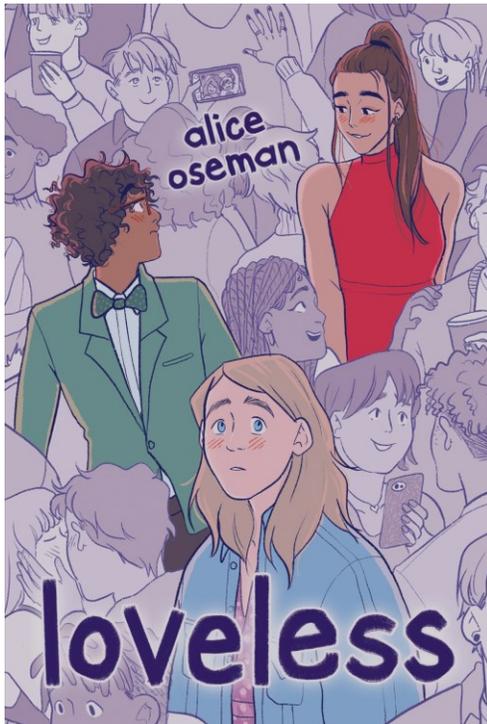


LOVELESS



Young Adult

By Alice Oseman

ISBN: 978-1-338-75195-6

CONTENT WARNING

You are about to access material that may contain content of an ADULT nature. These files may include pictures and materials that some viewers may find offensive. If you are under the age of 18, or if such material offends you or if it is illegal for you to view these materials, please exit now.

Book Summary:

A young woman seeks to identify her sexuality and lack of romantic attraction.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; excessive/frequent profanity; derogatory terms; alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; alcohol use by minors; and controversial cultural commentary.

3
/5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
3	<p>There were literally three separate couples sitting around the fire making out, like some sort of organized kissing orgy, and half of me was like, ew, and the other half was like, wow, I sure do wish that was me.</p> <p>...Georgia Warr</p> <p>i could not approach the fire and retrieve the marshmallows because there were people kissing around it</p>
4	<p>“You OK?” I asked.</p> <p>“Might be a tad drunk,” she said, her tortoiseshell glasses slipping down her nose.</p> <p>“There were three separate couples making out around the fire,” I said. “Like, in unison.”</p> <p>“Kinky,” said Pip.</p> <p>“I sort of wished I was one of them.”</p> <p>She gave me a look. “Ew.”</p> <p>“I just want to kiss someone,” I said, which was odd, because I wasn’t even drunk.</p> <p>...“We can make out if you want.”</p> <p>“That wasn’t what I had in mind.”</p> <p>“Well, Jason’s been single for a few months now. I’m sure he’d be up for it.”</p> <p>...I really, really wanted to kiss someone. I wanted to feel a little bit of prom-night magic.</p>
5	<p>Two people were kissing on the stairs, and I looked at them for a moment, unsure whether it was disgusting or whether it was the most romantic thing I’d ever seen in my life.</p>
6	<p>“God, I am sad, gay, and alone.”</p> <p>...“Maybe I could kiss a stranger instead.”</p>
8	<p>Jason kissed Karishma from my history class on his Duke of Edinburgh expedition and dated a horrible girl called Aimee for a few months until he realized she was a knob. Pip kissed Millie from the Academy at a house party and also Nicola from our youth theatre group at the dress rehearsal for Dracula.</p> <p>...Most people aged eighteen have kissed someone. Most people aged eighteen have had at least one crush, even if it’s on a celebrity. At least half of everyone I knew had actually had sex, although some of those people were probably lying, or they were just referring to a really terrible hand job or touching a boob.</p>
13	<p>Virgin-shaming wasn’t really a thing. Everyone knew that people did these things when they were ready, right?</p> <p>...Some of the guys started laughing and one of them coughed the word virgin.</p>
14	<p>“That’s rich coming from a guy who admitted to having a wank over the princesses in Shrek 3.”</p> <p>...Everyone else was growing up, kissing, having sex, falling in love, and I was just ...</p>
16	<p>As I walked back down the corridor, I saw that another bedroom door was ajar, so I peered inside, only to get an absolute eyeful of someone very clearly getting fingered.</p> <p>It sent a sort of shock wave through my spine. Like, wow, OK. I forgot people actually did that in real life. It was fun to read about in fanfics and see in movies, but the reality was kind of just like, Oh.</p> <p>...That aside—surely you’d think to shut the door properly if someone was going to put a body part inside of you.</p> <p>...Honestly, I loved the idea in theory—having a sexy little adventure in a dark room in someone else’s house with someone you’ve been on-and-off flirting with for a couple of months—but the reality? Having to actually touch genitals with someone? Ew.</p>

Page	Content
18	Jason Farley-Shaw Please return before pip has another glass of wine
20	I picked a seat near the blanket pile and Tommy sat next to me, balancing a beer bottle on his chair arm. What would happen now? Would we just start making out?
21	Or maybe he'd message me, and we'd decide to go on a date, just to see what would happen, and at the date we would decide to try going out, and on our third date we would decide to be boyfriend and girlfriend, and a couple of weeks after that we would have sex, and while I was at university he would text me good morning and come to visit every other weekend, and after university we would move in together in a little flat by the river and get a dog, and he'd grow a beard, and then we would get married, and that would be the end. ...“Everyone has a first kiss eventually. It doesn't mean anything. It's OK to be new at, like, romance and all that.”
24	We had a long conversation at a house party about whether Love Island was a good show or not, and then he tried to kiss me when everyone was drunk, including both of us.
28	Even Pip, who'd always been a chatty drunk.
29	When we arrived, I said, “Most people our age have kissed someone.” ...I'd get a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend, even. A partner. I'd have my first kiss, and I'd have sex. I was just a late bloomer.
35	“You never know,” Mum had said in an attempt to cheer me up. “You might find a lovely young man in your course!” “Maybe,” I said. Or a lovely young woman. God, anybody. Please. I'm desperate. ...Durham is a little old city with lots of hills and cobbled streets, and I loved it because I felt like I was in The Secret History or some other deep and mysterious university drama where there's lots of sex and murder.
50	What I found interesting was that she did this to several guys. I wondered what her goal was. What was she looking for? A potential boyfriend? Hook-up options?
54	Maybe my lack of interest in boys was because I was, in fact, interested in girls. ...According to Pip, the hallmarks of realizing you're a lesbian were: firstly, getting a little intensely obsessed with a girl, mistaking it for admiration, and sometimes thinking about holding their hand, and secondly, having a subconscious fixation on certain female cartoon villains. ...Maybe I was bi or pan, since I didn't even seem to have a preference at this point.
55	Rooney was in the kitchen. She was with a guy. She was sitting on the kitchen counter. He was standing between her legs, his tongue in her mouth, and his hand up her shirt. To put it lightly: They were both very much enjoying themselves. “Oh,” I said. Jason immediately stepped away from the situation, like any normal person would, but Pip and I just stood there for a moment, watching this go down.
56	I'd read infinite stories of people meeting and flirting and awkwardly pining, hating before liking, lusting before loving, kissing and sex and love and marriage and partners for life, till death us do part.

