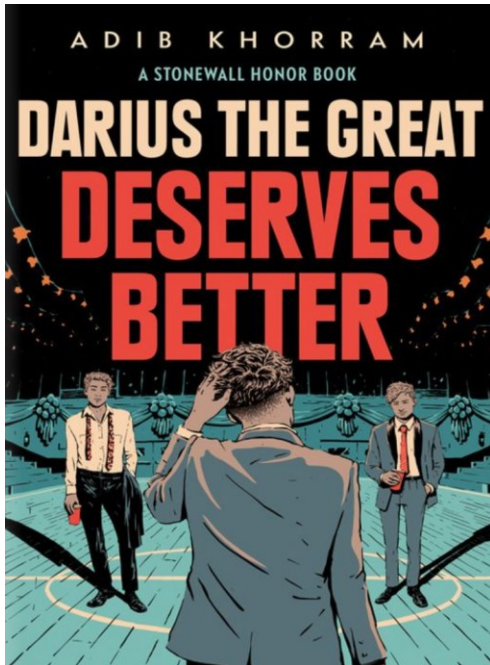


DARIUS THE GREAT DESERVES BETTER



Young Adult

By Adib Khorram

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CONTENT WARNING

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Book Summary:

A homosexual teenager questions his feelings for his boyfriend and other young men.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; sexual nudity; alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; mild/infrequent profanity and derogatory terms; controversial social and racial commentary; references to racism; and references to depression.

3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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3	<p>The first time Landon kissed me, we had eaten at Northwest Dumplings after closing up shop at Rose City, and I'd been nervous, because I'd never kissed anyone before.</p> <p>...I didn't go in expecting to kiss him, which is why I made the extremely unfortunate choice of having too many onions at dinner.</p> <p>When Landon leaned in close, I thought maybe I had something in my teeth. Because I never thought someone like him would want to kiss someone like me.</p> <p>..."Hey. Can I kiss you?"</p> <p>And I was kind of surprised and amazed, because I really liked Landon, and I really did want him to kiss me.</p> <p>I wanted my first kiss to be with Landon Edwards.</p> <p>His lips were warm and soft, and he let them linger against mine. But then I made the mistake of sighing, which blew a noxious cloud of onion breath into his mouth.</p> <p>He broke the kiss and giggled.</p> <p>...He squeezed my hand and said, "That was good. Even with the onions. Can we do it again?"</p> <p>So we did, and the kissing got even better once we started using our tongues.</p>
5	<p>Chip already knew I was gay- the whole team knew, since I told them at one of our team-building things when training started over the summer- but I was pretty sure Trent did not.</p>
6	<p>How did you ask a guy if you were officially boyfriends?</p>
7	<p>"Later, Dairy Queen," Trent said.</p>
12	<p>"And I feel like maybe we should be kissing or something."</p> <p>Landon laughed at that. "We don't have to if you don't want to. We can just talk."</p> <p>"I like kissing you, though."</p> <p>Landon smiled and bit his lip.</p> <p>"I like kissing you too."</p> <p>He brought his hand up to my face, and then ran his fingers along the edges of my fade.</p> <p>...I also really liked how Landon was very slow and deliberate with his lips. He had the fullest lips I'd ever seen on a white guy.</p> <p>...I did like how it felt when my tongue met his. How careful he was with it.</p> <p>But then I didn't like it when Landon moved his hand lower, and his fingertips brushed the skin beneath my waistband.</p> <p>I couldn't tell if he was doing it on purpose or not, but I didn't know how to stop him.</p> <p>Especially since, like I said, I really did like the kissing part a great deal, and to say something I would have had to stop.</p>
14	<p>I mean, obviously my parents already knew about Landon and me. They'd seen us kiss before.</p> <p>But not kiss kiss.</p>
16	<p>It's not like Shirin Kellner was mad or upset when I told her I was gay.</p>
18	<p>"I know we've talked some about dating. And sex. And consent. But I figured we had better revisit."</p> <p>...That was over the summer, right after Landon and I had our first onion-tinged kiss.</p> <p>...The worst was when I was thirteen and woke up with sticky sheets.</p>
19	<p>"We were kissing."</p> <p>..."First, it's okay to hit pause on kissing so you can communicate. Relationships, or even just casual, you know, whatever, need communication. And second, if you don't know</p>

