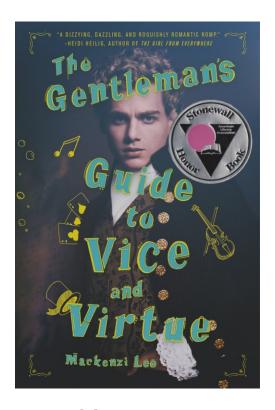


THE GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO **VICE AND VIRTUE: MONTAGUE SIBLINGS BOOK 1**



Young Adult

Book Summary:

Set in the 18th century, a young bisexual British man and his best friend vacation together and end up on an unexpected adventure.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities: alternate sexualities: references to racism; profanity and derogatory term; alcohol use; controversial historical commentary; and moderate violence

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3	For a disorienting moment, it's unclear whether we've slept together or simply slept together. Percy's still got all his clothes on from the night before, albeit most in neither the state nor the location they were in when originally donned, and while the bedcovers are a bit roughed up, there's no sign of any strumming. So although I've got nothing on but my waistcoat—by some sorcery now buttoned back to front—and one shoe, it seems safe to assume we both kept our bits to ourselves. Which is a strange sort of relief, because I'd like to be sober the first time we're together. If there ever is a first time.	
4	His hair stinks of cigars and his breath is rancid, though judging by the taste rolling around the back of my throat—a virulent tincture of baptized gin and a stranger's perfume—mine's worse. We must have drunk an extraordinary amount last night if it's hanging this heavily over me. And here I was starting to feel rather smug about my ability to get foxed out of my mind most nights and then be a functioning human by the next afternoon, provided that the afternoon in question is a late one. Which is when I realize why I am both utterly wrecked and still a little drunk—it isn't the afternoon, when I'm accustomed to rising.	
6	I pour a glass of sherry from the decanter on the sideboard and down it in two swallows. Hardly any flavor manages to kick its way through the taste of whatever crawled into my mouth and died during the night, but the hum will get me through a send-off with my parents "I'm not entirely certain I was playing that hand. If we're being honest, I had a few drinks." "And if we're truly being honest, it wasn't just a few." "I wasn't that drunk, was I?"	
7	I take another swallow of sherry straight out of the decanter and set it down on the sideboard, nearly missing.	
9	I suck a drop of sherry from my thumb.	
10	I am thinking how I am going to spend the next year ignoring the fact that there will be any year beyond it—I will get wildly drunk whenever possible, dally with pretty girls who have foreign accents, and wake up beside Percy, savoring the pleasant kick of my heartbeat whenever I'm near him.	
13	"Felicity," my mother hisses down to her. "Perhaps you should remove your spectacles at the table." "I need them for reading," Felicity says, eyes still fixed upon her smut. "You shouldn't be reading at all. We have guests."	
19	"No visitations to any dens of iniquity," he goes on, "or sordid establishments of any kind. No caterwauling, no inappropriate relations with the opposite sex. No fornication. No slothfulness, or excessive sleeping late."	
29	First time drunk, when we were reading at our parsonage's Easter service but got foxed on nicked wine before. We were just sober enough to think we were subtle about it and just tipsy enough that we were likely as subtle as a symphony. Even the first kiss I ever had, though disappointingly not with Percy, still involved him, in a roundabout way. I'd kissed Richard Peele at my father's Christmas party the year I turned	