Page	Content
57	<p>In the middle of the night, between Tuesday and Wednesday, I woke up to hear someone having sex in the room above ours.</p> <p>It was a sort of rhythmic thumping. Like a headboard hitting a wall. And a creaking, like the bend of an old bedframe.</p> <p>I sat up, wondering if I was just imagining it. But I wasn't. It was real. People were having sex in the room above us. What else would that sound be? There were only bedrooms up there, so unless someone had decided to do some three a.m. DIY, there was only one thing that sound could be.</p> <p>...I knew this sort of thing would happen at university. In fact, I knew this sort of thing happened at school—well, not physically at school, hopefully, but among my schoolfriends and classmates.</p> <p>But hearing it happen, in the flesh, not just knowing and imagining, chilled me to the core. Even more than when I saw that person getting fingered at Hattie's party.</p> <p>It was a jarring sort of Oh, God, this thing is actually real, it's not just in fanfics and movies. And I'm supposed to be doing that too.</p>
59	<p>On his jacket were several enamel pins—a rainbow flag, a tiny old radio, a pin featuring a boy band logo, one that read "He/ They," and another pride pin, this one with black, gray, white, and purple stripes. I was sure I'd seen that one before, online somewhere, but I couldn't remember what it meant.</p> <p>...A shy-looking student raised a hand and, in a quiet voice, asked, "Do you prefer 'he' or 'they' pronouns? Or ... do you use both?"</p> <p>Sunil smiled. "I personally like 'he/ him' slightly more. Thanks for asking."</p>
61	<p>Clubbing. College marriage. Sex. Romance.</p> <p>I knew all this stuff was optional.</p> <p>But I wanted to have a completely normal university experience, just like everyone else.</p>
63	<p>Was she the sort of person who would go out to clubs all the time and hook up with random people?</p>
67	<p>I was a little drunk, to be fair.</p> <p>...I didn't even like it that much, but everyone was drinking, and I'd look weird if I wasn't, wouldn't</p> <p>...The movies where the main characters freaked out about being virgins at the age of sixteen.</p>
68	<p>"I want you to go in there and find one person you think is hot. Or a few. More chance of this working."</p> <p>I already absolutely hated this idea. "Oh."</p> <p>"Try and get their name, or at least memorize what they look like. And then I'll help you get with them."</p>
69	<p>When I tried to picture standing close to them, kissing them, touching them ...</p> <p>I grimaced. Disgusting, disgusting, disgusting.</p> <p>I decided to change tactics and look at the girls instead. Girls are all pretty, to be honest. And they have much more variety in appearance.</p> <p>...Lots of people had started hooking up already—kissing each other underneath the flashing lights and the love songs playing louder than the voices in our heads. It was a little gross, but it had an element of danger that made it beautiful. Kissing a stranger you'd never see again, kissing someone whose name you didn't even know, just to feel a little high in that moment. Just to feel the warmth of someone's skin on yours. Just, for a while, to feel purely alive.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>...But the idea of trying to get with any of these people—no matter their gender—was, honestly, unnerving.</p>
70	<p>She was in the middle of the dance floor, making out with a tall guy wearing ripped skinny jeans. His arms were round her waist. One of her hands was on his face. It was a picture of passion. Movie romance. Desire. How. How could a person reach that point in the space of an hour? How could she do in one single hour what I was unable to force myself to do in my whole teenage life?</p>
76	<p>I tried to picture myself dating Jack, 18, Model. Kissing him. Having sex. Like, if it was gonna be anyone, based on appearance alone, surely it would be Jack, 18, Model, with his cool denim jacket and dimples. Imagine kissing that face. Imagine him leaning in. Imagine his skin near you. My thumb hovered over the screen for a moment. Trying to ignore the nauseated feeling in my stomach at the pictures I was conjuring in my head. Then I swiped left.</p>
77	<p>I deleted Tinder from my phone, then hit play on About Time again, wondering why picturing myself in any sort of romantic or sexual situation made me feel like I was going to vom and/ or run a mile, while romance in movies felt like the sole purpose of being alive.</p>
79	<p>I ambled along, feeling increasingly like I just didn't really fit anywhere, until I realized I had reached the stall of Durham's Pride Society. It stood out boldly with a giant rainbow flag behind it and had quite a sizeable gathering of freshers standing near it, chatting excitedly to the older students behind the table. ...Most of the front page was decorated with some of the identities it supported in arty fonts. The ones I knew well were at the top—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender—and then, to my surprise, it moved into ones I'd only really heard on the internet—pansexual, asexual, aromantic, non-binary. And more. ...What right did I have to join a society like this? I mean, to be fair, I didn't really know what I was. And yes, sure, I had considered the possibility that I was not into guys. Strongly considered. Then again, I didn't really seem to like girls either. I didn't seem to like anyone. I hadn't met anyone I liked yet, felt the nice stomach butterflies, and been able to proudly declare Aha! Of course! This is the gender that I like! I didn't even have a particular gender preference when it came to smutty fanfiction.</p>
80	<p>She had a little badge that said "She/ Her" on it. ..."Anyway," said Sunil, shaking his head at her with a sort of fondness, "we're here for any freshers who wanna get involved in queer stuff at Durham, basically. Club nights, meet-ups, formals, film nights. Stuff like that." ...Maybe I'd go to the Pride Society, see a girl, have a big lesbian awakening, and finally feel some romantic feelings for another human being. I was sure I'd read a fanfic with that exact plot.</p>
89	<p>Felipa Quintana OBVIOUSLY NOT. She can hook up with whoever she likes however much she wants, I have no problems with people who enjoy casual hooking up</p>

Page	Content
	<p>I'm just getting a bad vibe She made fun of my cacti</p>
92	<p>Rooney Bach I'm at the bar! Hey maybe we could hook you up with someone tonight ...</p>
95	<p>I knew that relying on alcohol to relieve anxiety was not great. On a physical level, I didn't even enjoy the taste that much. Unfortunately, I had grown up in a place where almost everyone my age drank, and I'd accepted drinking as "normal," like a lot of other things, even though often it wasn't really what I wanted to do at all. Jason ordered a cider and I ordered a double vodka and lemonade, and also two beers for Pip and Rooney. "I know she's done the whole deflecting-feelings-by-being-angry thing before," said Jason grimly as we waited at the bar for our drinks.</p>
97	<p>I proceeded to get drunk in record time. Maybe because I'd skipped dinner in favor of reading fanfic and eating a bagel in bed, or maybe because I drank the equivalent of six shots in forty-five minutes, but whatever it was, by ten o'clock, I felt genuinely relaxed and happy, which was definitely a sign that I was not in my right mind. To reiterate: I'm not advocating this sort of thing. But at the time, I didn't know how else to deal with what a long, stressful week it had been, and the prospect of many more long, stressful weeks I had to come over the next three years.</p>
99	<p>I didn't know what to say to her. It wasn't like I had the answers, and even if I did, we were both too tipsy to make much sense of them.</p>
104	<p>Rooney chuckled. "Oh, no, it doesn't. I was at this guy's place." I frowned, a little confused. But then I understood. She was at a guy's place, having sex. "Oh," I said. "Cool." I did actually think this was quite cool. I was always a bit envious of people who were super sex-positive and felt comfortable enough to just bang whoever they fancied. I couldn't even imagine feeling comfortable enough to let someone kiss me, let alone going to an absolute stranger's home and getting naked. She shrugged. "Wasn't that great, to be honest. Bit of a letdown. But, you know. Why not! Everyone's up for it this week."</p>
105	<p>"D'you think I'm immature?" I asked, bleary-eyed, my brain not fully awake. "Why would I think that?" She started unzipping her jumpsuit. "Because I haven't had sex or kissed anyone or ... any of that. And I'm not ... getting with guys and ... you know." Being you. Doing what you do.</p>
116	<p>"You do what?" "Like him." "Romantically?" "Mm." "Sexually?" I made a spluttering noise because I was suddenly picturing having sex with Jason. "Who thinks about sex that quickly?" Rooney snorted. "Me."</p>
118	<p>Clearly, she could have anyone she wanted as whatever she wanted—friend, partner, hook-up, even someone to playfully banter with.</p>

