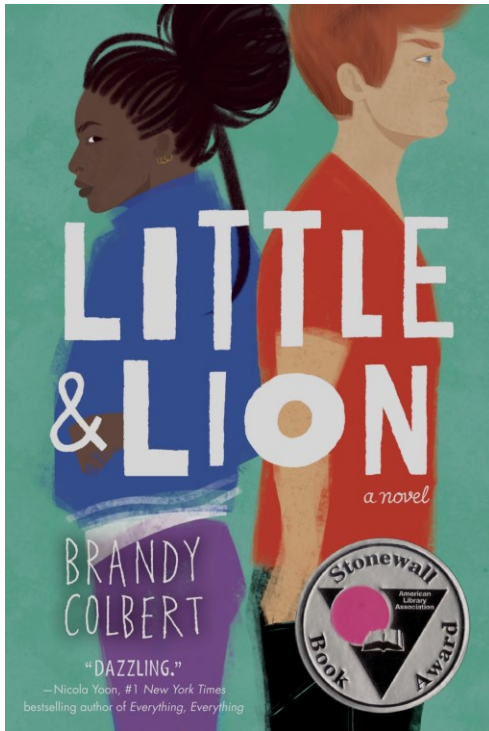


LITTLE AND LION



Book Summary:

A high school girl learns more about herself and her sexuality while helping care for her mentally ill brother.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; alternate sexualities; and profanity/derogatory term.

Young Adult

By Brandy Colbert

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3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
52	<p>“You and me? First of all, you’re not my type; your boobs are way too big. But also, it’s not like that, Suzette. Like, you start making out with girls and so we have to make out because I like girls, too.”</p> <p>...But I’d only ever kissed boys, and only two at that, and always with our clothes on.</p>
53	<p>“Says the girl who’s known she was a lesbian since the day she was born,” I say, rolling my eyes. “I was eight, smartass,” she replies.</p> <p>...There’s still too much I don’t understand, like why, even though everything I did with Iris felt good, I was still so shy about kissing or touching her first. Even after weeks of fooling around.</p>
86	<p>I stop somewhere along the smooth line of her neck. Which doesn’t do much to calm my nerves; it only makes me wonder what it would feel like to kiss her there.</p>
87	<p>Before Iris, I thought I liked guys exclusively, even though the little experience I had with them felt more like playing doctor. I haven’t been attracted to any other girls... until now.</p> <p>...Even before I met Iris, I was tired of all the jokes and assumptions I’d heard about bisexual people: that they’re just being greedy or doing it for attention or trying it on for size “before they cross over to full-on gay.”</p>
94	<p>“I don’t know anything except that I like Emil and I like a girl and I guess that means I’m bisexual, but... am I? Shouldn’t I know for sure? You know you’re straight. Dee knows she’s gay. Other people know they don’t fit into either of those categories...”</p> <p>...“It just feels... People don’t really care if you like more than one person if you’re gay or straight, but if you say you’re bi, it’s different. Like the same rules don’t apply.”</p>
106	<p>“I would totally try to get with him if I liked dudes.”</p> <p>...“I’m just saying, I get why you’re looking at him like he’s your last chance on earth for sex.”</p>
109	<p>“No fair,” Grace says, splashing us as she finds her footing. “Black people aren’t supposed to be able to swim.”</p> <p>...Grace laughs and wipes a few strands of green hair from her forehead. “I just mean... you know. Black people don’t, like, swim.”</p>
138	<p>Would we sneak off to the back room to kiss, or would we flirt with each other all day, letting the tension build up until we could leave the shop for the evening?</p>
147	<p>Emil slides his hand slowly up my arm, sending goose bumps tingling up and down my skin. Catherine is downstairs and Lionel is waiting in the car, but I want to kiss Emil so badly that I don’t care. And when he leans forward, I don’t overthink it. My eyes close as his lips brush the slope of one cheekbone and then the other, followed by the spot below my right ear. He pauses and I wonder where he will go next, take in a breath as his mouth falls down to my neck and along the line of my chin before he kisses my lips. Slowly. Softly.</p> <p>I kiss him back, resting one hand on his shoulder while I run a fingertip along the perimeter of his ear. I bump against a hearing aid and pull back, starting to apologize, but he shakes his head and kisses me again and then his arms wrap around my waist as he draws me closer. I like that I can feel his body heat through his T-shirt and how his skin smells like blankets and sleep, and I wonder if that’s the scent I’d wake up to if we spent the night together. My skin burns even more at the thought.</p> <p>Emil’s hands move down my waist, sliding just under the thin fabric of my tank top to touch me on either side of my spine, and I realize he’s searching for my dimples of Venus, the indentations in the small of my back. He must have seen them when I was in my bikini. “I like these,” he murmurs.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>I like you. I kiss him harder so I won't be tempted to say it aloud.</p>
