that the men speak, the witty one liners and the way that Jack especially, shrugs off conflict through a few well chosen words. Another part which I liked was the way the two different characters were able to show us the two different sides of society. Jack shows Sutton the jazz clubs and bars, the dive cafes and the seamier side to New York. Jazz is seen as totally scandalous but Sutton loves music in all its forms and Jazz calls to him. Later Sutton and Jack visit the posh hotels and parties where Jack feels out of place but which shows the reader how much of a divide there was between those in the upper classes and those struggling for their next penny. Jack and his friends frequently pool resources and it's unusual for any of them to have but a few dollars in their wallet.

Overall: I love a book which can immerse me in an era, and this certainly managed that. I finished the book feeling like I'd had a well rounded and accurate view of not only the city of New York but society in that city, of music, relationships and the newest inventions and crazes. We see the high and low lights of living in New York through the eyes of Sutton and Jack. More than that though we get to share in the good, fun times, the times when things are tight, when things are rough and justice comes from a gun not the police. We see

the tolerance of the city, and the intolerance. We also get into the hearts of two men, who despite their different backgrounds and personalities, fall deeply in love. It's a very romantic story and I was left full of happiness for these characters.

I feel like I've only really touched briefly on many of things I liked about this book. I loved the characters; the story; the way that there's so much going on all the time and yet everything is effortlessly pulled together by the end; the sheer energy and complexity of the setting. Put simply, it's a must read and I urge all lovers of historical romances to give this not often used era a try. You won't regret it.

Kassa says

A truly lovely story in a brilliantly crafted world with charming characters that draw you into a story so engaging and absorbing, you wish it never had to end. But all stories must end and this one ends on a wonderfully romantic note that will resonate with readers and keep this as a must read in the future. With an attention to detail and descriptive prose, this story takes the time to develop and let the characters fully emerge. The slow blooming romance and lack of explicit sex is well worth the wait.

Jack is a delightful character as a cynical, scarred, flirtatious, and outrageous young man. He's emotionally troubled from the war and struggles with his parents' death, while trying to maintain the shop his father spent his life creating. Bad choices and decisions often plague Jack as he attempts to insulate himself from the world with a boisterous personality, hiding his true emotions deeply within. Often accused of lacking depth, Jack in fact has an immense loyalty and fear of abandonment that prompts him to keep an emotional distance from those around him. Only a select few actually see and understand the man beneath his often-flamboyant exterior. The sheer complexity of his character could easily have overwhelmed the story but the author's deft hand kept Jack as charming and immensely appealing even as he was inscrutable for more than the half of the story.

Sutton is an easier character to like and openly transparent from early on. A young man from a prominent and wealthy family struggling to find his place after the war and being kicked out of school for an indiscretion with a teacher. Sutton is a dreamer, hopeless romantic, painfully open and naïve, yet he is well aware of these aspects of his personality. He simply doesn't see them as flaws as others might. He's willing to work hard and his love of music often pulls him into his own thoughts and world. He and Jack are very well suited with their balancing personalities and steadfast support and understanding. Their attraction and chemistry was not instant but took time to grow as their friendship grew. Their eventual first kiss scene was highly inventive, humorous, and incredibly satisfying for just being a simple kiss. This mixture of humor, romance, sensuality, and originality typifies this unique and wonderful story.

The historical setting of New York in early 1920's was skillfully and masterfully crafted from the incredible details, both large and small, even down to the weather of early fall. The day-to-day struggles with life, money, heat, food, and making a living give an authentic voice to the story and keep the characters grounded in the reality the author has created. Sutton and Jack never get the easy way as often in romance novels, no sudden windfall of money or sudden fix to their problems. They have to pawn their valuables for a few nickels to eat that night, worry about losing their job, their livelihood, if the radiator will give enough heat that night, live on borrowed credit and accept the consequences of poor decisions and wrong choices.