Page	Content
120	We spent a long time talking about how we both felt Freshers' Week was a monumental letdown—marketed to be the best week of your whole university life, only to turn out to be a week of endless drinking, visiting gross clubs, and failing to make real friends.
122	I knew all about Jason's past romantic experiences. I knew about his first kiss with a girl he thought he really liked, but the kiss was so terrible it actually put him off doing it again. ...Jason had sex for the first time with her, and it pissed me off that he'd had that experience with someone like that.
126	<p>"Me having sex with some random guy is not similar to you dating your best friend. Completely different scenarios."</p> <p>..."So why do you have sex with random guys?" I asked.</p> <p>...Why would someone go to a stranger's house and take their clothes off when you could just stay home and have a safe, comfortable wank? Surely the end result was exactly the same.</p> <p>..."I just enjoy having sex," she said. "I'm single and I like sex, so I have sex. It's fun because it feels good. I don't feel a 'spark' because it's not about romance. It's a casual physical thing."</p>
127	She'd gone out a few evenings that week, and she always came back with a story—a hook-up or a drunken escapade or some college drama. And I'd always listen, fascinated and, confusingly, jealous. Some part of me wanted that excitement in my life, but at the same time, the idea of a night like that filled me with horror. I knew I didn't really want to drunkenly hook up with a stranger, as fun as that seemed from the outside.
139	"If I profane with my unworhiest hand," began Jason, "this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: my lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss."
142	We'd known each other for a few weeks now. I knew that she was a sex-positive party girl and a Shakespeare enthusiast who could put on a smile to make you like her.
144	<p>Felipa Quintana</p> <p>We would murder each other if we dated</p> <p>Which we wouldn't because she's straight</p> <p>And I don't like her like that</p> <p>And she's super annoying and she has to have her way all the time</p> <p>And I'm doomed to be a lonely gay 4 life</p>
148	<p>I turned to Rooney, but we were sitting too close, so I just got an eyeful of dark hair curled into loose waves. "Would you kiss on the second date?"</p> <p>Rooney snorted. "I don't go on dates."</p> <p>"But you've been on a date before."</p> <p>She stayed silent for a moment.</p> <p>"I guess so," she said finally. "But generally, I prefer just sex."</p> <p>"Oh."</p> <p>"Don't get me wrong, being in a relationship would be nice, probably. And sometimes I meet people and I think, maybe ..." She halted mid-sentence, then rolled off my bed and walked over to her own. "It's ... well, I always fall for the wrong people. So what's the point?"</p> <p>...I didn't have any evidence that Rooney liked girls, but it wasn't impossible.</p> <p>"There's nothing wrong with just having sex," she said, once she'd got into bed.</p> <p>"I know," I said.</p> <p>"Relationships just aren't for me, I think. They never end well."</p>

Page	Content
149	<p>I opened a tab on my phone and typed in, “am I gay.”</p> <p>A bunch of links popped up, mostly useless internet quizzes that I already knew would be unhelpful and inaccurate. But one thing caught my eye—the Kinsey Scale test.</p> <p>I started reading about the Kinsey Scale. Wikipedia explained that it was a scale of sexuality which went from zero, “exclusively heterosexual,” to six, “exclusively homosexual.”</p> <p>...And instead of a number, the letter X popped up.</p> <p>You did not indicate any sexual preference.</p>
152	<p>I could go back to a boy’s room on a date and do whatever was usually involved in that.</p> <p>Talking. Flirting. Kissing. Sex, maybe.</p>
156	<p>He pulled the blanket over our legs. What if this was all a precursor to us having sex? Or even just kissing? This was the normal time when we would start kissing, right? People who were on a date didn’t just sit through a movie. They got ten minutes in and then started making out.</p> <p>...What if my sexuality was just the letter X, like the Kinsey Scale had told me?</p>
163	<p>All the tables had been arranged in neat squares, laden with white tablecloths, candles, shiny cutlery, and colorful centerpieces that featured all sorts of different pride flags—some I recognized, some I didn’t.</p> <p>...Right at the back, overlooking the whole room, was a big rainbow flag.</p> <p>“Could have gone harder with the pride flags,” Sunil said, narrowing his eyes.</p>
164	<p>What was my sexuality?</p>
170	<p>I’d had too much wine and I needed some water, badly. “Yeah.”</p> <p>...She came out to me when we were fifteen. It wasn’t the most dramatic or funny or emotional of coming-outs, if films or TV were anything to go by. “I think I might like girls instead” was what she’d said while we were scouring the high street shops for new schoolbags.</p>
171	<p>With that, and figuring out that she was gay, Pip had definitely drawn the short straw in terms of people in her vicinity who she could relate to and bond with on a deep level due to shared life experiences.</p> <p>“I’d forgotten how good it felt to be surrounded by so many Latinx people, you know?” she continued. “Our school was so white. And even being here in Durham—Durham as a whole is so white. Even Pride Soc is pretty white overall!”</p> <p>She gestured around her, and when I looked, I realized how correct she was—with the exception of Sunil, Jess, and a handful of others, most faces in the room were white.</p> <p>“I’m starting to feel how much it affected me to just ... be around white people all the time. Like, being gay and Latina meant that I just ... didn’t know anyone like me. As good as it felt to finally have a few queer friends in sixth form, they were all white, so I just couldn’t fully relate to them.” She chuckled suddenly. “But I met this gay dude at LatAm Soc, and we had a massive chat about being gay and Latinx, and I swear to God I’d never felt so understood in my life.”</p>
172	<p>“It wasn’t anything serious, like, it wasn’t like I wanted to date her or anything. But I wanted to kiss her—we both wanted to kiss, so, like ... we just did.”</p>
173	<p>“Well, if you ever consider becoming gay, let me know. I could very quickly hook you up with someone. I have contacts now.”</p> <p>I snorted. “If only sexuality worked like that.”</p> <p>“What, choosing it?”</p>