149	<p>Iris and I are careful—until we aren't. We've been locking our door at night because sometimes we fall asleep before one of us can move back to our own bed, and the girls on our floor don't always knock before they come in. We never touch outside our locked dorm room. ...I wake up in her bed and yawn, my mouth cottony from too much vodka. ...And now she's spooning me, her cheek flat against my back, and I flush for a moment when I remember what I said last night. That I told her no one has ever made me feel the way she does. ...When that doesn't work she uses her lips, kissing along my naked skin, but I eventually, reluctantly pull away.</p>
153	<p>"I should have told everyone I was gay when I first got here." She pauses, then: "Did you know I was president of my middle school's gay-straight alliance? A couple of people told me they came out to their parents because I was so brave, so open. What would they think if they could see me now?" ...A couple of times Iris said we should walk out of our room holding hands, or kiss each other in the common room, and I'd agree in the moment. ...When I was lying with my head against her shoulder and her arm was draped over my side, her fingertips tracing invisible patterns along the slope of my hip.</p>
156	<p>Iris turns and we look at each other, finally, her light brown eyes connecting with my own. "Do you... Did you ever feel like I was taking advantage of you?" Her voice is so small that I want to go over and wrap my arms around her and kiss her until the pain goes away. ..."Never," I say firmly. "Not once." "But we always drank. I know it made you more comfortable, and maybe that wasn't right... to be with you like that."</p>
158	<p>We weren't even close to being the biggest drinkers in our dorm, but she kept a bottle of raspberry-flavored vodka under her bed that we sipped from during second semester. She'd procured it with the help of her older sister when she was home over winter break, smuggled back to school in a giant duffel bag with her lacrosse gear. So when DeeDee says she'd like to get drunk because she's fighting with Alicia and I'm the only person she wants to see, I immediately think of Iris, the relationship between girls and liquor. Iris and I stopped drinking when everything fell apart between us, and it never occurred to me to use alcohol as a coping mechanism. We drank raspberry vodka on the nights I wanted to be closer to her. DeeDee comes over armed with a fifth of spiced rum tucked in her overnight bag, and when she shows it to me up in my room, it reminds me so much of Iris that for a moment I can't breathe.</p>
162	<p>"The worst is over," I say, remembering what Iris told me when we drank together for the first time. I didn't think she could possibly be right, as medicinally awful as the vodka had tasted. But each drink went down smoother after that first one, every single time, even if I never did grow to like the taste. I grab the bottle, tip it back, and send the honey-colored fire tearing down my throat. This particular bottle of rum is so not fucking around. But I swallow it down; stick out my tongue and cough a bit as I hand it back to Dee.</p>
164	<p>"So, it's not about liking guys and girls?" She takes another drink of rum and Lion passes so now it's my turn, but I'm already feeling so hot inside that I don't know if another drink is a good idea.</p>

Page	Content
165	<p>Maybe I'm bi, maybe I'm queer, maybe I'll never like another girl besides Iris and Rafaela. ... "I'm just mad about Alicia. And this rum is really strong. And I thought—well, after you told me what happened with Emil..."</p>
167	<p>Because technically, Iris and I were never a couple. Not in the traditional sense. We were locked doors and long, slow kisses that tasted of raspberry vodka and promises to keep whatever happened in our dorm between us.</p>
168	<p>"They wrote on our door. The word dykes," I say, grabbing the bottle from the center of our triangle. I take a long swig and it burns my tongue but it doesn't hurt so much going down this time. My body takes well to the liquor—to its warmth and the silent but steadfast promise that whatever I say out loud next won't hurt as much as it did at the time.</p>