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	what to say, you can use your hands to guide his. So if you don't want them...uh...in your pants, you can gently guide them to somewhere better, like your back or your knee or whatever."
20	Ladon told me he'd done more with girls than guys. That he had his first kiss in sixth grade.
22	Actually, Sorhab was the first person I told I was gay.
23	I told Sorhab about Landon taking me for my haircut, and about visiting Rose City after, and how Dad had walked in on us making out.
27	"Don't look at my ass, Dairy Queen," Trent muttered when Coach Winfield was out of earshot.
30	I kept my cleats, because Gabe was pretty good-looking, his stomach flat and brown with a little bit of hair right above his waistline, and it was kind of distracting.
33	Coach Bentley brought it with her from her old school. She said it's to promote team unity and fight the cult of toxic masculinity in sports.
38	I pulled on my shirt first, even before my underwear, because the risk of someone seeing my cold penis still seemed less alarming than having them see my stomach.
48	I couldn't remember a time where I didn't know my grandmothers were queer. Even before I figured that out about myself, they were just part of the fabric of my life. ...That they would talk about when Oma came out. That they would tell me about the history I was too young to witness going on around me: Prop 8, and Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and the fight for marriage equality.
55	He looked up and kissed me, first on my cheek and then on my lips. ...Landon wrapped his hands around my neck and kissed me again. I put my hands on his waist and kissed him back. It felt like a scene out of a movie, kissing each other under the awning while rain soaked the streets.
56	I liked the way that dark-wash jeans looked on me. Especially my butt, which, like I said, had seen some benefit from all the squats I'd been doing. Landon liked how I looked in them too. (Again, especially my butt.)
59	I met Landon my first day at Rose City- Mr. Edwards introduced us while he gave me a tour- but we got to know each other when we worked the Rose City Teas booth at Portland Pride, serving a bright pink hibiscus tisane. Landon had been to Pride before- he came out as bi when he was in middle school- but it was my first time. I had only come out to my parents like two weeks before.
60	"I'm not. I'm gay," I said. ...Landon leaned up to kiss me, and then his hands went from my belt loops to the small of my back. I kissed him with my lips closed, but then he started to add some tongue, and to squeeze my butt, and I leaned away. ...I swallowed and glanced at the open stockroom door. "I can't have an erection on the job."
63	He kissed me, and I kissed him. He giggled when I nuzzled into his neck, and sighed when I stroked under his chin with the back of my hand. "My boyfriend," he whispered, and I smiled against his mouth. Landon stepped toward me, which pushed me up against the dishwasher. It beeped shut, but we ignored it and kept kissing. I angled my hips so I wasn't pressing against Landon,

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	because I didn't want him to feel how excited I was. Not after I just told him I wanted us to take things slowly.
65	<p>I hit play, and we finished the episodes, and I kept my hands folded across my lap, because I kept thinking about Landon.</p> <p>I really needed to go number three.</p> <p>I usually did it before bed, and sometimes in the mornings, too, after my run. Well, most mornings, if I'm being honest.</p> <p>Ever since Dr. Howell had changed my prescription, it was like my sex drive had gone from impulse to warp.</p> <p>...I wondered what it was that made me imagine Landon touching me when I masturbated, but cringe when he reached below my waist in real life.</p>
77	After our trip to Iran, I had to deal with my fair share of ostracism and rumor mongering. (Trent Bolger even tried to start a rumor that I had joined ISIS).
79	<p>"Perv alert," Trent said behind me.</p> <p>"Shut up, Trent."</p> <p>"Make me, Dairy Queen." He jogged ahead of me, flashing me his middle finger.</p> <p>..."It could be worse. Last year he kept calling me a terrorist."</p>
104	Chip answered the door in a pair of soft gray sweatpants that looked really nice on him. Like, not-wearing-any-underwear nice.
106	Was it the kind of party people had on TV? With drugs and alcohol and sex and broken furniture?
113	<p>Landon's arms slid down to my hips. He kissed me one more time, then pulled me toward the living room. I settled on the corner of the big beige couch, and Landon sat on my lap, his knees on either side of my hips and his butt resting on my thighs.</p> <p>"Hey." He kissed my nose. "You were awesome today."</p> <p>"Yeah?"</p> <p>He kissed me again, on the corner of the mouth.</p> <p>"Yeah. I loved watching you play."</p> <p>"Really?"</p> <p>"Really. Have you seen yourself in those shorts?"</p> <p>I couldn't breathe.</p> <p>"You like them?" I squeaked.</p> <p>Landon's eyes twinkled. "I do." And then he kissed me again, and his tongue slipped into my mouth, and I decided breathing wasn't all that important anyway.</p> <p>I'm not going to lie: With all the kissing, I got an erection pretty quickly.</p> <p>And I couldn't tell for sure, but I thought Landon had one too. It was either that or his belt buckle rubbing against me as he rocked back and forth on his hips.</p> <p>"Is this okay?" he whispered.</p> <p>"Um."</p> <p>What Landon was doing felt good.</p> <p>Really good.</p> <p>If he didn't stop, I was facing a containment breach of an entirely different sort.</p> <p>...He smiled and kissed me again. His kisses trailed from my mouth to my neck, and then down to my collarbone, which felt weird.</p> <p>...He sat back, biting his lip, and glanced down at my lap.</p>

