

Page	Content
8	<p>They. It was a simple word, but it still sounded new and beautiful to me. Every time Mom, my grandparents, or one of the Martels used they or them or their pronouns to talk about me, it made my heart swell. They were the only people I had come out to so far, but that would change soon.</p> <p>Because being true to myself and swapping home school for public school were both parts of my plan to create a new normal for myself.</p>
9	<p>But I was also wearing my special arm sleeves, which covered both of my arms from wrist to elbow. They concealed my sore, blotchy skin—a result of my picking.</p> <p>I wasn't doing it on purpose, but I couldn't figure out how to stop, either. At least not at first. All I knew was that at some point after Mom lost her job, right around the time Thierry invited Mom and me to move in with his family to help save money, I'd started picking the hair on my arms.</p> <p>And that wasn't okay.</p> <p>...1. Spring: Come out as nonbinary (genderfluid). 2. Summer: Get a haircut that expresses who I am.</p>
22	<p>The shirt Mille had bought me was dark. Good for hiding curves. I knew clothes and hairstyles didn't say anything about what gender you were; you could be a girl with a shaved head or a boy wearing a skirt. I knew that, but not everyone did, so sometimes I had to help them along, making myself look traditionally masculine when I wanted people to see a boy or traditionally feminine to be seen as a girl.</p> <p>But today, I felt like neither.</p> <p>...Maybe people would look at me, wondering if I was a boy, a girl, or some other gender. Then if they asked, I could tell them I was nonbinary—genderfluid—that sometimes I felt like a boy, others more like a girl. And some days, I liked when people couldn't tell, because I couldn't always tell, either.</p>
30	<p>"They got a haircut," Mille called, head still in the basket. "Isn't it a cool style?"</p> <p>My eyes met Mrs. Webb's, but she looked away fast. "It's certainly different."</p> <p>Her tone was light, but something felt off. Plus, she didn't ask about the they pronoun Mille had used for me.</p>
34	<p>Also, when Mille and I walked back from Mrs. Webb's yesterday, Mille had asked me how I was going to share my pronouns at school, giving me something new to worry about.</p> <p>It wasn't that I hadn't thought about how being genderfluid would make things more complicated at my new school; I'd just been putting off deciding how to share it. Coming out the first time had been nerve-racking enough.</p> <p>So, I'd shrugged and made something up, telling Mille I was only going to share my identity with the kids I made friends with.</p>
39	<p>She. Her.</p> <p>I opened my mouth to explain that those words weren't right, even though I sometimes did feel like a girl. The best word for how I felt was fluid. Not like liquid, but the other definition: smooth, flowing, able to change. Like different, it had multiple meanings.</p> <p>...Plus, I barely knew them, and Mille wasn't here to support me if they reacted to my pronouns the way Mrs. Webb had to my haircut.</p>
44	<p>Nia held up the mug. "OMG, this is adorable." The mug was a moose's head, with two handles shaped like antlers and a nose protruding from the front. "Thank you! My dads will love it."</p>