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	thirteen, and though I thought it was quite a fine kiss, as far as first ones go, he got cold feet about it and blabbed to his parents and the other Cheshire lads and everyone who would listen that I was perverted and had forced myself on him, which was untrue, for I would like it to be noted that I have never forced myself on anyone. (I'd also like it noted that every time since then that Richard Peele and I have had a shag, it's always been at his volition. I am but a willing stander-by.)
31	I am also maybe a tiny bit drunk. I nicked a bottle of gin from a bar before we left Dover, and Percy and I have been passing it between us for the last hour. There are still a few swallows leftI have become a veritable scholar in seemingly innocent ploys to get his skin against mine.
32	When I'm finished, he wordlessly hands me the gin bottle. I snatch it with the plan to drain it, only to find he's beat me to it. "Bastard.""How is it that we've landed the only bear-leader for hire who's entirely opposed to the true purpose of the Tour?" "Which is remind me." "Strong spirits and loose women." "Sounds instead like it's going to be weak wine with dinner and handling yourself in your bedroom after." "No shame in that. If the Good Lord didn't want men to play with themselves, we'd have hooks for hands. Still, I'd rather not be keeping myself company from now until next September. God, this is going to be a disaster."
34	"Fornicating in alleyways?"
35	Particularly when what I'd really like to say is Oh, by the way, could you please keep touching me, and perhaps do it all the time, and while we're at it, would you like to take off all your clothes and climb in bed?
47	We finish near a Scotch pint of spirits between us before the interlude—Percy's drinking more than he usually does and it's making him giggly. I'm feeling it too—giddy and bold, coquettish at being out and alone in Paris with him and sitting on a belly of gin and warm whiskey.
51	So in spite of being in possession of a full understanding of what a terrible decision it is to do so, I lean in and kiss Percy on the mouth. I truly intend to make it a peck, just a small one, like it's only because of the rhyme and not because I've been going mad with wanting him for two years. But before I can pull away, Percy puts his hand on the back of my neck and presses me to him and suddenly it's not me kissing Percy, it's Percy kissing me. For perhaps a full minute, I'm so stunned that the only thing I can think is, Dear Lord, this is actually happening. Percy is kissing me. Really kissing me. Neither of us is sober, or even sober-adjacent, but at least I'm still seeing straight. And, damnation, it feels so good. As good as I've always imagined it would be. It makes every other kiss I've ever had turn to smoke and disappear. And then it's not just Percy kissing me—we're kissing each other. I can't decide if I'd rather keep my hands in his hair or do something about getting his shirt out of the way—I'm feeling frantic and scrambly, unable to commit to a single place to put my hands because I want to touch him abso-bloody-lutely everywhere. Then he slips his tongue into my mouth, and I am momentarily distracted by the way the entirety of my





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	being spills over with that feeling. It's like being set aflame. More than that—it's like stars exploding, heavens on fire. Kissing Percy is an incendiary thing. I tug his bottom lip between my teeth and work it gently, and he lets go a bright, weighted breath as he slides from his chair onto my lap. His hands go under my shirt, tearing it out of the waistband of my breeches in handfuls, then his arms slide all the way around me, and I'm struggling to stay soft, trying to think of the least arousing things possible, and it just isn't working because Percy's got his legs on either side of my lap and his mouth is open against mine and I can feel his palms up and down my back. I run my tongue down his jawline, so enthusiastic that my teeth scrape him, at the same time working my fingers against the buttons of his breeches until the essential one pops. He inhales softly with his head tipped skyward when my fingers meet his skin. His nails dig into my spine, my shirt rucked up in his fists. I know we should be careful—it's a private box, but not that private, and if anyone saw us like this, we might get in real trouble—but I don't care. Not about who might be lingering nearby or the pillory for sodomites or my father's threat of what will happen if I'm caught with a lad. Nothing matters right then but him. "Monty," he says, my name punching its way through a gasp. I don't reply because I'm far more interested in sucking on his neck than in doing any talking, but he takes my face in his hands and raises it to his. "Wait. Stop."
54	Then he says, very quietly, "Don't." Which is not a particularly fine thing to hear when I've still got one hand down his trousers. I don't move right away—give him a moment to change his mind and come back to me, though it's clear from his expression that I'm fooling myself in thinking he will. It's a fight to keep my face straight, pretend I don't have years' worth of wanting attached to this excellent kiss with the most gorgeous boy I know, but I manage to say, "Fine," without giving away how much that single word feels like the trapdoor of a scaffold falling out from under me"I really don't. And I really don't care. God, it was just a kiss!" "Right, I forgot you'll kiss anything with a mouth." Percy picks himself up with a bit of a stumble and winces.
57	I stay comfortably drunk for the next few days, perhaps toeing the line between comfortably and deliriously, for I forget entirely that my father arranged for us to accompany Lord Ambassador Worthington to Versailles for a summer ball until Lockwood announces it over breakfast in a voice that implies I'm an imbecile for forgetting.
72	"The last I heard, he was staying more at his estate to keep an eye upon a delinquent son who enjoyed drinking and boys more than he did his studies at Eton."
80	She's got the most incredible neck I've ever seen, and directly below it a truly fantastic set of breasts.
	The breeze flutters the single ringlet trailing down the back of that neck of hers that swans would envy. I have been mentally patting myself on the head for keeping my eyes on her face the whole time we've been speaking, but then the bastards betray me suddenly and dive straight down the front of her dress. I think for a moment she may not have noticed, but then her mouth twists up and I know she's seen. But instead of slapping me or calling me a boor and storming off, she says, "My lord, would you like to see" Telling pause. Eyelash flutter. "More of Versailles?"