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	<p>I wished I had worn jeans instead of my joggers. "Do you want to go somewhere less...exposed?"</p>
120	<p>"I was having a good time, though." "Me too." "I could tell." My ears burned, and Landon's cheeks flushed. He bit his lip. "I kind of wish we'd been alone."</p>
121	<p>I kissed Landon. ...Landon kissed me again.</p>
123	<p>I leaned down and kissed him. His mouth tasted a bit like bacon, but I kind of liked it. I led him to my bed and scooted into the corner, letting him rest against my chest. I wrapped my arms around him, kissed his cheek, his jaw, his neck, and then I rested my head against his and closed my eyes. I loved cuddling with Landon. But it always turned into kissing sooner or later. This time was no different: After a few minutes, Landon shifted and brought his lips toward mine. He was so slow and deliberate and tender, with the way he ran his hands through my hair, and grazed my lips with his, and rested his forehead against mine. I kind of melted. When he pulled away, his lips were puffy, and his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were soft like a cat's. He smiled and reached out for me, taking my hand and pulling it toward his stomach. He slipped our hands under his shirt. The hairs above his waistband tickled my palm. ..."I don't ever want to pressure you. But I have to be honest and, well, sex is important to me. As part of a relationship."</p>
125	<p>My bedroom still smelled faintly of Landon's cologne, and I felt a little sticky and unsettled as I breathed in his scent. I kind of wanted to go number three.</p>
127	<p>"We talked some. About stuff." He kept looking at me. "Sex stuff."</p>
133	<p>Chip stood right next to me, radiating body heat and a faint scent of sweat and deodorant as he pulled his shirt over his head. I slipped my joggers on and got out of there as fast as I could, because I didn't want anyone to see my erection.</p>
134	<p>I sat down next to him, but with a good foot between us, because I was feeling weird about getting an erection when I was changing next to him, and the way my skin hummed when he was close to me.</p>
141	<p>"And he said our family was terrorists." I breathed in sharply. I was almost used to being called a terrorist. Almost. But I hated for someone to call my sister one. I hated that people could look at her, look at our family, and say that.</p>