Page	Content
	<p>There was that word again. I wondered if Nia actually had two dads or if it was a nickname for one person, like calling a grandpa Pops.</p>
55	<p>Pride, I repeated silently.</p> <p>It was a word but also a symbol, like the rainbow. It'd come up a lot while I was researching my identity. Some cities held Pride events with parades to celebrate the LGBTQIA + community. People hung rainbow flags in shop windows and from lampposts, according to the images I'd googled.</p> <p>My new pronouns would honestly be the perfect topic for this project.</p> <p>Except I'd never seen a parade in Minocqua for people like me, never noticed any businesses with rainbow flags in their windows. I wasn't even sure if I should share my pronouns with Nia and Edie.</p>
57	<p>I thought so, too. As I slid my papers into my backpack, I tried to imagine telling Miss Richardson I was going to do my project on my new pronouns. I couldn't guess what she would say, but I bet it wouldn't be "That's certainly different." Not if that rainbow pin meant what I thought it did.</p>
73	<p>Because right now, I'm juggling the secret about my picking at home and my pronouns at school.</p>
79	<p>"Um, actually." I brought my pop up to my mouth but couldn't bring myself to sip it. "I'm pansexual."</p> <p>Edie's eyes lit up. "Really?"</p> <p>Back when I'd researched identities online, I'd also looked up different sexualities. Pansexual seemed to fit me the best. It meant the possibility of being attracted to any person, regardless of their gender.</p> <p>"I think I am, anyway," I said. "I also haven't really dated anyone to know for sure."</p> <p>Edie smiled. "I think sometimes when you know, you just know."</p> <p>My chest filled with warmth. That was exactly how I'd felt when I learned what pansexual meant.</p> <p>Same for genderfluid.</p> <p>Now would be the perfect time to come out about that, too.</p>
80	<p>Other worries were forming, too. The biggest one was about bathrooms. At home, it didn't matter that I was genderfluid; everyone used the same bathroom. Here at Shoreline, though, there were restrooms only for boys or for girls.</p>
82	<p>We were two queer kids at the same school.</p>
83	<p>I'd kept quiet every time Edie and Nia used the wrong pronouns for me.</p> <p>...It felt like it would be easier to talk about it if it was part of a school project, like if a teacher approved of my identity, Edie and Nia would have to accept me, too.</p> <p>...A nice welcome on my first day of school and a rainbow pin didn't prove anything.</p>
85	<p>Edie had a point, but I still pulled my laptop closer. There had to be more things I could talk about besides how I'd figured out my identity. I opened a new browser tab.</p> <p>...Maybe I could write about the history of the LGBTQIA + movement? There was lots of stuff online about that.</p> <p>...If I went to a church like the Martels, I could write about how religion and identity went together (or sometimes didn't).</p> <p>...I wondered what the folks at the synagogue Grandpa and Nan went to thought about genderfluid people.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>Curious, I typed some search terms into Google: gender identity + Judaism. My fingers tingled with excitement as I scrolled. There was an article about how Judaism viewed gender diversity, examples of fluidity within Jewish sacred texts, and facts about how different branches of Judaism had changed their views about gender and queer identities over the years (or sometimes hadn't).</p>
87	<p>What if, instead of focusing on my pronouns, I focused on my Jewish heritage? Then I could make one of my essays about being genderfluid, but I could also write about how genderfluid people participate in Jewish holidays. ...Maybe I could even interview a genderfluid Jewish activist and explain what their work meant to someone like me.</p>
90	<p>I wondered if I could find a movie about a genderfluid Jewish person.</p>
91	<p>Now, for the first time all week, I was feeling feminine, like I would be happy with people seeing me as a girl, even if hearing people use she/ her pronouns for me still prickled. Wearing my dress over a swimsuit felt right today.</p>
92	<p>"Hey, remember when you asked about how I was going to share my pronouns at school?"</p>
93	<p>"So, like, if you could avoid saying they but maybe don't use she or her pronouns, either, that'd be so great."</p>
96	<p>All I could think about was how she'd come out to me so easily, and I was still hiding an important part of my identity.</p>
98	<p>Did he think that just because Nia had two dads, I should come out as genderfluid? Being gay or bisexual or even pansexual felt different from being genderfluid, even though each one was technically an LGBTQIA + identity. Sexuality was about who you were attracted to; being genderfluid or trans or nonbinary was about how you interpreted your gender.</p>
103	<p>I thought about telling him about the other part of my topic, where I hoped to connect my Jewish heritage with being genderfluid.</p>
104	<p>Her shoulders tensed the same way mine did whenever someone used the wrong set of pronouns.</p>
105	<p>"He's been bothering you a lot lately, huh? You said he was calling you... girly?" "Or saying the stuff I like is gay, yeah." "Okay, that's definitely not cool." I fiddled with a strap on my life jacket, trying to find the right words. "I mean, he's basically saying gay people are stupid by using the word like that." "Right, and I told him so. But then he told me to chill, that I shouldn't have a problem with it unless I'm gay myself." ..."How did you know for sure?" he asked. "That you're genderfluid?" "Honestly? It was just something I'd always known, deep down. When people called me a girl, it felt... not always wrong, but usually kind of off. I asked myself if being seen as a boy all the time would make that feeling go away, and it really didn't feel like it would. So, I did some research online and found a word that fit better. You know the rest." ..."I know Thomas and I are into different things. But it's like he's suddenly embarrassed of me. And would it really be so bad if I was gay, honestly?" ..."I mean, I don't know. Just because I think guys like Christian Siriano from Project Runway are cool doesn't make me gay, does it? I just admire his work. You don't have to be gay to appreciate fashion."</p>