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83	"Now, where did you get that?" I ask, leaning in as she unlocks the door like I'm interested in it, but really it's to get a better angle down that dress.	
86	"And is there to be a wager? Or a consequence for the player with cards less close?" "They must sacrifice an article of clothing." Good. Lord. I deserve some sort of medal for the effort it takes not to look down her dres when she says that. Jeanne purses her lips, smearing the scarlet paint upon them. "Do you care to play?"	
87	when she says that. Jeanne purses her lips, smearing the scarlet paint upon them. "Do you care to play?" The lead-up is fun, but I'm starting to grow restless to be done with this, like downing a sour drink fast, which is not the sentiment I'm accustomed to accompanying earthly delights of this variety. And then I am thinking about Percy's fingers threading through my hair as I leaned in to him and him pressing our mouths together. The flutter of his breath passed between us, a feeling like a pulse point, and I'll be damned if one stupid kiss with Percy has ruined me. She touches her top lip with the tip of her tongue and a soft shiver of desire goes through me, chased with relief that Percy has not wrecked me after all. I reach out. She leans in. Time turns slow and delicious, seconds rolling forward like sunwarmed honey. I put my mouth much closer to her skin than it needs to be as I unclasp the pearl. My fingers trail down her neck—the ghost of a touch—then I waft my lips across her jawline. And, as I knew would come to pass, she puts a finger beneath my chin, tips my mouth toward hers, and kisses me. But my first thought is not how absolutely gorgeous it is to have this pretty thing at last putting her lips upon mine. It is how much better it was the week previous when it was Percy doing the same. I nearly swat the air, like that might clear Percy from my head as though he were a gnat. Instead, I put my hands on those two magnificent breasts that have been staring me down the whole evening and distract myself with the business of freeing them from their casings, and I am not thinking about Percy, not even a bit. My mouth is still on hers as we stagger to our feet, so I haven't even got a good view of what it is I'm meant to be ripping off. I take a guess and tear at the laces until something snaps and the stomacher falls away, which at least pops her breasts from their breast prison. But then there's a ghastly cage around her waist, with petticoats and corsets and a chemise and I swear t	
	them down my hips, which is just unfair. Her fingers wend their way up my spine, and I'm shocked suddenly from the moment by the memory of Percy's hands there, his palms parentheses around my rib cage and a touch that made me feel hungry and breakable. His legs wrapped around me. The sound of his short, sharp breath when I put my lips to his neck.	
	I let go of Jeanne just long enough to unfasten the buttons at my knees and get my	

breeches around my ankles, then I kick them onto the sofa in a high arc. She traces my lips

with the tip of her tongue, talc from her skin coating my mouth, and, hellfire and



