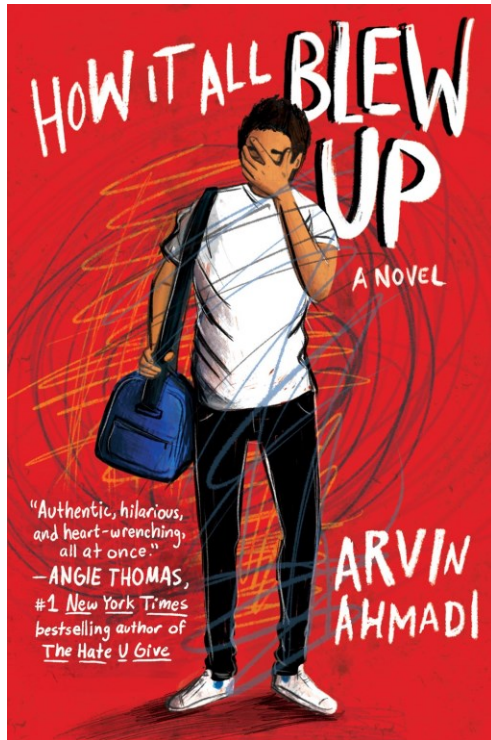


# HOW IT ALL BLEW UP



## Book Summary:

A young homosexual Muslim runs away to Rome to escape having to tell his family about his sexuality.

## Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities; alternate sexualities; profanity and derogatory terms; and alcohol use by minors.

*Young Adult*

**By Arvin Ahmadi**

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## CONTENT WARNING

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**Minor Restricted**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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1	FIRST, LET ME get one thing straight: I'm not a terrorist. I'm gay. ...I'm Iranian. And I'm gay.
12	There was one more condition: "Don't go telling your gay lover about our deal," Ben added.
13	I wasn't going to bet my happiness on the fact that my mom watched a talk show hosted by a lesbian.
16	THE OTHER OFFICER told you Amir is gay?
47	I sat at one of the tall barstools, my feet dangling above the ground, and rested my elbows on the wet bar. "A beer?" "What kind of beer?" I glanced up at the ceiling. "Oh, I'll drink anything."
48	I felt embarrassed, knowing that Jahan had figured out that I found Neil attractive, and I took a long sip of my drink. I was pleasantly surprised by how nice it tasted compared to the warm PBRs in Jackson's car.
50	But before we got really drunk and heard the nipple story told 'round the world- from what I understand, that story has spread farther from its initial source than influenza in 1918 or herpes in a frat house- we listened to Joni Mitchell.
51	I had been nursing the same beer since midnight, so Jahan made me finish and we took shots of fancy liqueurs. Not liquor. Liqueur. I'd never even heard the word before tonight. I definitely couldn't spell it. Jahan kept making me try. ..."Wrong!" he yelled. Another shot. "L-I-Q-U...O-" "Wrong!" he said again, giddily. Another shot. "I shouldn't be allowed to take shots of this stuff if I can't spell the word," I slurred.
54	Drunk as hell, I called them back like it was a reflex.
57	My husband had said- he had said something unkind about a trans...transgender woman on television, and he and Amir got into an argument.
63	And suddenly, I wondered if these seasoned gay men maybe wouldn't understand my situation- if they would judge me for not having the courage to just say the words. To come out to my parents like they had. So I switched gears: "My parents kicked me out for being gay."
68	Eventually, I googled Trevor Lifeline on my phone and learned that it was a suicide hotline for LGBTQ youth. When I read those words, I had to sit down on Amir's bed. Was my brother gay? ...I wasn't ashamed by the possibility of my brother being gay, but by the possibility that he was hurting and I didn't even notice.
72	"That's Mina!" Neil shouted at me, sufficiently drunk by now. He got close to my face, and even with his breath smelling like alcohol, I was more than a little turned on.
73	That should have scared me more than it did- the idea of permanence, of a new life in Rome- but I was drunk.
78	We headed over to Garbo, the bar where I had met Jahan, for a "nightcap"- which I learned was not an article of clothing but an alcoholic drink you have before bed.
79	He went around the bar, arbitrarily pinching strangers' nipples.