Page	Content
	<p>“No, you don’t,” I said quickly. “Nia loves fashion, and I’m, like, ninety-nine percent sure she’s straight.”</p>
111	<p>I narrowed down my search to LGBTQIA + films and found one that sounded interesting. I watched its trailer, about a boy who was trying to figure out how to come out at home and school.</p>
112	<p>“I’ve decided to do mine on my Jewish heritage.” Mom’s smile faltered. “I’m surprised they’re letting you do a project on a religious topic.” I hadn’t thought about this. What if Miss Richardson said I couldn’t do my project on my heritage, not because it was a bad topic but because it wouldn’t be appropriate for public school? ...“My essays would be on stuff like where our family came from and how we got to Wisconsin. I also want to research how queer people fit in at synagogues. You know, secular topics.”</p>
113	<p>“A little. I got interested in it because I was reading an article that said many different branches of Judaism recognize that there are more than two genders.” ...“I can’t guarantee I’ll be able to answer everything—I unfortunately don’t know how the various streams of Judaism approach gender diversity.” “Oh.” I deflated a little. “But that may just be because I haven’t been part of the community for some time, and to my knowledge, there weren’t any gender-diverse people at my temple growing up. Reform rabbis—Reform is the branch I was raised in—have officiated same-sex marriages for a couple of decades now, so I imagine the Reform community has an official policy on trans and nonbinary people, too. I just don’t know it.” Reform Judaism. Same-sex marriage. Trans and nonbinary policies. My excitement built as I took mental notes.</p>
116	<p>A sea of blue & pink & white flags, each one with a Star of David at its center. Words like: B’nai mitzvah, a rite of passage. B’nai is plural, for both boys and girls, but it’s also sometimes used for nonbinary people.</p>
121	<p>Now that I thought about it, I felt a little silly hiding my hair. A hairstyle didn’t say anything about someone’s gender identity. That would be up to me to share, when I felt ready.</p>
123	<p>All last week, Miss Richardson had worn the same rainbow pin on her shirts and blouses. ...But that pin meant something to me. Like my arm sleeves, it felt comforting and safe. It made me feel like sharing my identity with Miss Richardson and how it related to my VIP topic might be okay. ...What if Mom was right about religion not being an appropriate public-school subject? What if Miss Richardson was fine with the Jewish part of my topic but thought being genderfluid was bad?</p>
127	<p>And if I’d had nothing to worry about in the first place, maybe I was also overthinking the part about researching Judaism’s relationship with gender identity. ...“Then, I don’t know, maybe learn more about how Jewish people feel about the LGBTQIA + community? My mom says the branch of Judaism she grew up in is okay with same-sex marriage, so I thought I’d research their policies on, um, other stuff?”</p>

Page	Content
130	Boyish was the perfect word: not a boy, but boy-like. It felt so good learning that someone noticed this part of me, even if she didn't officially know what it meant yet. ...And if she did, would she still like me when I told her I wasn't a girl?
160	Bar/ Bat mitzvah: A coming-of-age ceremony for a Jewish boy (bar) or girl (bat), usually when they are thirteen, sometimes twelve. (B'nai and B-mitzvahs are for nonbinary kids!)
177	A woman entered through a door at the front of the sanctuary, with a man following. She was white and had thick, beautiful eyebrows. Her curly brown hair was pulled back loosely at her neck, resting on the top of her dress. People immediately began to quiet down when they saw her. "That's the rabbi," Grandpa whispered to me.
182	If I were Mille, I would walk up to the kids and introduce myself. Hi, I'm Shai Stern. They, their, them pronouns.
197	"It just bugs me that he thinks saying something is gay is an insult. Even if I'm not gay, he shouldn't be saying that. It's offensive." ...Nia wasn't gay, as far as I knew, but she had opened up to me about her dads and how they'd used a surrogate to have her, too. ...But I'd still left something big out—all because I worried Edie might not like me the same way I liked her if she found out I wasn't a girl.
202	Now we have Pride parades. We remember the past & celebrate our identities. ...Some schools have safe spaces, like Gender and Sexuality Alliance clubs (but mine doesn't).
205	I'm nonbinary. Genderfluid. Not a girl or a boy, but sometimes I can feel sort of like...
207	But the only secret between us was that Edie didn't know I wasn't a girl.
212	I'd told her I was pansexual, but that might not matter when she realized I wasn't a girl. ...My thoughts were too focused on the feeling of Edie's hand in mine, plus my coming-out script.
213	"I'm nonbinary," I blurted, then shook my head as her eyes widened. ..."Nonbinary," I repeated. "Genderfluid, actually." My gaze flickered guiltily to Edie. "That's what I wanted to tell you both at lunch, but then I, um, couldn't wait, I guess." Edie's brows pinched toward her nose. "Sorry, what does that mean, exactly?" ..."It means she doesn't identify as a binary gender, like boy or girl, male or female." Nia was speaking to us, but her eyes were focused on her phone, reading a definition off Google. She looked back up. "Or maybe she isn't the word I should be using?" "Yeah." I made myself nod. "My pronouns are they, them, and their. I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I just..." What? Was scared? I'd told them about being pansexual. What if they didn't understand why sharing that I was genderfluid felt different?
221	Edie: Bc I've been using the wrong pronouns for you for TWO WEEKS ...Things might not be exactly the same now that she knew I was genderfluid, but we'd figure it out.
227	Although I don't know much Hebrew yet, I learned that Shai is gender-neutral, which fits me perfectly.