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144	<p>"One of Laleh's classmates called her a terrorist," I said. ... "She said it's been happening ever since we went to Iran." ... "It's just. Well, Laleh never stood out before that. She got treated like all the white kids. But now..." "Iranians are white, though." I bit my lip. Just because that's the blank we fill out on forms at the doctor's office doesn't make it true. No one at school ever treated me like I was white once they found out my mom was from Iran. Laleh's classmates weren't treating her like she was white. ...I thought about Melanie Kellner, trying to explain racism to Laleh's teacher. ... "Sometimes people just don't like Iranians. Or anyone from the Middle East, really." ... "You know, when I first moved here, people said things to me too. Especially after 9/11." ... "I guess I just got used to it. And I worked hard to be as white as I could. That's one reason I didn't teach you Farsi like I should have."</p>
149	<p>He had a mellow voice, and there was something in it that kind of made me wonder if he was queer too. Sometimes I did this thing where I imagined other people I met were queer. Just because I liked to think there were lots of us around.</p>
152	<p>"What about Micah calling her a terrorist?" Miss Hawn's eyes went wide. "Micah said that?" ... "That's certainly unacceptable," Miss Hawn said. "But I don't think he understands the context of what he's saying." My voice shook. "I think he does." ... "He sees stuff like that on TV all the time. That's how white people see people like Laleh and me." Miss Hawn clenched her hands. "Not all of us," she said.</p>
154	<p>"Sometimes people think they're doing a good thing, and so they ignore that they're doing a bad thing too. Miss Hawn and Grandma were excited about the gifted program, so they just ignored all the microaggressions and stuff." ...I didn't want to explain why D-Cheese was an insult. I never wanted to discuss anything penis-related with Laleh Kellner.</p>
158	<p>"I think Miss Hawn doesn't get that Laleh's classmates are being racist. Or maybe she doesn't care."</p>
173	<p>"Just so you know." He glanced down again. "I really like your underwear." My own face went to Red Alert. And for a second, I wondered what Landon looked like in his underwear.</p>
174	<p>Landon leaned in and kissed my shoulder, something he'd never done before. It was just a quick peck, but it felt like a lot more than that. "Seems like a shame to get all dressed again, though." "Stope," I said, but my skin broke out in goose bumps. I had this idea. This image of us making out in the bathroom. ...I hooked my fingers into Landon's belt loops and leaned down to kiss him on the</p>

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	<p>shoulder. It was a good spot to kiss, I decided.</p>
183	Trent shrugged. "Later, D-Cheese."
184	I wanted to tell him to go find someone else to bother. Someone who wasn't D-Bag, D's Nuts, D-Breath, D-Cheese.
211	<p>"When I was your age, guys could never do this." "Some guys still won't." Grandma snorted and said, "The patriarchy at work."</p>
236	<p>"I never told Babou I was gay." ..."You know, I knew your parents had trans friends in college. But it was still hard coming out to them." ...I had never heard my grandmothers talk about Oma's coming out.</p>
238	<p>And then he rested his hand on my leg, kind of on my inner thigh. I stared at it: the way his fingers rested against the smooth gray fabric of my dress pants. His pinky traced the inseam back and forth, back and forth. ..But I didn't want to get an erection in grandmother's car.</p>
239	I still felt kind of weird and tingly where Landon's hand had been on my inner thigh, perilously close to my penis.
252	<p>Landon kissed my shoulder. I sighed. He smiled at me, and then leaned in closer to press his lips against mine, warm and soft and lingering. It was gentle and nice. His hand moved from my waist to the back of my neck, fingers playing along my hairline before moving up my head and twisting into my curls. ..."Is this okay?" he asked. "Yeah," I said, because when we were kissing, I didn't have to talk. I didn't have to think. ...Landon scooted closer until he was almost in my lap and kissed me again. He tapped his tongue against my teeth, and I opened up a little bit to meet it. But then he did this thing where he hollowed out his cheeks and sucked my tongue into his mouth. My breath hitched. It was the weirdest thing I'd ever felt. Weird and excellent. I finally had to break the kiss and catch my breath. ..."Someone's excited," he whispered, and poked at the weird pooch my jeans made in the front. "That's a joner," I whispered back, and Landon giggled. I mean, I was hard, but it was trapped against my left thigh. Landon used his thumb to trace my lips. I kissed the little pad of it, but then he stuck it in my mouth and rubbed it against the inside of my cheek. It was the kind of thing you would see in porn. (If I'm being honest, it was the kind of thing I had, in fact, seen in porn.) ...I kissed his shoulder. He rested his hand on my thigh (my right one, thankfully) and rubbed it back and forth. He leaned in for another kiss, and he did that tongue-sucking thing again. ...Landon kissed me and rested his head against my chest again.</p>