169	<p>"I can't believe you went to such a homophobic school," DeeDee says, shaking her head. "It wasn't, though. Lots of people were out and there's a gay-straight alliance and... it wasn't even everyone on our floor. But the bigots made sure we all knew how they felt. Iris and I were new to Dinsmore and they'd been there a whole year before us and... it sounds stupid now, but it was easier not to stand up to them." "Well, I still can't believe they treated you like that."</p>
172	<p>He goes ahead of me down the stairs and I wonder, for a moment, if he's taken something—a pill, maybe, or even coke, though he once told me he has no intention of putting anything up his nose.</p>
180	<p>Rafaela and I held hands in public and kissed in public and when we were alone, I wasn't shy about touching her first.</p>
181	<p>I tie my apron around my waist and notice hers isn't even fastened. The strings dangle freely on either side of her. My eyes travel upward, to the black tank she's wearing with the oversized armholes that reveal the sides of a hot-pink bra underneath.</p>
191	<p>"But I don't know if I'll ever talk to my mom again. Even if she got over the abortion, she wouldn't exactly agree with my lifestyle."</p>
192	<p>I see Iris's face as she hovers over me, her breasts bare and her blond curls messy and damp from our sweat. ... "You've kissed a girl? Brava!" Rafaela cheers, and it feels a bit like she's mocking me, but at least she doesn't think I'm a bigot. "Did you like it?" I nod. "So... are you bi?" "Pan," she says, and when I don't say anything right away, she clarifies, "Pansexual?" ... "I just don't really believe in restricting love to one or two genders."</p>
206	<p>Emil is right behind me, and before I can tell him to wait for me to find the light, his hands are on my hips. Turning me around to face him. I can't see him, but I can tell he is smiling, just from his energy. I like the moment before we kiss; his warmth becomes my warmth, and its combined force envelops me before I even touch him, like we're in a cocoon built for two. Emil gathers my dreads in one hand and pushes them away from my shoulders. His lips start at my neck and graze across my earlobe, and my skin ripples with goose bumps as his mouth meets my own. We stand in place for a while. A breeze skips across the night, lighting on our skin and fluttering the chimes above the back porch as we kiss. We feel our way across the room and onto the futon, and then we're lying down. I silently marvel at how Emil's lips can touch mine in the softest, sweetest way, and then in the next instant leave me breathless. We pull apart after a while and we are still. The room is softly lit by the dim moonlight filtering in through the windows, and I look at the outline of Emil beside me, run my fingertip along his temple and over the hearing aid behind his left ear.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>I trail my finger down his neck and shoulder and along the soft part of his arm until he shivers. He lightly catches my arm by the wrist and pulls it toward him, and I rest my palm flat on his chest, against his heart.</p> <p>“Suzette,” he says with an ache in his voice.</p> <p>It’s cool up here, almost cold, but I want to be as close to him as possible, so I begin to unbutton his shirt. Once the buttons are undone, he shrugs it off and peels off his undershirt, too. I sit up and turn my back to him, holding my dreads up with one hand while I gesture with the other to the zipper that falls down the back of my dress. Emil has it undone in seconds and, when I point to the clasp, my bra, too.</p> <p>I slowly push down the top of my dress and toss my bra to the floor, and I almost wish the moon were hidden behind clouds tonight because when I turn back around he’s looking at me so intently that it makes me self-conscious. I want to cross my arms over my chest; no one has seen me without clothes on since Iris, and she was the first. But I sit here, completely still, and I let him look at me.</p> <p>I breathe out as he touches my breasts, first with his hands and then with his mouth. It feels so good that I moan softly, and I’m embarrassed at being so audible, but he kisses just above my navel and says my name again. I lie back and his hands move to my thighs, to the hem of my dress and then under it. He bends his head to kiss between my legs and I jerk away.</p>