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	damnation, I am not thinking about Percy. I put my arms all the way around her, jerking her toward me. Then, from behind us, the door latch snaps and someone says, "What's going on?"
	His face is going red and I brace myself, but his attention is commandeered by Jeanne, still standing bare-breasted at my side. "Mademoiselle Le Brey, cover yourself, for God's sake," he snaps. Jeanne starts tugging at her corset, which does less to cover her and more to emphasize the fact that she's not.
93	And then everyone turns to stare at me, the Viscount of Disley, standing in the courtyard, with his hair askew and a woman's powder smeared across his face like flour. And, also, without a stitch of clothing on.
94	His mouth tightens. "Are you drunk?" "Excuse me?" "Are you drunk?" he repeats. "Have you ever seen him sober?" Felicity says under her breath.
96	"A girl I met." "And what happened to her?" "I don't know, I bolted." "You were caught with a woman and then you left her there? Monty, you tomcat!" "She'll be fine. They didn't chase me down." "Because you're a man." "So?"
	"It's different for women. No one condemns a man for that sort of thing, but she'll carry that with her." "It won't matter, she's someone's mistress. She's just a whore!"
	I'm also feeling worse than I expected—I didn't think I had drunk that much, thanks to the lord ambassador's blockade, but my stomach won't sit still, and my whole body feels as though it's been dragged behind a carriage.
154	Percy who you kissed in Paris, who looks so damn beautiful, even now.
164	"I do not pretend to understand the passionate friendship you and Percy have always sustained—you're important to each other, there's no questioning that. But I don't think you can blame him for not telling you. Your attention is usually elsewhere, and when hard things come up, you drink, you sleep around. You run away."
169	Then I remember the highwayman was the duke from Versailles, in whose apartments I was caught with a bare-breasted French girl.
	Ernesta gathers up her cards and leaves me alone to mull the reading while I drink some sharp-edged spirits Pascal gave me that's so acidic it's likely meant to be medicinal. I tip my head back against the railing and look up at the stars.
186	I laugh—a short, sincere burst that catches even me off guard—and the moment feels so adjacent to ordinary that I loosen. Or maybe that's the spirits, though I haven't had much. I hold the bottle out to him. "Do you want a drink?" He shakes his head. I take another swallow for courage, but all I can think of is, Percy is ill, Percy is going to an asylum at the end of this Tour, and he didn't trust you enough to tell you so.



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	He seems like he wants to touch me, but we've both lost any sense of how men who haven't kissed each other do that.	
	When you are a lad who enjoys getting other lads in bed, you have to develop a rather fastidious sense for who plays the same instrument or there's a chance you'll find yourself at the business end of a hangman's knot. And if this fellow and I had met at a bar, I would have already bought him a drink and put his fingers in my mouth.	
203	Percy seems lost in his thoughts and I'm busy trying to roll tobacco in a scrap of Bible page torn from a manhandled copy I dug up in the common room. I could snort it straight, but to my great shame, I've never been able to take snuff without sneezing, and as futile as this effort is beginning to seem, I'd rather smoke. Once my makeshift cigar is assembled, I have to lean a rather dangerous distance over the edge of the roof to catch the tip in the grease lamp hanging above the livery door. I hold out the rolled tobacco to him. "Careful—it's a bit fragile." Instead of taking it, Percy puts his mouth to my fingers and takes a pull. His lips brush my skin, and a tremor goes through me, like a shadow passed over the moon, so absolute I almost shiver. Instead of doing the foolish thing it makes me want to do, which is lean in until those selfsame lips are upon mine, I catch his chin in my hand and scrub at the stubble starting to pebble it.	
	When Percy's finished, I take his place before the dressing table and tuck into my first proper wash in weeks, which is sincerely the most marvelous thing that's happened since those two ecstatic minutes of our kiss in Paris.	
	There's a decanter on the sideboard with a bottle-collar proclaiming it cognac, but no glasses, so I take a swig straight out of the neck. I haven't had a drink in a while, but it's not quite as soothing as I want it to beI offer her the cognac, and she shocks me by accepting it, then taking a delicate sip. Her nose wrinkles. "That's vile."	
236	I came down here for the sole purpose of getting drunk enough to sleep and avoid venturing anywhere near this subject, but Felicity goes on staring at me like she's waiting for an answer. "Oh yes, am I a sodomite. Well, I've been with lads, so yes." "No, I mean I haven't much choice in who it is I want to bed." "Of course you do. Sodomy's a vice—same as drinking or gambling." "Not really. I mean, yes, I enjoy it. And I have certainly abstained from abstinence. But I'm also rather attracted to all the men I kiss. And the ladies as well." She laughs, like I've made a joke. I don't. "Sodomy has nothing to do with attraction. It's an act. A sin." "Not for me." "But humans are made to be attracted to the opposite sex. Not the same one. That's how nature operates." "Does that make me unnatural?" When she doesn't reply, I say, "Have you ever fancied anyone?" "Have I what?" "Ever fancied someone?" "Oh. Well, yes." "Girls?" "Yes."	