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80	When we reached Jahan's place, Jahan cleared his throat and asked what I was doing, looking at me like don't do that, and I realized, as Rocco pulled me in closer, that he actually thought we were going to hook up.
84	"RuPaul's Drag Race," Jahan said. "It's our Sunday church."
85	<p>"You've never seen a drag queen before, have you?"</p> <p>I shrugged. "They kind of remind me of clowns."</p> <p>Jahan shook his head. He scooted over on the couch and gestured for me to sit next to him. "Do you see that?" Jahan pointed at a drag queen who had just come out of a limo wearing a sparkly jumpsuit and a big white wig. "A clown would never."</p> <p>He was right. Drag queens were far more advanced than clowns. I had never watched RuPaul's Drag Race before, but it didn't take long before I was asking questions about the rules and the competitors. It was like America's Next Top Model but with men in high heels. And the shade. These people threw incredible amounts of shade.</p> <p>+10: Enjoys RuPaul's Drag Race.</p>
87	<p>After the Drag Race episode ended- a tall white queen appropriately named "Milk" got eliminated- Jahan's friend left, and Jahan went into the kitchen to make pasta.</p> <p>...They would only see the person in that photo, kissing Jackson in the car.</p>
88	<p>Jahan's eyes lit up. "Oh, we're obsessed. You know why? Because drag queens don't give a shit. There is no group of people on this planet that gives less of a shit than drag queens. People can call them freaks, say they're confused or sick or whatever, and they don't give a shit about any of it."</p> <p>I smiled. "Even clowns care what people think of them," I said.</p> <p>"Oh, clowns are the most fragile bitches in the world. They can hardly take criticism. Trust me. I've dated enough clows to know. Drag queens, though"- Jahan made a chef's kiss with his fingers- "ugh, I just love them."</p> <p>"Also, on a technical level," I said, swallowing down another bite of pasta, "it's amazing how they can just transform like that."</p> <p>"Exactly! They transform. They sing. They have fabulous wigs. They're like- what's the name of that Disney star who was a regular girls but secretly a pop star at night?"</p> <p>"Hannah Montanan."</p> <p>"Right. I knew it was something Midwestern. Anyway, drag queens are like Hannah Montana but less tacky."</p>
93	<p>"Well. Yeah," Neil said. "But they're open." I cocked my head back. "It means they're not monogamous. They're allowed to hook up with other people."</p> <p>"I know what an open relationship is," I said defensively.</p> <p>"Right, because you're on the internet," Neil mocked.</p> <p>..."So, um. Is that...common?" I asked.</p> <p>Neil laughed. "I don't know. A lot of gay couples are open. I have some straight friends who are in open relationships, too."</p> <p>"But isn't the point of a relationship that you're with one person?"</p> <p>"Depends on your definition of a relationship. Some people would insist that a relationship is only between a man and a woman."</p> <p>"Good point," I said. "I guess if you look at it like that, anything works."</p> <p>"Yeah. Though I don't want you thinking every gay couple is open."</p>
97	He told me he hadn't ever talked to anyone about this, any of this- no one knew that he was gay except for Amir.

