

A VERY, VERY BAD THING



Young Adult

By Jeffery Self

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Book Summary:

A homosexual teenager falls in love with a young man whose family does not approve of his sexuality.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities; controversial political, religious, and social commentary; profanity/derogatory term use; alcohol use by minors; alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; and references to abortion and suicide.

2 /5

Teen Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
1	Up until a few months ago I was just another snarky gay kid from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, watching life through the disconnected Instagram filter of my generation and judging every minute of it.
10	He was usually on one of those talking head “news” shows, blaming hurricanes on gay people or terrorist attacks on transgender people who used the “wrong” bathrooms.
12	Over the years, he has made headlines for opposing abortion rights and gay marriage, as well as being a strong defender of the controversial “pray-the-gay-away” movement and a proponent of prayer in schools.
26	“I only asked if you’re gay because I’m gay and I’m new here and, well, I don’t have any friends. And you have been staring at me at school.” ...“I AM GAY!” I said, eagerly and loudly, like I was coming out before Congress or the Thanksgiving dinner table.
29	It happened absurdly fast, our falling for each other. But sometimes things click—and also, it’s not like two gay teenagers in some small North Carolina town have that much else going on. ...I couldn’t imagine a night without texting him good night. I couldn’t imagine a morning without kissing him by my locker.
40	He was genuinely making me laugh, and not in the way you pretend to laugh at everything a cute boy says at a party when you’re hoping he’ll have too many beers and forget he’s straight. It was all happening so organically, the way it always seems to in angsty teen movies in which attractive heterosexual white kids accomplish stuff.
43	“Did they kick you out or something?” “Oh God, no! That would be un-Christian of them.” He rolled his eyes. “No, instead they did the right thing ... and tried to brainwash me. Have you ever heard of pray-the-gay-away camps?”
58	“Wieners! Who wants a wiener?” she crowed before bursting into laughter so hard she almost dropped the tray. She looked at me and Christopher and said, “Probably don’t need to ask you two, huh?”
63	What do you say when you and a guy you barely know (but have already decided you’ve fallen in love with) are driving out to The Spot? Something like ... “Hey, this is where a lot of people go to make out!”
68	Every breath, every cricket’s cry, every star, the cold cement, and his face as it floated down to join mine. We kissed. Both sides of the heart-shaped locket fitting together perfectly. We stayed like this, in our kiss, for a long time.
71	The night, the karaoke song, the long drive out of town, The Spot, all those laughs, and, most important, the kiss. The kiss that had lingered on my lips for the past ten hours. The kiss that had prompted me to come home, take one look at myself in the mirror, and say out loud to no one in particular, “You’re growing up, Marley.”
81	“That reminds me—my night with Christopher was pretty great.” “Oh, right!” Audrey popped a piece of Gorgonzola into her mouth. “Did you get laid?!” I nearly spit out my Diet Mountain Dew. “Audrey!” “Oh, please. Don’t pretend to be a prude, darling. I’ve seen your web browser history.” ...“You’re telling me you went to The Spot and you didn’t get laid? What’s the point of going

Page	Content
	<p>to The Spot, then?"</p> <p>...“Okay, we did make out.”</p> <p>...“How was it? Good breath? Bad breath? Tongue? No tongue? Does he have all his teeth?”</p> <p>“Good breath. He has all his teeth. And his tongue is none of your business.”</p> <p>“Okay, then, so yes. Tongue.” She rolled her darkly lined eyes. “But wait, isn’t he some kind of religious right-wing basket case?”</p> <p>“His family is. He isn’t,” I quickly explained. “It’s incredible. His parents have sent him to all these ‘treatment retreats’ and those horrible pray-the-gay-away camps, but he’s not a rambling lunatic like you’d imagine. He’s actually pretty secure and evolved.”</p>
83	<p>“I know. I know. I am turning into the kind of person I hate. Not even hate—loathe. I feel like that time I tried tequila at Matt Robson’s party and woke up the next morning in his parents’ pool house in your skirt with dried Play-Doh stuck to my forehead with zero recollection of how I got there.”</p>
99	<p>“I don’t know. I can’t even remember the last time I painted or drew something. Probably not since that time my parents took me out of second grade to help them make protest signs to hold outside an abortion clinic.”</p>
103	<p>And how the first boy he liked turned out to be straight and made out with him in the school supply closet anyway but promptly punched him in the face a week later.</p>
108	<p>Audrey and I got ready together at her house over a bottle of room-temperature champagne she’d stolen from her father’s liquor cabinet.</p>
117	<p>WHEN YOU’RE A GAY KID, you get used to the name calling. You get used to the cruel comments made by peers and teachers and people’s parents and on TV.</p> <p>...We create our armor for the battle to be the person we were born to be. For some it’s toughness, for some it’s creativity, for some it’s drag, for some we’re still figuring it out. It can be anything. Maybe that’s why gay people are so strong.</p>
122	<p>“Oh dear. Those two parents of his, dammit, I just want to wring their necks,” Aunt Debbie snarled between cigarette drags. “Have a seat. Can I get y’all a Diet Sprite or beer?”</p>
123	<p>Clearly, Aunt Debbie had a very different idea of what Christopher and I had been up to, but I was in no mood to explain that frozen yogurt was not slang for gay sex.</p>
125	<p>Isn’t that a hilarious word for a place that attempts to brainwash kids into not being gay? Retreat. Picture a spa but instead of deck chairs and cucumber facials, it’s twelve hours of Bible study and processed food.</p>
140	<p>He kissed me. “Can a dead person do that?” He kissed me again, this time a little longer. “Or that?” His hand moved under my shirt. His fingertips were cold, and I could feel my skin bristle into goose bumps at his touch.</p> <p>“I’ve really, really missed you,” I whispered into his neck.</p> <p>“I’ve missed you too,” he said, kissing mine.</p> <p>...“I’m going to kiss you again.” He placed his lips gently onto mine.</p> <p>“I mean, about life; where are you going to go?” I asked from beneath his lips, spoken through our kiss.</p> <p>...He walked, pulling me behind him, over to the water tower. He stretched out onto the concrete slab beneath the tower, where generations upon generations of teenagers had shared moments like this one. The same place many had experienced their first true intimacy. And as I stretched out beside Christopher and he looked into my eyes, I knew I was about to have mine.</p>