Page	Content
	<p>“Yeah. I think I’d choose to be gay if I could.” Pip didn’t say anything for a moment, and I wondered if I’d said something weird or offensive. It was the truth, though. I would have chosen to be gay if I could.</p> <p>I knew liking girls could be hard when you’re also a girl. It usually was, at least for a while. But it was beautiful too. So fucking beautiful.</p> <p>Liking girls when you’re a girl was power. It was light. Hope. Joy. Passion.</p> <p>Sometimes it took girls who liked girls a little while to find that. But when they found it, they flew.</p> <p>“You know,” said Pip. “Straight people don’t think shit like that.”</p> <p>“Oh. Really?”</p> <p>“Yeah. Thinking shit like that is, like, step one to realizing you’re a lesbian.”</p> <p>“Oh. Right.” I laughed awkwardly. I was still pretty sure I wasn’t a lesbian. Or maybe I was and I was just really repressed. Or maybe I was just X on the Kinsey Scale. Nothing. God. I was regretting not ordering more alcohol.</p>
174	<p>She didn’t want to say it. She knew it’d be disrespectful to say it, to assume anything about my sexuality, but we were both thinking it.</p> <p>We were both thinking that I probably just didn’t like men.</p> <p>I didn’t know what to say, because I didn’t disagree.</p> <p>I wanted to tell Pip that I didn’t feel sure about anything, and I felt so weird all the time, to the point that I hated myself, being a kid who knew all about sexuality from the internet but couldn’t even vaguely work out what I was, couldn’t even come up with a ballpark estimate, when everyone else seemed to find it so, so easy. Or if they didn’t find it easy, they got through the hard bit at school, and by the time they were my age, they were already kissing and having sex and falling in love as much as they wanted.</p>
177	<p>“I saw the fucking flyers you were handing out at the Freshers’ Fair! Asexual and bigender and whatever. You’re just gonna let in anyone who thinks they’re some made-up internet identity?”</p>
179	<p>“Uh ...” I was grateful I was a little tipsy. I pointed at his pin—the one with black, gray, white, and purple stripes. “Is that ... the flag for, um ... being asexual?”</p> <p>...</p> <p>“Yes,” he said. “Asexuality. Do you know what that is?”</p> <p>Now, I had definitely heard of asexuality. I’d seen a few people talking about it online, and many people with it in their Twitter or Tumblr bios. Sometimes I even came across a fanfic with an asexual character. But I’d hardly ever heard people use the word in real life, or even on TV or in movies. I figured it was something to do with not liking sex. But I didn’t know for sure.</p> <p>“Erm ... not really,” I said. “I’ve heard of it.” I immediately felt embarrassed by this admission.</p> <p>“You really don’t have to spend time explaining it to me, I can just—I could just go and look it up ...”</p> <p>He smiled again. “It’s OK. I’d like to explain it. The internet can be a bit confusing.”</p> <p>I shut my mouth.</p> <p>“Asexuality means I’m not sexually attracted to any gender.”</p> <p>“So ...” I thought about this. “That means ... you don’t want to have sex with anyone?”</p> <p>He chuckled. “Not necessarily. Some asexual people feel that way. But some don’t.”</p> <p>...“Asexuality means I’m not sexually attracted to any gender. So I don’t look at men or women or anyone and think, Wow, I want to do sexy stuff with them.”</p>

Page	Content
	<p>This made me snort. “Does anyone actually think stuff like that?” Sunil smiled, but it was a sad smile. “Maybe not in those exact words, but yes, most people think stuff like that.”</p> <p>...“Some asexuals still enjoy having sex, for a whole variety of reasons,” he continued. “I think that’s why a lot of people find it confusing. But some asexuals don’t like sex at all, and some are just neutral about it. Some asexuals still feel romantic attraction to people—wanting to be in relationships, or even kiss people, for example. But others don’t want romantic relationships at all. It’s a big, big spectrum with a whole range of different feelings and experiences. And there’s really no way to tell how one specific person feels, even if they openly describe themselves as asexual.”</p> <p>“So ...” I knew it was a little invasive to ask, but I just had to. “Do you still want relationships?”</p> <p>He nodded. “Yes. I identify as gay as well. Gay asexual.”</p> <p>“As ... as well?”</p> <p>“The technical term is homoromantic. I still want to be in relationships with guys and masculine folks. But I feel very indifferent about sex, because I have never looked at men or any gender and felt sexual attraction to them. Men don’t turn me on. Nobody does.”</p> <p>“So romantic attraction is different from sexual attraction?”</p> <p>“For some people they feel like different things, yes,” said Sunil. “So some people find it useful to define those two aspects of their attraction differently.”</p> <p>“Oh.” I didn’t know how I felt about that. What I felt was so whole—it didn’t feel like two different things.</p> <p>“Jess—she’s aromantic, meaning she doesn’t feel romantic attraction for anyone. She’s also bisexual. She won’t mind me telling you that. She finds a lot of people physically attractive, but she just doesn’t fall in love with them.”</p> <p>...“She’s happy,” said Sunil, like he’d read my mind. “It took her some time to feel happy with herself, but ... I mean, you met her. She’s happy with who she is. Maybe it’s not the heteronormative dream that she grew up wishing for, but ... knowing who you are and loving yourself is so much better than that, I think.”</p>
181	<p>“It’s funny,” said Sunil after a few moments. He looked down, as if remembering an old joke. “So few people know what asexuality or aromanticism are. Sometimes I think I’m so wrapped up with Pride Soc that I forget there are people who’ve just ... never even heard these words. Or have any idea that this is a real thing.”</p> <p>...“Oh my God, you have nothing to be sorry about. It’s not in films. It’s hardly ever in TV shows, and when it is, it’s some tiny subplot that most people ignore. When it’s talked about in the media, it gets trolled to hell and back. Even some queer people out there hate the very concept of being aro or ace because they think it’s unnatural or just fake—I mean, you heard Lloyd.” Sunil smiled sadly at me. “I’m glad you were curious. It’s always good to be curious.”</p> <p>I was curious now, that’s for sure.</p> <p>And I was also terrified.</p> <p>I mean, that wasn’t me. Asexual. Aromantic.</p> <p>I still wanted to have sex with someone, eventually. Once I found someone I actually liked. Just because I’d never liked anyone didn’t mean I never would ... did it?</p> <p>...He probably just wanted to have a nice evening, but here I was, asking for a sexuality lesson.</p>