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107	<p>"Says the boy who missed the orgy scene in La Dolce Vita."</p> <p>"First of all, I was tired and falling asleep," I said. "Second, there was no orgy! They just had a pillow fight. I might be a virgin, but I'm gonna need a little more than that if you're going to call it an 'orgy' scene."</p> <p>"Is there an orgy in Mean Girls?"</p>
119	<p>Before I could even sit down, Rocco asked me, "What is the weirdest place where you have hooked up?"</p> <p>..."Where we go around and each say the weirdest place where we've done the dirty deed. Or, at least, some deed."</p> <p>..."I guess a lot of times in the car," I said, sitting down next to Rocco's feet. "With this one guy, specifically. He went to my school."</p> <p>"That is so American. And so high school," Rocco said. "I always forget you were in high school, like, yesterday."</p> <p>"Was he your boyfriend?" Neil asked gently, his eyebrows raised.</p> <p>I laughed. "Not really. I wasn't out, obviously, and neither was he, so we mostly just snuck around and hooked up."</p>
120	<p>The point is, we were kissing and feeling each other up and stuff.</p>
121	<p>"Did you fuck?" Rocco asked.</p> <p>...I nodded. "But then Jackson noticed something. He looked over across the aisle, and behind the last row, there was a space. Just a foot or two between the back of the seats and the wall. Enough space for two people to fit in."</p> <p>..."Jackson looked over at the space, and my eyes followed, and we just stared at each other in the dark. I think we were thinking the same thing. All I wanted in that moment was Jackson, on a flat surface. Not a car seat, not a movie theater seat. So we went."</p>
126	<p>"Sembra che tu stia succhiando un cazzo quando lo dici. Gorrngonnnzzoolllllaaaaa," he stretched out the word and made a sexual gesture with his hand and mouth.</p> <p>"Gorrngonzoolaaa," one of the boys said.</p> <p>"Gorrngohrrrhghhh," said a girl with pink streaks in her hair. She practically choked on the word. Jahan explained to me what was going on, and I agreed that although I might have previously questioned how cheese could have a sexual orientation, after this debate, I fully believed that gorgonzola was the gayest cheese.</p>
128	<p>Neil stumbled forward; he was more than a little bit drunk.</p>
132	<p>Neil was popping a bottle of prosecco and Jahan was going through a record collection in a dusty cabinet to the side of the couches.</p>
139	<p>"Beach-blond hair, tall, tan like a Sicilian. I could not have drawn up a more attractive man. Within minutes we were kissing. My friends left me with this boy. I believe his name was Alessio. I will spare you the details, except that on our way to his apartment just blocks away from the bar, he bought a rose for me from one of those gypsy street peddlers. A rose! And so in my drunken, heartbroken state that night, I slept with him. He was gentle. So kind. The next morning, I walked home from his apartment, happier than I had ever been with my amore. I felt hope. I felt wanted."</p>
142	<p>"He-" Before I could finish my sentence, Valerio grabbed my elbows and pulled me in and pressed his lips against mine.</p>
143	<p>Valerio took off his shirt. Fact. There was a tiny silver pin punctured through his right nipple. Fact.</p>

