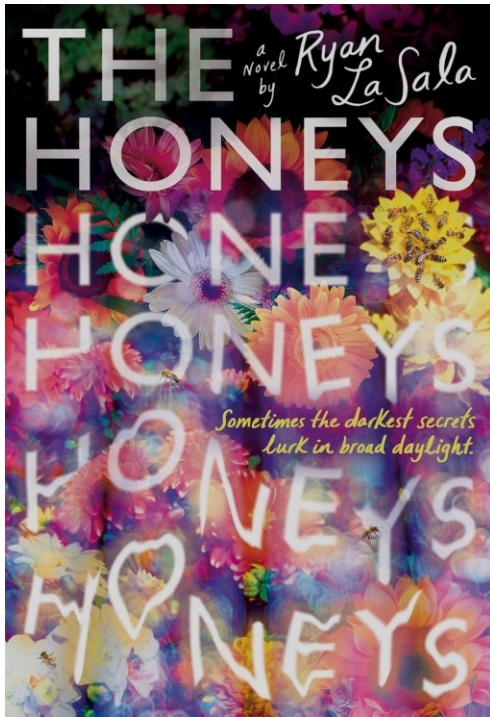


THE HONEYS



Young Adult

By Ryan La Sala

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CONTENT WARNING

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Book Summary:

A young man attends a camp he believes holds clues to his sister's violent behavior.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; violence; illegal drug use; controversial religious, social and cultural commentary; and profanity and derogatory terms.

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Minor Restricted
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10	What attempted murder? What accidental suicide? Not in this Lovely American Home.
13	I'm great at makeup but let me tell you, not even a drag-queen-level contour can hide that I've clearly been through some shit.
17	"Just didn't feel like the right place for me anymore," I say, gesturing at my body. Dressed in this suit my parents picked out, I look mostly boy, but if Caroline told them anything about me, they'll know what I mean.
19	I'm gender fluid, not a grenade.
25	<p>I think this is where our divergence began. Our bodies were changing, mine lumbering in a direction that set me further and further apart from my sister, from girls like the Honeys. Eventually, the binary of the cabins at Aspen felt insufferable. A constant question I couldn't answer.</p> <p>Who am I? What am I?</p> <p>...She played along with my whole Aspen is a sexist, capitalist cult protest, but I could tell she loved those girls more than anything.</p>
29	<p>Sitting on my bed, my mom holds my hand and stares.</p> <p>"Why, sweetie?"</p> <p>"Aspen has a grooming policy," I say, keeping my voice flat. Emotionless. "They'll put me in the boys' cabins. Boys have to have short hair."</p> <p>..."We didn't specify," she says slowly. "Mars, listen, sweetie. You're right. The camp policy only allows for them to put you in a bunk with other ..."</p> <p>With other boys, is what she doesn't say. If she did, it wouldn't hurt me. My cropped hair is supposed to prove that—that I am as much boy as I am girl, that I morph as I see fit, that hair has nothing to do with it. My mom's hesitance just goes to show that she still hasn't put her mastermind toward understanding that my fluidity is an advantage, not a hindrance.</p> <p>"That's fine," I assure her. "That's what I figured. I literally don't care. I'll even wear the boys' uniform."</p>
33	I know people think being queer is, like, very fabulous and full of witty repartee and all that, but sometimes it's also crying in the bathroom of an Applebee's somewhere near Margaretville, New York, while Rihanna's "S& M" plays on the speakers for the early-bird crowd.
38	But then, after the age of fourteen, the space between the gendered communities rips open. Boys become Hunters, girls become Amazons. And those in between?
39	Heavy, entitled footsteps launch a boy my age into the living room.
45	I know what I look like. I know how people see me. I used to play sports to offset my femininity, but the result is a muscular frame that makes my swish that much stranger. And now with the shaved head I'm sure people are even more confused.
58	<p>"Wendy mentioned that you were ... that you are ..."</p> <p>"Gender fluid."</p>
59	Long ago I had to learn that my body isn't who I am; who I am is how I feel. A pressed polo shirt won't change anything. Still, I hate how I look after I've dressed. What little androgyny I'm able to hold on to fades as the clean white lines of the uniform reveal my square shoulders, my flat chest, my narrow hips. At least I brought extra-short shorts. Still, not even a five-inch inseam is going to help me baffle the binary.