Page	Content
237	<p>“Actually,” Nia said. “Shai uses they/ them pronouns.” ...“So, not a girl, then?” Dad Rob asked.</p>
248	<p>“I just—I feel bad. I didn’t know you were going through this, just like I didn’t know about your pronouns.” “That’s because I didn’t tell you about either, at first.” I took a long, slow breath. “My arms aren’t related to my pronouns. My identity has always felt like a good thing, just tricky to figure out how to tell people sometimes. The stuff with my arms is, like, the opposite.”</p>
249	<p>“So... you said you do that with your arms when you get stressed?” My chest tightened, but I nodded. “And sometimes when I’m distracted. That’s why I try to keep my arm sleeves on as much as possible. It helps remind me not to pick.”</p>
250	<p>“I read online that sometimes people pick at their hair because of a stressful environment. And Mom and I have both been pretty stressed out since she lost her last job. Then I found an article that said sometimes creating a new normal for yourself can fix the problem.”</p>
252	<p>There’s my family. The Martels. The queer community. Maybe even being Jewish. All of these are important to me.</p>
271	<p>Edie: Like how is me dating you different than me dating a boy?? ...If two people liked each other, their genders shouldn’t matter. I knew that. Edie knew it. Lots of other people did, too. But because most people expected girls to date boys, it made it harder for girls who didn’t.</p>
279	<p>If the “stuff” Edie was writing related to her identity, it made sense why she wouldn’t want to share it. Some of my poems felt like that, too, especially the one about my picking.</p>
283	<p>Coming out to Mom and the Martels had been scary, but it’d felt necessary.</p>
289	<p>He poured three glasses from one bottle, then opened the other for me. “Wine for the adults, sparkling grape juice for Shai here.” ...Mom eyed her full glass. “That is a lot of wine, Dad.” “Pah, it’s fine. You’re staying overnight. Now is the time for a celebration.”</p>
294	<p>I pulled out the two clothing options I’d brought, studying both: One was a long, flowing skirt, and the other was a pair of dark pants. I didn’t feel boyish today, but I also didn’t feel girlish.</p>
297	<p>Hate crime. Unlike so many other terms, this one only had a single meaning. I’d come across it when I was trying to figure out my identity months ago. It was a crime motivated by prejudice, when someone targets someone else for reasons such as being disabled or an immigrant or LGBTQIA +. Or Jewish. ...“What did it accomplish? It’s just antisemitism, plain and simple.” Antisemitism was another term I’d found during my research. Prejudice and hatred directed at people for no reason other than being Jewish.</p>
301	<p>I wanted to tell them how scared I was that if someone could do this to people who were Jewish, they could do it to people who were gay or lesbian. Or genderfluid.</p>

Page	Content
306	Even though Love, Simon was about a cisgender boy who was gay, it'd meant a lot to me to see someone queer in a movie.
307	"Whoa, that's a huge step. And they were cool about it?" "Yep. Nia even corrected one of her dads when he called us all girls."
314	"I know you're gay."
321	Slowly, I rolled up my sleeves, revealing my arms. Mom sucked in a breath. "Why would you do this, Shai? Please tell me why." ..."I don't understand why you would hurt yourself like this."
327	"I told Caleb I'm a lesbian."
336	"But there were things I didn't think about that ended up stressing me out, like telling people at school I'm genderfluid. And then I learned that Judaism welcomes genderfluid people—at least, they do at Grandpa and Nan's temple—so I thought it'd be perfect to do my English project about my heritage. But then that stressed me out because there's so much to learn and my English teacher didn't think my topics were personal enough. So, I kept picking, because even though it hurts, it also feels like it calms me down."
345	"I really did mean it when I said coming out to Thomas was an accident." Mille's voice was quiet. "I was trying to explain why it bothers me when he calls things he thinks are dumb gay, and it just sort of slipped out."
353	"We can say we're celebrating you coming out to us, too, if you want."
360	She reached around to the back of her chair and then slipped her arms into a sweater. There was a pin attached to it. Just like on the first day of class, it was rainbow shaped, but the colors were different. This one was pink, yellow, and blue. My skin tingled with recognition. It was an exact match for the colors on the pansexual Pride flag. "I like your pin," I said shyly. "Oh, thank you." She touched a finger to it. "My partner, Maia, makes them. Unfortunately, I lost my first one, but she just made me a new one. This color scheme fits me better, so I suppose everything works out in the end."
362	"But I would like to go on a date sometime. If you want to, I mean." Heat crept into my cheeks now, too, but I kept looking right at her. "That'd be nice." "Yeah?" Her eyes lit up. "Yeah." Maybe it wouldn't be as simple to go on a date as it would be if we were a boy and a girl.

Derogatory Term	Count
Queer	9