These details were a welcome addition to the charming turning of time when in a few months before prohibition, the decadence of the gay lifestyle was given shine. The hints of anonymous bath houses, the

automat, free and easy encounters, open affection amongst friends, even getting thrown out of restaurants for daring to dance with another man. However, for the acceptance within the small bubble around Jack, there are hints of the outside world as men still hide within arranged marriages and homosexuals are arrested for being in the park late at night. Each example was given in the same tone and honest voice, lending an even quality to the pacing and prose.

Just as the additional characters were all given weight and purpose from the charming and irrepressible Theo, Miles, and even Lewis to Sutton's family all of whom showed a different aspect of the time period with prevalent and changing attitudes. Henry, Ox, and Es were wonderfully created as they added a depth and layering to the gently built story. Each clearly had their own personality and their lives are easy to imagine well beyond the end of the story. Even the cast of Ned, Gert, and Marshall were nice touches without being over the top or stereotypes. Perhaps not as essential to the plot, they were necessary and added to the texture of the time and story.

I did have a few problems with the story, although I will stress these were minor. The added scenes of Ned attempting to manipulate the shop's demise with the threat of exposure was one too many problems that didn't need to happen and felt comical, as did the obvious resolution. Additionally, Sutton's family's reaction to his statements towards the end was surprising and somewhat not keeping with the story. The author creates a wonderful and believable tension amongst the various members with Sutton and Jack, which leads to the final problem and resolution between the two men, yet the reactions were too pat. Given the setup previous, it seemed too easy unfortunately.

Also, while Jack's noble gesture was easily seen and predictable, Sutton's acceptance felt unbelievable and out of character. One of the best qualities of the book was the character development and growth both Sutton and Jack went through and the ending seemed to regress both completely back to the beginning of the novel before the final resolution at the end. While clearly something had to be done to prompt the declarations neither were saying, this felt predictable and out of character at the same time. Both Sutton and Jack had grown beyond their reactions and I felt this scene could have happened another way with the same outcome.

However, my qualms were minimal as the writing was lovely, inventive, descriptive, original, and engrossing. The prose was engaging and delightful with a lovely, slow build of plot, romance, and characters that develops the story at its own pace, but entirely worthwhile. The sweetly romantic relationship between the men is typical of the story with the lack of any explicit sex and the language, while not formal lacks modern swearing and slang. However, for as romantic as this story is, it's never sappy or overly sweet. The men are masculine men with strengths and weaknesses and this story is likely to appeal to more than just m/m romance fans. This is a fabulous piece of fiction and I easily recommend it. The print version will be sliding onto my keeper shelf.

Chris, the Dalek King says

After being thrown out of his college for being caught in the arms of a teacher, Sutton Albright, headed to New York. To find a place for himself. To figure out how he can move on without the music that lives in his head. And to, more importantly, avoid the disappointment of his family and friends once they hear of his untimely dismissal. New York has very little to offer, though, in the way of welcoming parties, and soon Sutton is homeless, nearly penniless, and running out of things to pawn. After a night that'd gone from bad to complete disaster, Sutton finds himself splurging on a cup of coffee and a meal in dinner he'd come across when the walking seemed to much. When he sees that they are looking for a worker of all-sorts he jumps at

the chance to once again have a roof over his head, and some food in his belly. Surely his luck is turning 'round.

Jack Bailey is at his wits-end. But that's ok, he's been hanging out there for quite some time. Since he got himself entangled in a war that left his soul scarred. Since he came home to find his parents dead from an outbreak of influenza. Wits-end and total mess--that's Jack Bailey. But he's not going to let that stop him. He'll push through the nightmares, withstand the grief, and try and keep both his parents' and his dreams alive. At least for as long as he can. But a debt to a loan-shark is coming due, his father's Emporium of curiosities and foreign wonders is doing less business than the tramp down the street, and his dream of building up a radio show to advertise the store is being held together by electrical wiring and prayers. Then he meets Sutton--classically trained pianist, respectable gent, and a fellow bent in all the right places. Maybe luck is just starting to sing his tune.

Now all the pair have to do is save the Emporium, survive the cold streets of New York, dodge skeezy loan sharks, and, oh yeah, try not to be nicked by the coppers for the horrible crime of falling in love with each other. They might also want to work on keeping Woody* from snacking on the customers--or at least, not the paying ones.