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	"Lads?" "Also yes."
241	It occurs to me then that perhaps getting my little sister drunk and explaining why I screw boys is not the most responsible move on my part. I almost snatch the bottle back, though it feels rather hypocritical to take a stand for sobriety.
256	Behind the counter, a headmastery-looking man with majestic jowls glowers. He looks like a bit of a traditionalist, the sort that wouldn't take queries from a lady or a Negro boy, nor think either of them has any place in a bookshop, so I sally forth alone.
273	"Here then, let's play a game where we drink every time someone sings something in Spanish."
282	A lady and a gent perched near the wall are giving us a glare that plainly implies we interrupted what was about to be his hands up her skirt.
291	In spite of the fact that I'm still ready to wring his scrawny neck, I can't help but feel a bit bad for the poor lad. One minute he's working himself up to put his lily-white hands down a girl's dress for likely the first time in his life, and the next he's facing down an inquisition from said girl whose dress he was about to reach down.
308	Percy nods me forward, his hand falling from around my wrist, and as much as I'd rather cling to him and demand he kiss my cheek again so I can turn my head and he'll meet my mouth instead, I trot over to the stall at the end of the row.
361	"I kissed you in the music hall." "I kissed you." "You were drunk." "So were you. And you stopped it." "You told me it didn't mean anything to you. That's why I stopped it."
362	Knees, as it turns out, can be rather grand. I put my hand overtop, fingers fitted between his. His heart is beating so hard I can feel it in every point where our skin meets. Or perhaps that's mine. We're slamming, both of us. Percy stares down at our stacked hands, a deep breath trembling in his shoulders. "I'm not going to be the most convenient mouth around when you're drunk and lonely and missing blue-eyed Sinjon," he says. "That's not what I want." Percy hooks his bottom lip with his teeth, eyes flitting down to my mouth. The space between us—what little is left—grows charged and restless, like a lightning strike gathering. I'm not certain which of us is going to do it—close those last, longest inches between us. I touch my nose to his again, and his lips part. Breath catches. I close my eyes.
372	"Then you're selling us into slavery. I know how you Barbarians operate. You'll torch our ship or claim it for your fleet, then trade us innocents to be Muslim slaves in Africa! We'll be forced to convert to your godless ways or else be slaughtered. You'll make our women your whores."
_	"I won't apologize to a colored man."
411	He sits down on the step, flicking the sweat off his brow, then takes a flask from his pocket and offers it to me. I can smell the vinegar tang of gin, and I want nothing more than to snatch it from his hand and down itScipio takes a drink, then picks up his paintbrush. I think he's going to start in on our chore again, but instead he turns, looks me straight in the eye, and says, very seriously,