210	<p>He leans over to kiss the apples of my cheeks. Then he presses his mouth to mine, just as the wind chimes dance their way through a new song.</p>
211	<p>We didn’t have sex, but we would have, if I hadn’t stopped it.</p>
221	<p>“Well, he said it feels like he’s known me his whole life, and I know how cheesy that sounds. Guys have said it before and it felt like they were just trying to get into my pants. But... I believe him. And I feel the same way.”</p>
222	<p>She kneels next to me. My skin is warm and the coolness of her fingertips makes me shiver. Her lips find me, too, and it’s the second night we’ve done this, but this time I’m not so tense. I let myself lean into her and my mouth opens with hers and I kiss her like I wanted to the first time. Her palms slip behind my neck and she pulls me closer, kissing me so deeply I feel as if I might burst into flames. I push my fingers through her curls, thinking how strange and good this is, how unexpected even though it’s the second time.</p> <p>...“What are we doing?” It’s the same question I asked last night, except I remember the mild panic in my voice, shocked that one minute we’d been drinking and complaining about the girls on our floor and the next I was pressed against the wall, her lips moving in a swift line from my chin to my collarbone. Tonight there is no panic, just lazy wonder; more of an excuse to prolong what’s happening rather than stop it.</p> <p>...“I didn’t know you were into girls,” she says as we remove our shirts, as my hands slide hesitantly over the side of her body.</p> <p>“I didn’t, either,” I say, and when I look at her, she smiles.</p> <p>When we’re both in just our underwear, we sit on the edge of her bed for a while. Just looking at each other.</p> <p>“You can touch me,” she says.</p> <p>And I do, because it’s odd that I’ve been around other girls my whole life and never felt like this. So many gym periods and sleepovers spent changing in front of one another and I never felt this urg. The citrus shower gel I’ve smelled on her since our first morning at Dinsmore is different now. It is so distinctly her and it is the best thing I’ve ever smelled and I keep dipping my head toward the space between her collarbone and her neck to fill my nose with the scent.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>My hand shakes as my fingers skate across Iris’s skin—her incredibly soft skin. I slide my fingers across the smoothness of her stomach and linger around her breasts until she exhales and kisses me again. After a few moments, she takes my hand in her own and holds them both over her heart.</p> <p>“I’ve been with other girls,” she says. “I’ve only been with girls.”</p> <p>“I know.”</p> <p>...I move her hand to my chest. “No one has ever done this to me.”</p> <p>She gently pushes me back on the bed and we start kissing again and when her hand moves between my legs I don’t stop her. When my breathing changes, when she asks if I want her to stop, but it is so clear she doesn’t want to stop, I say no. And when we’re lying there, after the space around us has transformed from a small, dark dorm room into an explosion of fireworks only I can see and then back again, she asks if it was okay.</p> <p>“That was amazing,” I say, breathless and wondering if I should feel more embarrassed about what just happened. One of the boys I kissed back in L.A. had tried to put his hand down my jeans and I got too nervous, so I pushed him away. He seemed to know what he was doing up to that point, but I can’t imagine anyone ever making me feel as good as Iris did.</p> <p>“Lily and Bianca would be losing their shit right now,” she says, kissing my shoulder.</p> <p>Should I be losing my shit? Maybe, but the only thing I feel nervous about is how inexperienced I am, how I don’t know if Iris expects me to return the favor tonight.</p> <p>“Lily and Bianca need to get laid,” I say, and Iris laughs with me.</p>
237	<p>He kisses me, directly on the lips, and I think how good it feels, to be so open about what we’re becoming... whatever that is.</p>
242	<p>Justin finds us in the dining room next to a half dozen types of tequila. He’s carefully holding three plastic cups of beer, the foam almost brimming over the top.</p>
245	<p>I was nervous in the tree house when we drank the rum with DeeDee, but that was controlled.</p>