I am a long-time devotee of Tamara Allen and her absolutely wonderful historical novels--I think I've lost count on how many times I've read *Downtime*--so there really was no question that I would get around to reading this book eventually. I have been putting it off for quite some time, though. I think it is a combination of not wanting to eat the last chocolate in the box, and an odd trepidation that this one would not live up to the rest. I mean, author's can't *always* write great books, can they? Well, sometimes they bloody well can.

I adored this book. There was something so incredibly real about it. The language, the feel, the characters, they lived and breathed on the page and in my mind. New York, in the aftermath of The Great War, and on the cusp of the prohibition, is at times both flowing with mirth and drowning in sorrows. The influenza epidemic that robbed Jack of his parents, and many others of their lives, still haunts the streets. Reminders of just how powerless everyone was to stop it. Especially Jack, who is plagued with the idea that he could do nothing to save those he loved, and that all the world's attempts at placating the masses was worth as much as the tattered posters their words of advice were printed on. But there is also an underlying current of frivolity and alcoholic glee, in the darker parts of the city. They dance, they sing, they drink and try to wash away the lingering sorrows--except the drink is getting awfully expensive, and all the singing and dancing has to end at some point. To Jack, this is a place to hide, but also to live as free as possible for a gay man in a world that would see him locked up for his proclivities. For Sutton, this world is far removed from the crystal and gold that gilded his past, but he is coming to find that it, and Jack, might just be the home he is looking for.

Jack and Sutton are quite a pair. I love how they seem to work, even when they are being absolute boneheads. Jack is convinced Sutton is going to high-tail it back to greener pastures the moment he is able, and Sutton, well he can't seem to figure out what Jack is wanting from him. Other than his piano skills. And, maybe, a few of his bedroom ones, as well. While there are several external factors pulling these two around in this story, I really think the real conflict comes from how these two circle each other, and that oh-so-dangerous L word, with neither of them willing to take that final step, but both unable to let themselves out of the dance. What they do is illegal, what they want is dangerous, and how they go about trying to save each other could blow up in their faces. Or make them stronger and more alive than ever before. We never really get to see the sexy-time with Allen's characters, but you get all the romance, all the tension, and all the meat and heart of the relationship. You don't miss it, because you are so happily gorged on the love story that to

add in the graphics of their sexual romps would be to upset the whole balance.

And what a perfect balance it is. Secondary characters are wonderful additions, and they serve a purpose and direct influence on the story, but also bring it to life. The villains are properly nasty, but they don't seem contrived, or created simply to serve a function. They have purpose, even if it is a mean one, and they constantly trip up our MCs without coming across as plot points. This book is a mix of people, stories, and lives that intertwine around Jack and Sutton, making their lives complicated but a real joy to read. You are never quite sure what, or who, is going to pop up next, but you know that the pair are going to try and keep each other safe, and loved, and, maybe, a little drunk. Jack brings life to Sutton, Sutton becomes a touchstone for Jack. They both strive to be what the other needs, even if it is what they fear the most.

I am so glad I finally gave this book a chance. And am already contemplating going back through Allen's backlist to reread some of my favorites. These books are perfect for snuggling with your cats, drinking a pot of tea, and letting yourself be whisked away to a land of danger and love, and quirky but real characters. 5 stars--as if there was ever any real doubt.

**Now, don't worry about zombies or cannibals popping up, Woody is just a crocodile. Which, I admit is an odd thing to show up in New York 1919, but all sorts of curious things tend to appear in a curiosity shop.*

JenMcJ says

This was a great tale of romance at it's best that also happens to be a m/m story. The story was fully engaging and both the heroes were likeable and relatable.

Set just after WWI and about 4 months prior to prohibition, both heroes are back from the war with their own demons, dreams and desires. Relating to each other on different levels in almost every way, slowly they find that two different people can become one perfect couple.

My only issue with this book is the almost too accepted homosexual atmosphere portrayed. Maybe it was like that in 1918 and clubs and open behavior was acceptable to that degree in NY and maybe families did accept it pretty well back then, but somehow I think that was just a bit too rosy in some regards. It does not detract from the book or the romance but it did make me think about that era afterward and question the research.