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	Oh well. I'll think of this as dress-up. Mars Matthias's latest performance of dude, a Golden Bear Boy in Brayden's ensemble.
63	This reminds Charlie to tell a story about his bar mitzvah's after-party. The point of his story is to complain about a hot waitress who wouldn't give him a hand job, but by the time he gets there we've learned the party was on his family's yacht.
64	<p>"Hey, so, me and the guys were wondering," he says.</p> <p>"What's up with you?"</p> <p>"What's ... up with me?"</p> <p>"Yeah, like, what's your deal?"</p> <p>The guys all keep the same stoic mask, but laughter licks at the edges. My fingers itch to play with my hair but it's gone, so I make a fist.</p> <p>"Are you asking if I'm gay?"</p> <p>The boy shrugs. "Straight, gay, boy ... girl."</p> <p>On girl one of the guys spits out a laugh.</p> <p>... "I'm sorry, what's your name?" I ask.</p> <p>"Uh. Callum?"</p> <p>"Well, Callum, I appreciate the inquiry but ..." I drop my voice to its lowest. "I'm not going to have sex with you. You look bad at it."</p>
69	<p>"I got a haircut," I blurt.</p> <p>"Congratulations, I'm still a lesbian," Bria says, turning her back on me.</p>
71	"Hi, my name is Mars. My pronouns are he, him, they, them, or she, her. Whatever, really."
95	"Funny," I say with mock intrigue, "your dad liked it rough, too."
100	I hear whispering from the deck. A girl, giggling, and then a guy shushing her. I pause in the dark as they stumble away, playfully pulling at each other until he catches her in a kiss.
125	<p>The boys walk side by side, louder now. Bolstered, maybe, by the alien terrain, they begin to discuss Aspen with scientific authority. Mostly this means they dissect the girls they think are hot, in fantastical comparisons. Gruesomely, they begin to build new girls from the parts of known ones. Bria's nose. Kyle's legs. Amanda's breasts. I don't know most of the people they mention. The girl who comes together in my mind is a tortured patchwork, and I tune the boys out.</p> <p>...I fall into a strict focus as I walk, ignoring the boys as they continue to rub themselves raw against the kaleidoscoping fantasy of girls made of other girls.</p>
156	<p>"That's right. This afternoon is the opening ceremony for one of Aspen's most cherished traditions, and every challenge this week is for points that'll go to the victory board. Now I don't know about you, but I've seen our competitors this year, and those girls are looking fierce. I think we can show them a thing or two about superiority, though, don't you? Am I right, boys?"</p> <p>A warm, derisive jeer. I bite my tongue. They've renamed the tradition, but the bones beneath it are as old as Aspen itself. Which is to say: sexist. A sexist skeleton, beneath it all.</p>
157	Less to burn in the event a rogue gender-fluid camper decides to go on a flaming crusade against the binary, I guess.
165	Bria, Sierra, and Mimi, a smoldering joint between Mimi's fingers. She blows her breath toward the narrow window cracked above. I finally smell the stink of weed through the perfume they've sprayed.

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166	<p>We all sit in the silence, listening to the party outside, and then suddenly the girls are taking off their clothes. Just pulling their shirts over their heads and stepping out of their skirts. “Try this.” Mimi thrusts a skirt at me.</p> <p>“No, Mimi, you’re too petite.” Bria shoves in front. “Try this one instead, Mars.”</p> <p>Suddenly my fists are full of clothes still warm from their bodies. I’m backed into a corner, but I don’t want to run. The three girls, standing in just their underwear, emanate no threat. They don’t even seem self-conscious. I avert my eyes and they don’t mock me for my bashfulness. They turn around, facing the tub, so I can change.</p> <p>I end up in Bria’s skirt and Sierra’s shirt. They wear parts of my uniform. Sierra delights in the oversized cut by knotting my shirt to show her tanned belly.</p> <p>“Wait!” Mimi claps gleefully as she pulls out a purse beside the toilet, dumping it into the sink. Out comes a clutter of makeup, hair ties, and tampons. The girls have me crouch down as they lean into my face, plying it with soft powders and shimmering tints. I permit this for a few minutes and then take over when they get to the eyeliner. They coo and clap as I swipe on a wingtip sharp enough to cut someone. For drama, Mimi gives me a small beauty mark on my cheekbone.</p> <p>I look at myself in the mirror. For the first time in weeks, I’m looking at me. The way I see me and the way I want to be seen.</p> <p>“Shall we?” Bria asks, swinging open the door, invading the bathroom with the sounds of the party beyond. I nearly say no, but I can’t quite form the word. Also, I don’t want to say no. I feel powerful as myself. Invincible in my newly familiar shape. I want to be seen. I want those boys to know what they’re dealing with. And I want these girls to hold on to me like they are right now, pulling me along into their circle. Finally.</p>
201	<p>“Shut up,” Bria jokes. “You have to be hot to die first.”</p> <p>“Or have sex,” Mimi counters.</p> <p>“Well, you haven’t done that either, girl.”</p>
209	<p>“And everyone returned to the correct shore. Except you.”</p> <p>“I don’t subscribe to binaries like shores.”</p> <p>Wyatt does that quick-exhale laugh. “So what? You’ll just float forever in the middle?”</p> <p>“Yes. In my little nonbinary canoe,” I say.</p> <p>Wyatt tilts back his head and ponders this. Then he asks, “Question, Mars. What’s that like, floating in the middle?”</p> <p>I wait for him to laugh, or to indicate somehow that he’s not really asking, just continuing our banter. But he wrestles the mischief from his face and replaces it with an almost-academic curiosity.</p> <p>“Okay. Answer. It’s like ...” I pause. My mind is still spinning with the business of Cabin H. My usual explanations slip away. “It’s more like I drift back and forth. Sometimes I’ll get out, stay a while on one shore, but a part of me is always waiting to get back to drifting.”</p> <p>“You don’t get tired?”</p> <p>“I don’t,” I say. “Or I guess I do. But it’s not drifting around in the middle that makes me tired. It’s staying too long on either shore. People have these specific ideas of what a boy is, or a girl is, and it’s so exhausting to play along. People make themselves so unhappy trying to get it right. But it’s not even real. So I reject all of it. I’d rather be happy and adrift.”</p> <p>“What’s do you mean, it’s not even real?”</p> <p>“Hate to be the one to break this to you, nature boy, but hardly anything is real,” I laugh.</p>