Page	Content
183	<p>I passed the shops and cafés, the history department and Hatfield College, drunk students and locals stumbling around, and the cathedral, lit up gently in the dark, and that made me stop and think about how I had walked this path with Jason only a few hours earlier, and we had been laughing, and I had almost been able to imagine that I was someone entirely different.</p> <p>When I got back to my room, the people upstairs were having sex again. Rhythmic thumping against the wall. I hated it, but then I felt bad, because maybe it was two people in love.</p>
193	<p>“Much Ado is such a good play. Although I don’t get the appeal of relationships where they’re mean to each other at the start.”</p> <p>“It’s all just buildup to the point where they inevitably have really wild sex,” I said, thinking fondly of some of my favorite enemies-to-lovers fics. “It makes the eventual sex more exciting.”</p> <p>“I suppose it makes a good story.” Jason flipped over a page. “It’s funny how much stuff revolves around sex. I don’t even think I’d need it in a relationship.”</p> <p>“Wait, really?”</p> <p>“Like, it’s fun, but ... I don’t think it’s a deal-breaker. If the other person didn’t want to do it that much. Or at all, I guess.” He looked up from behind the book. “What? Is that weird?”</p> <p>I shrugged. “No, that’s just a cool way to think about it.”</p> <p>“If you really loved someone, I just think you wouldn’t really ... care so much about things like that. I dunno. I think everyone’s been kind of conditioned to be obsessed with it, when in actual fact ... you know, it’s just a thing people do for fun. You don’t even need it to make babies anymore. It’s not like you’d die without it.”</p> <p>...Was there some kind of third choice when it came to mine and Jason’s relationship? Could we be together and just ... not have sex?</p> <p>I stood there in the doorway trying to picture it. No sex, but still a romance. A relationship. Kissing Jason, holding hands with Jason. Being in love.</p> <p>I’d spent a lot of time thinking about how I felt about love, but not much about having sex—I’d just assumed that sex would automatically be a part of it. But it didn’t have to be. Sunil had told me that some people didn’t want sex, but were perfectly happy in relationships without it.</p> <p>Maybe I did like Jason romantically—I just didn’t want to have sex with him.</p>
195	<p>Obviously I spent the rest of the day thinking about sex. Not even in a fun way.</p> <p>...I hadn’t given much thought to how I felt about sex until the prom afterparty. That had been when I’d started to wonder whether I was weird for not having done all the things other people claimed they’d done—including having sex.</p> <p>We all know that the concept of “virginity” is dumb as hell and invented by misogynists, but that didn’t stop me feeling like I was, essentially, missing out on something really great. But was I missing out? Sunil said he felt indifferent about sex. I’d never heard anyone talk about sex like that before. Like it was a takeaway cuisine you thought was OK, but you wouldn’t personally choose it.</p> <p>All I’d felt about sex so far was shame for not having had it.</p>
196	<p>“I’m not sure, though. I’ve been thinking a lot about, um ... well, how I’d feel about ... physical stuff.”</p> <p>There was a pause, and then she said, “Sex?”</p> <p>...“OK.” She nodded again. “Yeah. That’s good. Sexual attraction is just figuring out who you want to have sex with.” She paused to think, and then she turned fully to face me. “Right.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>We're going to figure this out."</p> <p>"What d'you mean?"</p> <p>"I mean, let's get to the bottom of your feelings and figure out whether you're attracted to Jason or not."</p> <p>I had absolutely no idea where this conversation was going, and I was scared.</p> <p>"Question One. Do you wank?"</p> <p>..."So," Rooney continued. "Masturbation."</p> <p>I wasn't the sort of person who thought it was a "guy thing." I'd been on the internet long enough to know that masturbation was all-gender.</p> <p>"Doesn't ... doesn't everyone masturbate?" I mumbled.</p> <p>"Hm, no, I don't think so." Rooney tapped her chin. "I had a friend back at home who said she just didn't like doing it."</p> <p>...Yes, I did. I wasn't gonna just lie about it. I knew it wasn't something to be ashamed of, obviously, but it still felt excruciating to talk about.</p> <p>"Yeah," I said.</p> <p>"OK. So, what d'you think about when you masturbate?"</p> <p>..."Do you think about men? Women? Both? Any/ or?"</p> <p>The honest answer was:</p> <p>Any.</p> <p>Literally anything.</p> <p>...My usual masturbation situation was just whenever I was in the mood to read a smutty fanfic. It felt like a safe, fun way to get turned on and have a good time. So I would just think about the characters in the fic I was reading. Whatever combination of genders that involved—I wasn't fussy, as long as the writing was good.</p> <p>It wasn't about bodies and genitals for me. It was about chemistry. But that wasn't anything unusual, I thought.</p> <p>People didn't really just look at boobs or abs and get turned on. Did they?</p> <p>..."Fine," I said. "I ... the gender doesn't really matter."</p> <p>"Oh my God! Same!" Rooney gestured between us. "Wank fantasy sisters!"</p> <p>..."Like, I know I only go out with guys, but ... you know. It's fun to think about other stuff." Maybe I was bi or pan, then. Maybe we both were. If gender didn't matter to us, that would make sense, right?</p> <p>"There are still some specific scenarios I have to picture," she continued. "Like, I can't just imagine myself doing anything with anyone. I still think I have ... preferences. But not limited to gender."</p> <p>..."Wait," I said. "I—I mean, I don't imagine myself with any gender."</p> <p>..."I don't think about myself having sex," I said. Rooney frowned, then she snorted, and then, upon realizing I wasn't joking, she frowned again. "What do you think about, then? Other people?"</p> <p>"Yeah ..."</p> <p>"Like ... people you know?"</p> <p>"Ew, no. Oh my God. More like ... made-up people in my brain."</p> <p>..."So ... you don't think about having sex with Jason?"</p> <p>"No!" I exclaimed. The thought of having sex with Jason freaked me out. "People don't—people don't actually do that, do they?"</p> <p>"What, fantasize about someone they have a crush on?"</p> <p>..."OK, so. Question Two. Who was the celebrity you last got off to?"</p>

Page	Content
	<p>I blinked. "People definitely don't do that." "Do what?" "Get off to pictures of celebrities." "Uh, yes they do. I have a folder of shirtless pics of Henry Cavill on my laptop." ... "I thought that was just a movie thing. You really just ... look at abs and that does it for you?"</p>
199	<p>"Sex dreams. What happened in your last sex dream?" I stared at her. "Seriously?" "Yes!" I started to say that I'd never had a sex dream, but that wasn't strictly true. I'd had a dream a couple of years back where, in order to pass my exams, I had to have sex with a guy in my class. He was waiting on my bed, naked, and I kept walking in and out of my bedroom, fully clothed, not quite able to work up the courage to go through with it. It wasn't a nightmare, but it gave me that same feeling of a nightmare where you're trying to run away from a demon but your legs are moving like they're stuck in sludge, and the demon is catching up with you, but you can't move properly, and you're about to die. On second thought, I wasn't sure that counted as a sex dream. "I don't have sex dreams," I said. Rooney stared back at me. "What ... ever?" "Does everyone have sex dreams?" ...For someone who'd had a lot of sex, Rooney didn't seem to understand it any better than I did.</p>
201	<p>Georgia Warr i respect the dab, it's not about that soooooo me and rooney are having a conversation about sex right now</p> <p>Felipa Quintana OOOOH Okay I'm in</p> <p>Georgia Warr my question is.... do you have sex dreams?</p> <p>...Felipa Quintana Wow hi rooney Yeah I've had sex dreams Not like looooads But occasionally I mean that's pretty normal right??</p> <p>"She says she's had sex dreams," I said to Rooney. "Ask her about masturbating," Rooney hissed from across the room. ...Georgia Warr that's basically what we're trying to determine a second question—when you have a wank</p>

Page	Content
	<p>do you think about YOURSELF having sex?? And if so ... with what gender?? rooney says the gender doesn't matter for her</p> <p>Felipa Quintana JESUS georgia what is this conversation omg Wait Rooney thinks about being with girls??????</p> <p>Georgia Warr yeah</p> <p>Felipa Quintana Okay.... . Okay interesting Well firstly, yeah I do think about myself? Idk what else I would think about?? I guess unless you're literally just having a wank to porn ... but even then it's like at least a little bit about you and your fantasies too And obviously I just think about girls haha ... the thought of being with a guy just disgusts me I mean I am very much a lesbian. We've established this This is interesting though</p> <p>"She said she does think about herself having sex," I said. Rooney nodded, though she'd started adjusting her hair so I couldn't read her expression. "Yeah. I mean, that's what most people do, I think."</p> <p>Georgia Warr i won't tell rooney this one, this is just a question from me do you fantasize about other people?? like real people? like if you get a crush or meet someone really hot, do you fantasize about having sex with them????</p> <p>Felipa Quintana Georgia how come you wanna know all this? Are you okay?? Are you and Jason having SEX Oh god I don't know if I want to know</p> <p>Georgia Warr calm down i'm not having sex just trying to understand some stuff</p> <p>Felipa Quintana Okay Yeah I guess I do sometimes Not eeeevery single hot person I meet but if I really liked someone ... I mean sometimes I just can't help it I guess haha? ..."People are really out there just ... thinking about having sex all the time and they can't even help it?" I spluttered.</p>