This is a true old-fashioned romance. There is little to no gratuitous sex. There is kissing and cuddling but everything else pretty much happens with a cut away to the next morning(s)

Em says

This book won't be for everyone, it's extremely slow paced, very sad at times and almost a bit depressing. To top it off it's fade to black and I must admit after such a long build up I was a bit disappointed. Having said that, I couldn't put it down, I love historical romances and while it was a bit heavy at times, it all came together really rather well. Fantastic ending too.

Lena♥Ribka says

Audible

I knew I knew I knew it!

Tamara Allen and I ARE TOTALLY COMPATIBLE.

You can ask me HOW COULD I KNOW?

Whistling in the Dark was just my SECOND book by Tamara Allen, and the first one, Downtime, I rated with ONLY 3 stars!

Let me explain you something:

-there are authors I read, rate with 3 stars and I know, I probably NEVER EVER read anything by these authors in my life again.

-and there are authors I read, rate with 3 stars and I know I just NEED to read more of their works. **Tamara Allen belongs to THOSE authors.**

I think Tamara Allen writes what I expect/like/enjoy in MM Romance.

- a slow-building romance

- characters that make you FEEL/CONNECT

-PLOT!!! It is a story behind. A real story

-SETTING/historical aspect

-WRITING!!

Of course I'm going to read EVERYTHING this talented author wrote. But I have to warn you: Even if I rate some of her works with ONLY 3 stars...consider it just as a full moon problem (Ask my hubby, he can explain it to you better). In other words, a bad timing, not a proper mood, common trivialities.

I love the story, I love the characters, oh and HOW I LOVE the ending!..

It is sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo romantic, beautiful, touching and emotional.

Some words about the audio book:

I have to add **Meral Mathews** to my fav narrators.

He created a real great theater/movie in my head.

I didn't have a feeling that it was just a SINGLE narrating person: women, men, old, young, everything(depending on) sounded soooooo different! Simply GREAT!

K.Z. Snow says

Incredible novel. The kind of book that makes other writers in the same genre want to throw in the towel, because they'll never be this good. I loved it beyond expression.

Katharina says

4.75

I'm becoming such a big fan of this author. Tamara Allen brings the early 20th century alive in a way that makes you believe you can actually smell, taste, hear, and see it. The increasing popularity of jazz, of the radio, the traumatic experiences of young men having served in the first world war, this all gets a stage here, becomes a part of this beautiful story of two young men trying to survive in New York City, where the neighbourhood can be as hostile and dangerous as it can birth true friendship when you're lucky. Sutton and Jack are a bit of an unlikely pair, with different backgrounds, different attitudes to life, and, in principle, different potentials for the future. But circumstances bring them together and despite all these differences, they find in each other what they had missed in their own lives: Sutton finds a new way of enjoying life and rediscovers his love for the piano, and Jack finds quiet and content in a way he didn't think he could. There is a healing magic in music and both of them are in dire need for it.

There are quite a few struggles these two have to fight and obstacles they have to overcome, not least of all their own fears and insecurities that in an act of irony always try to rip apart what one cannot bear to lose. Sutton and Jack are not ones to give up all that easily, though, and they are made out of stronger material than one might guess.

This was a near perfect read for me. I acknowledge that I don't know much about New York in the late 1910s, but the world seemed authentic and rich to me, full of little details that allow a reader to really dive in and enjoy - and I don't believe this is such an easy feat to accomplish. There were a few passages when the story could have been shortened a little - but the delight I felt reading it wasn't diminished by that, so I'm rounding up to five full stars.

Janeylou says

4.5 stars

Nova says

What a great book! I loved the story, the characters and the writing. :)

Susan says

sigh

I love Tamara Allen. Her books feel like you're reading something special. Every one feels like a treasure. I don't often use the word "delightful", but it works perfectly to describe "Whistling in the Dark".