246	<p>Even as the crisp, cold beer starts to soften the edges of the room, it’s impossible to relax.</p> <p>...They’re always attached to each other in some way: Lionel grabbing her hand or Rafaela standing behind him with her arms around his waist, her cheek flat against his back; after he takes his turn at flip cup he swivels around and they kiss for a few beats longer than necessary.</p>
249	<p>She touches the center of my top lip, briefly rests her finger in the little groove right under my nose ring, and I close my eyes out of instinct, like the moment I know I’m about to be kissed. I hold my breath while she glides the tip of her finger around the edge of my mouth.</p> <p>“You have great lips,” she says, and I finally open my eyes, finally exhale.</p> <p>...We look in the mirror together with our matching lips, and I think how easy it would be to kiss her now.</p>
251	<p>I think that if I’d made a move, she would have kissed me back. That we might be pressed against the cool marble sinks, touching and still kissing and not just wanting.</p> <p>...He kisses me in response. Soft and sweet and unexpected, square on the lips. I kiss him back, and when we pull away, I smile.</p> <p>...Just then a guy lopez over from the porch and announces to the entire line of people waiting for the keg: “Fight! In the garage!”</p>
263	<p>He kisses me first this time and makes up for the kiss he didn’t return. His lips are warm and understanding as they meet mine, as if he knows how much I need to be needed tonight.</p> <p>I take my time removing his clothes, stopping to touch the parts of his body I haven’t seen before.</p> <p>He sucks in a breath and releases it unevenly as my fingers glide across his skin. I’ve never seen a</p>

Page	Content
	<p>boy completely naked; even when we were up in the tree house that night, Emil never took off his boxers. Now he strokes the dimples at the small of my back as I look at him a little too long. I ask if he has a condom and he nods, grabs one from his jeans on the floor. But he stops and asks if I'm sure before he puts it on. I'm no surer of what I'm doing than when I was with Iris, but like when I was with her, this feels right.</p> <p>We go slow, and still sometimes it is so uncomfortable I have to bite my lip to keep from whimpering. I don't want him to think he's hurting me because he's so gentle the whole time, as if my body is sculpted of glass. He kisses and kisses me, and each time our lips meet, I think the strangest thing about being so close to Emil is that it's not strange at all.</p> <p>And I don't think about Iris. Not until we're done and he is wrapped around me like a spoon, his arms holding me tight like she used to, like he'll never let me go.</p>
266	"The last time I saw that guy, he said he was going to 'fuck the gay' out of me."
280	"And we brought blankets and booze." Rafaela points to the canvas backpack on her shoulders. "Oh, and I got a joint from Alicia."
281	Rafaela doesn't wait for us to respond before she confirms this with a kiss.
283	I can't find it next to me, and when I start searching the blanket, I look up and find Rafaela and Lionel making out. Not short, sweet kisses like before, but full-on lips melded together, his hands tangled in her hair with hers draped lazily around his waist. They're practically lying back on the blanket and it all makes my stomach turn, but I can't stop watching, either.
307	I put my hands on either side of his face, lean in, and kiss him softly. He's still for a moment and I freeze, wondering if he's going to refuse me completely. But then his hands find the small of my back, grazing over my dimples of Venus. Emil kisses me back and I know he believes me.
317	Dee rolls her eyes. "She said she could sense that I was bored. Restless. Said I should go sow my wild oats, like I'm some dude who can't keep his dick in his pants." ..."Said like a dude who can't keep his dick in his pants."
320	We move toward each other. We kiss. I'm worried it's going to feel like a good-bye, like a farewell to everything we built this summer. But it's sweet. Hopeful. And I feel certain that it won't be our last.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	13
Bitch	1
Dick	4
Dyke	2
Fuck	51
Goddamn	1
Piss	6
Shit	56
Tit	1