Page	Content
204	<p>I'd never fantasized about myself having sex. ...Picturing fanfic characters having sex? Great. Fine. Sexy. But picturing myself having sex with anyone, guy, girl, whoever, didn't interest me.</p>
207	<p>"She thought it was weird we hadn't kissed yet." OK, that wasn't exactly what she'd said just before our big sex conversation.</p>
210	<p>I wanted to want to kiss him. But I didn't actually want to kiss him. But maybe I should do it anyway. ...He met my eyes, questioning. Then he leaned in and pressed his lips to mine.</p>
211	<p>My first kiss was with Jason Farley-Shaw in the November of my first year of university, standing in front of a college kitchen sink. ...It was not Jason's fault that it was not amazing. I didn't have anyone to compare him to, obviously, but objectively, he was perfectly fine at kissing. He didn't do it too deep or forcefully. There were no teeth incidents, or, God forbid, tongue. ...I hated how close he was. I hated the way his lips felt against mine. I hated the fact that he wanted to do this.</p>
214	<p>It wasn't just that I'd hurt Jason. It wasn't even having to accept that I was some kind of sexual orientation that barely anyone had heard of, that I would have to find some way to explain to my family and everyone else. ...But now I had to accept that it would never happen. None of it. No romance. No marriage. No sex.</p>
219	<p>I was about to give up and go back to my own bed, when she said, "Had sex with some guy." "Oh," I said. "What ... recently?" "Yeah. Like a couple of hours ago." She sighed. "I was bored." "Oh. Well ... good for you." She shook her head slowly. "No. Not really." "It ... was bad?" "I just did it to try and fill a hole." I considered this. "I may be a virgin," I said, "but I sort of thought that filling a hole was usually the point." Rooney let out a cackle. "Oh my God. You did not just make that joke." I glanced at her. She was grinning. "Are you referring to a different hole?" I asked. "A non-vaginal one?" "Yes, Georgia. I'm not talking about my fucking vagina." "OK. Just checking." I paused. "I thought you were all sex-positive and stuff. There's nothing wrong with casual sex." "I know that," she said, then shook her head. "I still believe in all that. I'm not saying that having casual sex makes me a bad person, because it doesn't. And I really do enjoy it. But tonight ... it was just ..." She sipped her tea, her eyes filling with tears again. "You know when you eat too much cake and it makes you feel sick? It was sort of like that. I thought it'd be fun, but it just made me feel ... lonely."</p>
222	<p>"I started thinking what would happen if people knew it was my birthday. I'd just end up going on another night out with a bunch of people I really don't know that well, and they'd all pretend to be my friend and sing 'Happy Birthday' and take fake-happy selfies for Instagram before we'd all separate and hook up with different people, and I'd just end up in some stranger's bed after having below-average sex, hating myself again."</p>

Page	Content
	<p>...We lay there in silence for a little while. “You ... don’t like having casual sex anymore,” I said, realizing what she’d been trying to say earlier. It wasn’t that casual sex had hurt her, or that it made her a bad person—it didn’t.</p>
224	<p>Jason liked me romantically. I’d taken advantage of that to figure out my sexual identity, despite knowing I didn’t like him like that in return. Selfish.</p>
225	<p>The duke is in love with a noble lady of Illyria, Olivia, so he sends Viola to express his love for her. Unfortunately, instead of accepting the duke’s feelings, Olivia falls in love with Viola, who is disguised as Cesario, a guy. And, doubly unfortunate, Viola falls in love with the duke. It’s not technically gay, but let’s be real: This play is very, very gay. Sunil had already volunteered to be Viola, saying, “Just give me all of the roles that mess around with gender, please.”</p>
230	<p>Without it, I would have probably just stayed in bed for two weeks, because figuring out my sexuality had unearthed a new kind of self-hatred I hadn’t been ready for.</p>
235	<p>I was never going to experience romantic love, all because of my sexuality—a fundamental part of my being that I couldn’t change. I drank wine. A lot of wine. It was free. ...I was absolutely stuffed with food and, to be honest, drunk already.</p>
237	<p>“No, absolutely not, Georgia, she’s—she’s objectively extremely hot and, yes, in any ordinary situation she would be exactly my type and I know you know that but—I mean, she’s straight and she literally hates me, so even if I did, what would be the point—” ...I had a feeling that, if she continued to get even drunker, she was going to do something she regretted.</p>
238	<p>I got another drink from the bar, which I didn’t need because I was already drunk, and stumbled aimlessly around the ball and all its various rooms. The more I drank, the more I could space out and not care about being alone, in every sense of the word.</p>
239	<p>I went to curl up in the tea room, only to find myself stuck opposite a couple who were making out in the corner. I hated them. I tried to ignore them and drank my wine while scrolling through Instagram. ...I turned towards the door and found Pip there in her green jacket, one hand on her hip and a plastic cup undoubtedly full of alcohol in the other.</p>
240	<p>Pip frowned. “Jesus. How much have you drunk?”</p>
246	<p>“Holy shit, Georgia. How much did you drink?” “I ... fourteen.” “Fourteen what?” “Fourteen drinks.” “No, you didn’t.” “OK, I can’t remember how much I drank.” ...I realized I was still lying on the floor, which was awkward, so I sat up and reassured everyone that I was fine and had just had a bit too much to drink, which they chuckled at and went on with their evenings.</p>
249	<p>Because I am aromantic and asexual. ...“It seems way better to not be attracted to guys. Girls are much nicer all round.” Then she made a pained expression. “Oh my God. I spent so much time and energy trying to set you up with Jason. Why didn’t you say anything?”</p>