Her cast of characters in this story, much like in every other story I've read of hers, are like family. And she brings you into the fold. Accepted. Cozy. :)

Sutton is a down and out son of a railroad mogul, who, rather than go home to where he's not accepted, he tries his luck living in NY. When that luck runs out, his desperation and his breaking point are tangible. I felt his hopelessness. I ached with him when he almost gave up. I was, frankly, depressed.

Along comes Jack. Jack is ALIVE and has ENERGY to spare. He doesn't always make the best choices, but he doesn't do anything half-assed either. Jack has his own baggage and hurts, but he doesn't give up. He's fearless. And he makes me feel like I can do anything!

Jack takes Sutton in and finds that Sutton is quite the musician. And so begins the story of the pianist and the radio tinker. Sounds gripping, right? Ha! Ok, maybe not. But it IS! It's lovely. And their friends-to-lovers story is written with such a gentle-touch. And there are some dun dun duuuuun moments that had me biting my nails.

And remember that 'family' I was telling you about? I can't decide who I love more! Is it Sutton and Jack? Is it Henry? Ox (gah! I heart Ox!)? Is it Esther or Ida? There are just so many great characters and Allen takes care with each of them. None are an afterthought. They all matter.

Truthfully, some of the story is too tidy. And there are a few parts that are almost too gentle...like a lullaby? Ha! But, I was in the mood for that....for all of it. Tamara Allen's style just works for me. *sigh*

Enjoyed it immensely.

Lisa says

Another 5 star for me.

A fantastic book set in New York in the years after the end of WWI.

2 damaged men coming together. A true love story.

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

Another one I have to return to later. DNF at 6%.

Sheziss says

Too anodyne for me. I want a spark, something. At least it transports you to the 1910s in no time.

Too slow, too average, too bland. I liked the shop, the music, the environment, the lifestyle, the after-war theme. But details and surroundings are nothing if there are not worthy and memorable characters to focus on.

I think Tamara Allen is not for me.

Linda ~ chock full of hoot, just a little bit of nanny ~ says

This is true Tamara Allen sweetness here: a quiet little story full of hope in a bleak time.

Sutton and Jack are WWI veterans trying to figure out how to get back into civilian life after the war. Jack runs an emporium which is struggling because of the economic times. He's also suffering from PTSD, unable to sleep most nights. Sutton suffered a hand injury that has prevented him from getting back to playing the piano, and he's running out of ways to make it on his own in NYC.

I really liked the way Ms. Allen took her time with this story and building up these characters and their relationship, so that while this is another one-month romance, it didn't feel rushed at all, and it actually felt like a lot more time had passed. She really pays attention to the details, like the "treatments" for PTSD and the "health advice" for influenza, and makes sure the characters feel like they're from the time period. Normally, when this many side characters are tolerable of Jack and Sutton's relationship, I'd bemoan "gay okay" revisionist history in M/M, but Ms. Allen never loses sight of the consequences, not just of the general public but of the law as well, if the wrong people find out or decide to spread the word. Plus, it's New York, where almost anything goes. There's also a variety of different ways that the characters react to it when they find out, so they're not exactly 100% on the Rainbow Train even when their responses are mostly positive.

I also liked that Sutton wasn't the wide-eyed country boy, and that Jack wasn't the "corrupting" influence his friends teased him as being. Though they'd both served in the army, they didn't come out of it tough-as-nails warriors like you see so much of in contemporary stories. You can see the weariness on them both, and Jack especially had a hard time forgetting the things he saw or the people who died so he could do his work. They were tired of fighting and eager to put it behind them.

The narrator, Meral Mathews, has a nice old-timey quality to his voice that suits the story. I do wish he'd made more of a distinction between the various voices, but I was still always able to keep track of who was

speaking and which POV we were in.

Sheri says

Ho-hum, I tried. I really really did.

I wasn't bad by any means, it just wasn't fantabulous for me either.

It was...a beautiful tale of two men falling in love despite the world telling them they shouldn't (*or couldn't*).

It was...a first-class cast of adorable and sweet characters.

It was...sad, made me a little mad, and finally a lot glad.

It was...slow and smooth, but perhaps too slow at times

It was...m/m that I would love for my mom to read (seriously, I think she would love this)

It was...worth pushing myself to finish.