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	"Now, next time someone takes a swing at you, you swing straight back at him, all right? Promise me that, Henry."	
417	As darkness settles, the noise in the barroom rises until we're all shouting at each other to be heard—or perhaps that's the drink as well. Everything's louder when you're in your altitudes, and I'm the tipsiest I've been since France.	
419	"It's the Festa del Redentore. Feast of the Redeemer. Everyone's drunk and masked and rowdy."	
420	A band takes up on the street outside, a whole slew of voices joining it in drunken song.	
421	Percy laughs. "How much have you had to drink?" "Mmm. Some." "Some?" "Some of the drink."	
424	I see a ginger-haired man lean over the rail of a bridge and lift his mask so he can deliver a quick kiss to another man with a thick beard, and, zounds, I never want to leave this place.	
426	I nearly start to cry when his lips touch mine in return. Pain and ecstasy live tight-knit in my heart. It's a very gentle kiss at first—closemouthed and chaste, one of his hands rising to cradle my chin, as if each of us wants to be certain the other is in earnest. Then his lips part a smidge, and I nearly lose my head. I grab him by the front of his shirt and pull him against me, so forcefully that I hear the seam at the neck pop. He takes a deep breath as his hands go under my coat, his mouth firm for a moment before it softens and then opens against mine. His tongue snakes between my teeth. We're so wrapped up in each other that we stumble a bit, and he presses me backward against the alley wall, bending down so I don't have to stand quite as high on my toes to reach his mouth. The bricks tear at my coat like briars as I pull his hips to mine so I can feel him going stiff. We're so close that there's not a thing between us but the rain, each drop feeling like it might sizzle and spark on my skin—a spitting quench against molten metal. He's fiddling with the waistband of my trousers, and a shock goes through me when his cold fingers meet the bare skin along my stomach. "Do you want to ?" His voice comes out ragged and breathless, and he doesn't finish, just hooks his finger in my waistband and tugs.	
	"Yes," I reply. "Yes?" "Yes, yes, absolutely, yes." I'm already fumbling with the buttons along the flap, cursing everything I drank that's now making my fingers fat and awkward, but Percy stops me. "Not here, you tomcat. There are people about." "There are no people about."	
	As though prompted, someone calls to his mate from the other end of the street. A few dark silhouettes run through a barrel of lamplight. I reach for the buttons anyway, but Percy threads his fingers between mine and pulls my hand away. "Stop. I won't let you take your trousers off in the middle of the street. That is a terrible idea." "Right. Well. Shall we keep kissing until we think of a better one?" He brushes his mouth against the corner of mine, and Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, it takes every ounce of the not-inconsiderable restraint I've spent years exercising around Percy not to rin all my clothes off right then, passers by he damped. But Lam nothing if not a	

not to rip all my clothes off right then, passersby be damned. But I am nothing if not a gentleman, and a gentleman does not take his trousers off in a public place, particularly if



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	the great love of his life is asking him to refrain. "What if we went away together?" he says. "Back to the inn? Because I could certainly take my trousers off there."
	Back along the Grand Canal, it's easy to find cheap, virulent gin, easier to drink it until everything smudges and I start to feel like I can leave myself behind. I take four shots of it in quick succession, chased by ambiguous ale and clear spirit straight from a bottle I have to reach behind a bar for. I've that mostly empty spirit bottle clenched in one fist and also I cannot remember where I am—sitting on the edge of a bridge overlooking a canal, which narrows down possible locations not at all.
435	"No, no, I can drink more." "I'm sure you can." I hold out the bottle. "Have some." "No, it's too late for me."
	"I knew him, when he was young and living in the French court. He was a bastard even then, squandering his father's money on horses and cards and always screwing someone else's woman. The wives and intendeds of his friends, those were always his favorites. And then he got himself a wife of his own."
511	Queer Culture The history of sexuality is tricky to study and trickier to write about, because the concept of sexuality itself is a modern one. In the eighteenth century, the general population would have had no vocabulary or understanding of any identity beyond cisgender and heterosexual, and even those were unacknowledged (and unnamed) because they were of an assumed universality. Sodomy—the most formal term for homosexuality at the time, drawn from the Bible—was a reference to the act of homosexual sex itself rather than attraction or identity. Every country had its own laws, but in most of Europe, homosexuality was both sinful and illegal, and punishable by fines, imprisonment, or sometimes death. Under the Buggery Act of 1533—which was not repealed until 1828—sodomy was a capital offense in England.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	4
Bitch	6
Goddamn	20
Piss	8
Prick	2
Queer	7
Shit	8