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264	<p>"I know it's cliché, but. Well." His smirk slowly faded, and a blush crept up from his jawline to his cheeks. "Sometimes couples will, you know. Get together. After a dance." His face was nearly glowing. ...Like Landon only wanted sex from me. ..."Think about it," Landon said, and kissed me on the shoulder.</p>
275	<p>He stepped closer to me and rested his hands on my chest. I let go of the tie and leaned down to kiss him. "Hey," I said. His hands slid down to my waist.</p>
276	<p>He pulled me in and kissed me. Right in front of my mom.</p>
279	<p>"Hey. No jerking off at school, Dairy Queen."</p>
280	<p>"Don't act like you can't tell. He's got such a boner for you." ..."Later, D-Cheese."</p>
281	<p>THE FORESKINNED FIDDLE</p>
282	<p>All around us, everyone else was dancing and smiling and even stealing a few kisses here and there.</p>
283	<p>And then I decided to risk it: I leaned in and gave him a super quick kiss, barely more than a peck on the lips.</p>
285	<p>He pulled my head down to kiss me. I kissed him back, but not too hard: We were still at school, and it just felt weird to be making out in the halls of Chapel Hill High School. The sound of echoing footsteps made me pause, my lips hovering over Landon's. ...He slipped his fingertips under my waistband, right along me hip crease. "You remember what we talked about?" "Um." "My dad's gone tonight." He leaned in and kissed me again. "We'd have the house to ourselves." ...But what if Landon didn't like the way I looked? What if I was too big? What if I was too small? What if we didn't fit together the way Landon wanted us to? What if I didn't like it? What if I didn't want it yet?</p>
286	<p>I don't know why it bothered me, the way he said it. Like I had to want sex. ...To be clear, I did want sex. I really did. And I even thought maybe it would be fun to do it with Landon. ...I thought maybe I'd be ready for sex when that fear was overshadowed by the wanting. When the gravity of my desire shifted.</p>
288	<p>Trent stared at us- our arms around each other, Landon pressing me back against a locker- while Chip's brow furrowed. ...His eyes lingered where Landon's fingers where still hooked under my waistband. ..."Time to play the foreskinned fiddle?"</p>
289	<p>"Have fun!" Trent cackled. "Rubber up!" ..."That got really weird all of a sudden. When he mentioned us having sex." He glanced</p>

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	<p>down at my pants. "Playing the 'foreskinned fiddle,' huh?" ... "So are you..." Landon's eyes darted down again. "What?" "You know." I shook my head. "Uncut?" "Intact," I said. ... "It doesn't bother me. I've hooked up with uncut guys before." "Hooked up?" "Just jerking off and stuff." I didn't want to know about Landon masturbating other guys. "Is that all you want to do? Hook up?" ... "Why won't you be honest with me? Why does Chip know you're uncut anyway?" ... "You won't even take your shirt off around me. But he's seen your dick?"</p>
291	<p>"I've told you sex is important to me. But you never want to talk about it. You want to go to dances and look cute together, you want me to cook for you and your family, but when it comes to doing stuff-stuff that I told you I wanted, stuff that matters to me in a relationship- you say you're 'not ready'. We've been together for four months now and you won't even take your shirt off around me. You're a coward. And you're selfish." ... "But you'll go around swinging your dick in front of Chip?"</p>
295	<p>"I'm queer. I've always liked guys too," Chip whispered.</p>
296	<p>"Trent's not homophobic. He knows I'm queer." "You can have queer friends and still be homophobic, Chip."</p>
302	<p>"I'm sorry I kept pressuring you. I didn't mean to. I just wanted us to be close. Physically."</p>
304	<p>No one ever held my hand or kissed me or smiled the way he smiled when he saw me.</p>
310	<p>I was feeling weird and sad, I didn't even go number three before tucking myself in.</p>
314	<p>It was because Sohrab had teased me after seeing me naked in the showers after we played soccer. He said my penis looked like it was wearing a turban. Was my entire life going to be one long string of penile humiliations? Maybe it would. Maybe that is what it means to have a penis.</p>
317	<p>"Your dad said the two of you were thinking about...sex."</p>
318	<p>"You always had this look on your face. Every time we kissed." ... "I'm not mad you're gay. I promise."</p>
324	<p>"Your dad and I both had to let go of our picture of who Oma was, and make a whole new one. But I also had to make a new picture of myself. I'd spent my life thinking I was a straight woman. But I was still in love with Oma. So what did that make me? A lesbian? Bisexual? Queer?"</p>
325	<p>"Let us know about Pride. Maybe we can go together. If the weather is nice."</p>
328	<p>"Don't ask me. We never did anything other than kissing."</p>
339	<p>Chip chewed on his lower lip. He had really nice lips.</p>

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	2
Dick	2
Queer	10
Shit	1