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	"Gender, the idea that there are two shores directly across from each other. The lake has a ton of hidden shores, but you don't know that if you're stuck standing on the land."
219	The conversation devolves into a philosophical debate about energy. Our higher selves dancing in higher dimensions of pure light and love. God. Gods. Unfathomable forces that drive us, divinely of course, toward our destiny or our doom. Magical thinking, Bria calls it, before sliding a cool hand over my wrist to get my attention. She says: "Mars, help me. You're into science and stuff. Tell them it's all bullshit."
221	Mimi shakes her head. "I don't like the idea that we're trapped in a design. I have free will, don't I? I make choices."
224	"Nah, man," another boy answers for me. "Mimi's a prude. You gotta target the sluts." ... "They're all sluts, I bet," says Mitch. "Not Mimi; not when it comes to you," Ray claps back.
228	With the adults gone, the boys revert to their usual coarseness. In fact, they seem intent on making up for their polite behavior. They start talking about which girls look like their moms, which moms they'd fuck.
259	They think we had sex? They think we snuck away from The Tempest to ... hook up?
290	I kiss him. Wyatt pulls away. He's staring at me like I've stung him again, but then his fingers rise to my lips and tentatively trace their shape. He studies me. It's the same wondrous concentration I've seen him apply to the mysteries of the natural world, except now I'm the mystery. We are the mystery. His fingers graze down my jaw, to the back of my neck. He pulls me in, and then he's the one kissing me. I let him. I want him to. I return his yearning with the full force of my own. Restraint dissolves in the wet heat of our shared breaths, evaporates in the crush of our bodies pulling together. Restraint has done its job; in the slow language of patience, we learned about each other from afar, and grew toward this moment with slow, organic chance. When we crash together now, there's no awkwardness of discomfort. Just an instantaneous intimacy, too perfect to be crafted. ...Wyatt gets my shirt off before I even get his pants undone. He tugs at the crop top but I yank at his shirt's hem, and he lets me drag it up and over his raised arms. My hands explore the mystery of his skin, feeling the prickle of hair on his chest, the curve of his stomach, the needful arch of his spine, the flex of his shoulders as he pulls me into him. He holds me with such force that for a moment I feel that wheeling levitation from before, like the world has dropped away and we're falling upward, into the net of stars. Wyatt's hand dips between my hips. I place a hand on his chest, slowing him down, but barely. My nails drag down the back of his scalp, to his neck, to his back, pricking across a scar. ... "It's nothing," he whispers, his hand cupping over me and squeezing gently. I gasp. I fall into him, forgetting the cut, but a low buzz cuts through the steam in my head. A question.
292	The boy I kissed has flickered away, and now something else has me trapped.
306	Ahead I see—oh my fucking god, thank you, gay Jesus—a traffic light.
310	Greta is telling us how she didn't know what "a gender fluid" or "a nonbinary" was until tonight, when Dad finally cuts in.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	14
Bitch	9
Fuck	14
Piss	1
Queer	6
Shit	15