Page	Content
250	<p>“Date. Ever. I don’t like girls either. I don’t like anyone.” ...“You are drunk,” she said. I was, a little, but that wasn’t the point. ...“I don’t like guys,” I said. “And I don’t like girls. I don’t like anyone. So I’m never going to date anyone.”</p>
252	<p>But I was drunk. And so was she. ...“Even if I was gay, I wouldn’t necessarily feel something just because you’re a girl.”</p>
253	<p>I hated it just as I had hated the kiss with Jason. I hated how close her face was to me. I hated the feeling of her lips moving around against mine. I hated her breath on my skin. My eyes kept flickering open, trying to get a sense of when this was going to be over, while she put her hand on the back of my head, pulling me closer to her.</p>
255	<p>“If you’re seeing each other, fine, just go and fuck each other and enjoy yourselves, but you could have at least done me the courtesy of informing me so I could try and put a stop to my feelings and not be absolutely fucking crushed right now—”</p>
256	<p>“Stop blaming her!” Rooney shouted back. “She was figuring out her sexuality!”</p>
258	<p>I went to sleep for a few hours, and when I woke up, I could hear the thumping of people having sex in the room above me. This was, perhaps, the final straw. Was everyone just having sex and falling in love all the time?</p>
264	<p>Georgia Warr Hey, I know you’re not talking to me, and I understand why, but I just want you to know the facts: Rooney kissed me because I’ve been very confused about my sexuality and she wanted to help me see if I liked girls.</p>
266	<p>I know we were drunk but that’s literally not an excuse for the way I acted. You know when straight guys find out that a girl is gay and they’re all like “haha but you haven’t kissed me so how do you know you’re gay.” ...And then I thought kissing would be a good idea because I always think kissing just solves everything!!!! You’ve been figuring out your sexuality for months and I did everything wrong. EVERYTHING. I had so many ideas about how people should feel about romance and sex and all that, but ... it’s all just bullshit and I’m so sorry ...I decided to be bold and type out: so as it turns out, I am aromantic asexual ...yeah I was confused about it too haha it means i’m not attracted to anyone romantically or sexually no matter their gender sorta been figuring that out lately ...R—I mean, we have KISSED. Sort of. Platonically made out.</p>
270	<p>Googling aromantic asexual unleashed a quantity of information I was not mentally or emotionally prepared for. The first time I searched it, I quickly exited the window and didn’t search again for a whole day. ...In fact, people had been using the word asexual as a sexual identity since as far back as 1907. ...The internet informed me that asexual simply meant little-to-no sexual attraction, and aromantic meant little-to-no romantic attraction.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>...I wondered whether Sunil had ever felt like this about his own asexuality, and after I scrolled down his Instagram for a while, I found he had a blog.</p> <p>...He'd also posted a few times about asexuality. One post stuck out to me, where he'd written about how he'd initially found it difficult to accept his asexuality. Sexuality in general was very taboo in Indian culture, he'd explained, and when he'd looked for support, he'd found that the asexual community—even online—was incredibly white. But after finding a group of Indian asexuals online, he'd started to feel proud of his identity.</p> <p>Sunil had no doubt been on a very different journey from me, and a lot of things that he'd dealt with, I would be shielded from due to being white and cis. But it was reassuring to know that he too had felt some anxiety about being asexual.</p> <p>...It turned out that lots of asexual people still wanted to have sex for all sorts of different reasons, but some felt totally neutral about it, and others—what I'd originally thought—literally despised it. Some asexual people still masturbated; others didn't have libidos at all.</p> <p>...And people identified as all sorts of combinations of romantic and sexual—there were gay asexuals, like Sunil, or bisexual aromantics, like Jess, or straight asexuals, pansexual aromantics, and loads more. Some asexual and aromantic people didn't even like splitting up their attraction into two labels, and some just used the word queer to summarize everything. There were words I had to google like demisexual and grayromantic, but even after googling, I wasn't sure exactly what they meant.</p> <p>The aromantic and asexual spectrums weren't just straight lines. They were radar charts with at least a dozen different axes.</p> <p>It was a lot.</p> <p>Like a lot a lot.</p> <p>The crux of it all was that I did not feel sexual or romantic feelings for anyone.</p> <p>...I'm not sure when I realized that I was no longer feeling melancholic distress about my sexuality.</p>
278	<p>By "everything" she definitely didn't mean how I'd utterly destroyed the very small number of friendships I'd had, begrudgingly realized that I wasn't straight and was in fact a sexuality that very few people in real life have heard of, and realized that the world was so obsessed with romantic love that I couldn't go an hour without hating myself because I didn't feel it.</p>
279	<p>In the corner, I spotted my cousin Ellis, sitting quietly with a glass of wine and one leg crossed over the other.</p>
280	<p>She was asking me if I was gay.</p>
282	<p>One day I would probably have to just tell them.</p> <p>I don't like guys. Oh, so you like girls? No, I don't like girls either.</p> <p>...It's called being "aromantic asexual."</p>
289	<p>"I don't know when I started to realize that I hated it. For a long time, I was just dating and having sex because that's what people did. And I wanted to feel like those people. I wanted the fun, exciting beauty of romance and sex. But there was always this underlying feeling of wrongness. Almost disgust. It just felt wrong on a fundamental level."</p> <p>..."And yet, I kept trying to like it. I kept thinking, Maybe I'm just picky. Maybe I haven't met the right guy. Maybe I like girls instead. Maybe, maybe, maybe."</p>
290	<p>"It's a real sexuality," I said. I didn't even know if Ellis knew it was a sexuality. "Just like being gay or straight or bi."</p> <p>Ellis chuckled. "The nothing sexuality."</p> <p>"It's not nothing. It's ... well it's two different things. Aromantic is when you don't feel</p>

Page	Content
	<p>romantic attraction and asexual is when you don't feel sexual attraction. Some people are just one or the other, but I'm both, so I'm ... aromantic asexual." ... "Are they also ... ?" "They're asexual too."</p>
292	<p>"Aromantic asexual?" "Yes. No one who isn't aromantic asexual will understand it."</p>
294	<p>Thankfully we found a tiny beer-stained table in a back room, and I left Rooney to guard it while I procured us a bowl of chips to share and a jug of strawberry daquiri with two paper straws.</p>
296	<p>She said it with such nonchalance, it was as if she'd realized her sexuality and come out in the space of about ten seconds. But I knew her better than that. She'd probably been figuring it out for a while. Just like I had. ...She was staring at the table. "You know, when we kissed ... I think I did that because there's always been this part of me who's wanted to ... um, you know. Be with girls. And you were just a safe option to try it out because I knew you wouldn't hate me forever. Which was a really shit thing to do, obviously. God, I'm so sorry." "It was a shit thing to do," I agreed. "But I can relate about accidentally using people because you're confused about your sexuality." We'd both fucked up in a lot of ways. And while our sexuality confusion wasn't an excuse, it was good that we both realized our mistakes. ... "I never had any gay or bi friends at school," Rooney said. "I didn't really know anyone openly gay, actually. Maybe I would have figured it out sooner if I had." "My best friend has been out since she was fifteen, and it still took me years to figure myself out," I said. ...She snorted. "I'm at uni for three months and suddenly I'm not straight anymore." ...I got us a second cocktail jug—cosmopolitan—and nachos.</p>
299	<p>This was absolutely untrue—Pip had heavily implied that she liked Rooney, and then I'd kissed Rooney anyway.</p>
305	<p>The film night this month would be Moonlight, the Pride club nights would be on January 27, February 16, and March 7, the Trans Book Club would take place at the Bill Bryson Library on January 19, the Big Queer Dungeons & Dragons group was looking for new members, and it was someone named Mickey's turn to host the Queer, Trans, and Intersex People of Color Society dinner on February 20 at their flat in Gilesgate. ... "When I was a fresher, I didn't feel like I belonged at Durham. I'd arrived hoping to finally meet some people like me, but instead I found myself still surrounded by a lot of cis, straight white people. I'd spent a lot of my teenage life very alone. And by that point, I'd got used to it. I spent a long time thinking this was the way things had to be—I had to survive on my own, I had to do everything on my own, because nobody would ever help me. I spent much of that first year in a really dark place ... until I met my best friend, Jess."</p>
306	<p>"Pride Soc isn't just about doing queer stuff," Sunil continued, and that got him some laughs. "It's not even about finding potential hook-ups." ... "No. It's about the relationships we form here. Friendship, love, and support while we're all trying to survive and thrive in a world that often doesn't feel like it was made for us. Whether you're gay, lesbian, bi, pan, trans, intersex, non-binary, asexual, aromantic, queer, or however you identify—most of us here felt a sense of unbelonging while we were growing up."</p>