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	<p>...When I caught sight of Valerio's shiny piercing, my mind immediately raced through Jahan's story: His friend had gone home with a cool DJ, tattoos and piercings and all, and they took off their clothes, and one of his nipples was pierced, so he went in and sucked the nipple, because that's what one does, apparently, and he enjoyed it, so he kept sucking. Then he felt something on his tongue, so he pulled back- it's just a hair, bound to happen. But when he checked his tongue, nothing was there, and then he noticed something dangling from the guy's pink little pepperoni, a white string. That was when it hit him. He had sucked a nerve tendon out of his crush's nipple.</p>
146	<p>"You won't exploit the Preachers, but you'll exploit the new Muslim kid," I said. "Nice one."</p>
147	<p>"But I fell asleep while we were kissing," I groaned, wiping the sleep out of my eyes.</p>
148	<p>In two weeks, there would be no one to convince us to drink prosecco in the afternoon, no one to spread the gospel of Joni Mitchell, no one to determine which cheeses were gay, straight, or asexual.</p>
150	<p>"See that church over there? It's called la Basilica di San Bartolomeo. The Basilica of Saint Bartholomew. The guy got skinned alive and beheaded. A lot of times when he is depicted in statues, you will find him holding his own skin, his body skinless, just veins and raw flesh."</p>
154	<p>"One evening Jahan approached me...'Come sit at the bar,' he said...He was very obviously gay...such a fruit, so flamboyant...but there was something about him...something genuine...I joined him, and very quickly, he won me over...he was magic and laughter...the kind of presence that made you feel special...at that time, my own family was having trouble accepting me...</p>
167	<p>I opened my mouth to ask what the hell he was doing when Valerio leaned in and kissed me.  ...Valerio held my face and whispered, "I am cool with the gay thing. Fuck everyone else."  ...Just as suddenly, Valerio pulled back and swooped around the door, tugging me with him into the next exhibit. "You tease," I said, my heart racing. Another part of me throbbing.</p>
172	<p>I remember my mom asking, "Well, what? Would we rather have our son be gay, or would we rather not have him at all?" And I remember my dad was just silent.</p>
174	<p>"See, even the lesbian said to fuck 'em!"</p>
175	<p>"Amir, you're being extremely homophobic right now..."</p>
178	<p>If Jackson and Valerio were boys, the maps I knew well, then Giovanni was Westeros. His ass was in full view, and although he was covering his dick with his hand, his abs were still very much on display though the mirror.  My eyes jumped between Giovanni's body in front of me, hot, the empty glass of ice cubes in my hand, cold, and the flesh in my pants, hard.  "When do you think you'll finish your book?" I asked, my mouth dry.  "Oh, who can say?" Giovanni said. He slipped on a pair of underwear, finally.  ...I looked up; Giovanni was eyeing me like a wolf.  He took a step forward.  "I always thought you were handsome, Amir," Giovanni said. "From that very first party, when Jahan brought you here."  He moved closer. His abs were at eye level. "Thanks" was all I could manage to get out. Giovanni was suddenly towering over me, one bare leg jutted forward, and somehow my arm brushed against it like he was tracing a vocabulary word in my notebook, like he was my tutor, like he was Jackson-</p>

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	And then there were mouths. There were hands. There were torsos. And there was motion, from the changing area to the old couch in the dining room. It all happened so fast, but I can say it happened under Caravaggio.
183	"Anyway, Rocco is guzzling whiskey or scotch, something manly like that, in the living room. I'm a classy lady, so I'm sticking to wine."
184	A hair, a sock, anything we might have left behind when we were hooking up. ...He was sitting on the couch where Giovanni and I had gotten frisky just a couple of hours earlier.
186	"Thx for fucking my fucking boyfriend"
193	"It's hard to explain. I- I never really had the chance to come out to my parents. A kid at my school saw me kissing another boy, and he took a picture of it, and he was going to show it to my parents unless I paid him a bunch of money, so I left."
194	All those times we were drinking prosecco in the park together, I wanted to pinch myself.
195	"Amir, you're giving me a real headache right now. This is the last thing I need. First you hook up with Giovanni and his relationship blows up, and then you lie to us-" ..."I'm just saying you fucked up a bit, that's all. You hooked up with a guy you would have been wise not to hook up with- and if you'd asked me, I could have told you that. On top of that, you lied to us about what's going on with your family- which, again, if you had told me-"
202	I explained all the drama to him: the hookup, the breakup, Jahan finding out.
204	About twenty people were drinking and chatting under the fairy lights, a mixed crowd of men and women, young and old, while a band played soft music.
218	It was all very Brokeback Mountain. Francesco had prepared a basket of fresh prosciutto, bread, and different cheeses.
237	They didn't know this version of my, the me who had a crush on his tutor, who could give a speech in front of a group of weirdos and misfits, who could kiss a boy behind a door at the Vatican.
250	"YOU THINK IT'S a problem that he's gay?" She yelled this really loudly.
259	This was right after she had told my parents that I was gay, and I knew she still felt awful about it.
260	I want them to see me kissing Jackson in that car, blackmail be damned.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	8
Bitch	2
Dick	1
Fag/Faggot	1
Fuck	19
Piss	2
Shit	21