Page	Content
	As we lay there together, as we touched and kissed and clutched, you could feel our joy. ...“I’ve only gone all the way once, and it was different from this. Not bad but different. It was this kid at camp and we didn’t really know each other that well. I think we were just so freaked out by the therapy that we wanted to see if the world would end if we had sex. So we did it, and it didn’t.”
146	Look at me, in this new, altered reality. I am the pretty (after hours of hair, makeup, and Instagram filters) gay boy whose boyfriend killed himself because of his homophobic preacher parents.
149	I don’t know if I believe in God and I don’t know if I believe in spirits or ghosts or whatever ... but something is missing when you look at a dead body.
157	Two news vans were stationed on the curb, eagerly broadcasting the story of the conservative preacher’s gay son who committed suicide.
160	“You hear about these kind of people on TV, but you never think you’ll actually run into them,” Dad said. “We’ve met our fair share of conservative Christians, but this is something else altogether. How many of these camps or retreats or whatever they call it did they put that boy through?”
161	She was just as furious as the rest of us and went on to tell me all about how Christopher’s dad got up and gave a eulogy where the blatant focus was debunking the rumors that his gay son had committed suicide because of his family’s disapproval. In fact, he went on to explain that Christopher wasn’t even gay but psychologically imbalanced and that his suicide was something they had feared would happen for a long time.
169	Fancy gay events have seemingly endless open bars, and it has yet to become clear to me whether the fancy people attending said events are there for the cause or the free vodka. ...“Nice? Are you kidding me? It’s fantastic! Last month they had that lesbian chef who invented zero-calorie chocolate, and before that those triplets who came out on Ellen!”
171	Asking someone who just watched his boyfriend commit suicide what was really happening was just not something she could do.
174	“Christopher was the son of Reverend Jim and Angela Anderson, who you might know from TV. They’ve made big careers out of denouncing gay Americans in the name of God—including their own son. Their son, my boyfriend, was gay, and they hated this so much that they forced him into treatment facilities using the ‘pray-the-gay-away’ method from the time that he was thirteen up until he ran away from one here in North Carolina last week. They don’t want this part of Christopher’s story told. They don’t want the world to know that they had a gay son because they think it would ruin everything they stand for. But the truth is that while preaching this kind of hate, they were also directing it at their own son. And this went on until their son couldn’t take it anymore.”
179	It used to be the kind of park kids had birthday parties in by day and that junkies shot up in by night, but ever since the installation of security cameras, it was more just the former.
189	“But what do you say to the sources who indicate the therapy retreat your son had been on the week prior was in fact gay conversion therapy? A practice you have publicly supported on numerous occasions?” Liz asked. ...“It was a retreat for many things. Our son was there because he was mentally unstable. And we will not discuss that any further,” Reverend Jim stated flatly.

Page	Content
193	“He was my boyfriend. His parents did send him to those conversion therapy places, but ...” I cleared my throat even though I didn’t need to.
194	“Mormon. Big family, all boys. I was the youngest. And the only gay one. You can guess the rest of this story,” Harrison said with a bemused sadness. “That conversion therapy crap, those camps, counseling with men telling me all about the fiery inferno of my future unless I changed my ways. And I tried. I tried really hard to practice everything they taught me to do, to ignore all the feelings they told me to ignore, to push it down so much that eventually it was bound to simply disappear somewhere in my stomach. A dangerous little flaw to avoid and deny with all the power in my soul.”
198	However, they were also the most infuriating. She didn’t know Christopher, had never even met him, so attempting to talk to her about him was about as helpful as the five bowls of cereal I’d taken to binge-eating every night before bed.
209	“You can’t reinvent your version of the story either. He’s dead and, yes, his parents were awful to him, and, no, they shouldn’t have put him through all those conversion treatments, but he didn’t kill himself.”
213	The next phrase scrolls up on the screen: who killed himself due to the isolation he felt from his homophobic parents.
218	<p>“Darling! There’s a minibar!” Audrey dances across the room toward the fridge in the kitchenette. “We’re having champagne!”</p> <p>Being underage aside, we have zero business having champagne.</p> <p>“Isn’t the whole point of champagne to toast something?” I ask.</p> <p>Audrey is already digging through the fridge and pulling out the bottle of expensive-looking champagne.</p> <p>...She pops open the bottle, the sound fierce as a bullet, the foamy booze spilling onto her skirt.</p> <p>“Thank God this isn’t red,” Audrey says into the wet mark across her vintage skirt before pouring the wine into our two glasses. The carbonated bubbles rise farther and farther to the top before disappearing.</p> <p>...We clink our glasses and take a long drink, the acidic bubbles burning down my throat.</p>

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	6
Bitch	4
Dick	1
Fag/faggot	5
Piss	3
Prick	1
Shit	9