Page	Content
307	<p>He was sitting with a couple of other guys, drinking their way through a bottle of wine with sour expressions on their faces.</p> <p>"It's so pathetic the way he feels like he needs to bring up asexuality literally every time he does one of these," Lloyd was saying. "Next thing you know, we'll be getting any old cis-hets joining who think they're mildly oppressed."</p>
311	<p>And for the first time since getting to this university, I actually enjoyed it. All of it. The loud music, the sticky floor, the drinks served in tiny plastic cups. The old classics this club was playing, the drunk girls we befriended in the bathroom because of the pug plushie I'd been carrying around, Rooney slinging her arm over my shoulder, tipsy, swaying along to "Happy Together" by The Turtles and "Walking on Sunshine" by Katrina and the Waves, Sunil grabbing Jason by the hands and forcing him to do the Macarena even though he thought it was cringey.</p> <p>...There was one point in the night where she started drunkenly chatting and laughing with another group of people, students I'd never even seen before, and I wondered whether she was going to do her thing and abandon us.</p>
313	<p>"Yeah." Jason nodded again. "You're ... asexual? Or aromantic?"</p> <p>I froze. "What—wait, you know what those are?"</p> <p>"Well ... I'd heard of them. And when you messaged me I made the connection and then I went and looked them up and, yeah. That sounded like what you were describing."</p> <p>..."I—I am. Uh, both of them. Aro-ace."</p> <p>"Aro-ace," Jason repeated. "Well."</p> <p>"Yeah."</p>
334	<p>"He decided everything. He decided when we would go to parties. He decided we should start drinking and smoking and going to clubs using fake IDs. He decided when we would have sex. And I just kept thinking ... as long as he was happy, then I must be living my dream. This was love. He was my soulmate. This was what everyone wanted."</p>
344	<p>"I am so fucking done with liking straight girls. Literally my whole teenage life I spend pining after straight girls, maybe getting, like, one kiss from a slightly curious girl who immediately goes back to her boyfriend, and then I come to uni hoping to finally meet a solid range of other queer girls ... and I just immediately fall for a straight girl again." She smacked her forehead with one hand. "Why am I the actual dumbest gay alive?"</p>
345	<p>"Georgia ... I don't want to ... force you to talk about anything that you don't want to talk about. Like, that's not what people should do to anyone, especially their friends, and especially about things like ... like sexuality."</p> <p>..."I'm not sure if you're aware of this fact, Georgia Warr, but I am an exceptionally humongous lesbian with a lifetime of experience in gay thoughts."</p>
346	<p>For Pip, at least, it probably would have been easier to understand if I did like girls.</p> <p>..."It's called aromantic asexual," I said on an exhale.</p> <p>..."Some people call it aro-ace for short."</p> <p>"Oh, that's way better. That sounds like a character from Star Wars." She made a dramatic gesture with one hand. "Aro-Ace. Defender of the universe."</p>
350	<p>"You fucking dick. I'm not drunk enough to cry while having emotional conversations with friends."</p>
353	<p>"Georgia's not into sex."</p>

Page	Content
362	<p>“Excuse me!” Pip exclaimed. “I don’t—I’m not obsessed with losing my virginity!”</p> <p>“Sure you’re not.”</p> <p>“I just think having sex would be fun, that’s all.” Pip faced the screen again, going a little red.</p> <p>“I don’t care about being a virgin, I just—sex seems fun, so I’d like to start having it sooner rather than later.”</p> <p>...“But why are, like, most teen movies focused around the fact that teenagers feel like they’re going to die if they don’t lose their virginity?” I asked, then almost immediately figured out what the answer was. “Oh. This is an asexual thing.” I laughed at myself. “I forgot other people are obsessed with having sex. Wow. That’s really funny.”</p> <p>...“It’s a good movie, but I think it’d be better if the main romance was gay,” said Pip.</p> <p>“Agreed,” said Rooney, and we looked at her.</p> <p>“I thought you’d be into this sort of adorable post–John-Hughes hetero romance,” said Pip.</p> <p>“The straights eat this shit up.”</p> <p>“They do,” Rooney agreed, “but fortunately, I’m not straight, so, yeah.”</p>
364	<p>Like first about the play and then about our lives at school and all sorts of deep shit. She told me ... man we talked about a lot of really personal stuff for like ... at least an hour, maybe more She told me she thinks she’s pansexual!!!!</p>
365	<p>And then she just leaned in and KISSED ME</p> <p>...And then she leaned in again and we literally started MAKING OUT</p> <p>Like I’m talking proper making out</p> <p>So I’m just like holy fuck how is this happening, I’m literally deceased, and we just make out in my bed for like twenty minutes</p> <p>...So after a while she kneels up and just like ... takes her t-shirt off. And I’m like. Oh my god</p> <p>And then I’m thinking OKAY she wants to go further than just making out??</p> <p>And I’d be okay with that??? I also want to do that????? She like ... lies back down and is like “is this okay?” and I’m like hell yeah please proceed</p> <p>(I didn’t actually use the phrase “please proceed” during my first sexual encounter. I think I just nodded very enthusiastically.)</p> <p>So obviously I’ve never done anything sexual with anyone and she’s like ... just about to put her hand in my pajama shorts and I’m nervous as hell but extremely up for it lol</p> <p>But then she pulls back and she’s like “oh my god” and she jumps off me and just starts freaking out, like, pulling her clothes on and packing up all her stuff and being like “I’m so sorry I’m so sorry” and I’m just lying there horny and confused like “um”</p>
373	<p>“I’m ... very scared of ... getting close to people. And ... last night, with Pip, I ... what we did—well, what we were about to do, I—I just started to think that I was doing what I normally did. Having sex to just ... detach myself from feeling anything real.” She shook her head. “But I wasn’t. I realized almost as soon as I left. I realized I ... it would have been the first time with someone I actually ... cared about. With someone who cared about me too.”</p>
374	<p>“I know you’ve been trying to help me with Pip,” she began, “and I appreciate that, Georgia, I really do. I like her and I think she likes me and we like being around each other and, yep, I’m just gonna say it—I think we really, really want to have sex with each other.”</p>
385	<p>Rooney and Pip came back and did more <i>Much Ado</i>, where Benedick and Beatrice finally admit they love each other, and when they kissed, the audience roared with applause.</p>
390	<p>“Well, I’m only going to be <i>Pride Soc</i> president for a couple more months, and before I have to step down ... I wanted to set up a new group within <i>Pride Soc</i>. A society for aromantic and asexual students. And I suppose I wondered ... whether you’d want to be involved. Not</p>

Page	Content
	<p>necessarily as president of it, but ... well, I don't know. I just wanted to ask. No pressure, though."</p> <p>"Oh. Um ..." I immediately felt nervous about the idea. I still had days where I wasn't brimming with confidence about my sexuality, despite all the days where I felt proud and grateful that I knew who I was and what I wanted.</p>
392	<p>Once Rooney had finished berating Jason for bringing up her sex life and Jason had tactically retreated towards the bathroom, I watched as Rooney and Pip stood together in the doorway.</p>
396	<p>Funny how I've always been able to tell when people are into me, but with Pip, there's just a voice in the back of my head screaming, SHE LIKES YOU AS A FRIEND. KISSING HER WILL RUIN EVERYTHING.</p>
397	<p>Pip's bedroom looks like it belongs to an eccentric old woman. There are cacti dotting the overflowing bookshelves, clothes strewn about the carpet or half-heartedly folded and placed on the windowsill, an assortment of used crockery that don't match each other, a large lesbian pride flag above her bed, and so many sets of fairy lights that the room is probably a major fire risk.</p>
400	<p>She said she isn't straight. She said she isn't straight.</p>
401	<p>I am too fucking gay for all of this.</p>
409	<p>"You know what I was thinking about?" Pip says suddenly. Her voice is so close to my ear. "What?" "You saying you're not straight." ..."I never had any gay friends at home," I confess. "Even at school, like, nobody was out except maybe one or two boys in the sixth form. It was, like ... shame central." ..."Didn't you come out really young, though?" "Is fifteen young to come out?" ..."I had a few queer friends in the sixth form," she says. "There were like maybe five of us who used to hang out sometimes. Two gay boys, a trans boy, and a bisexual girl." ..."I wish I'd had queer friends I actually clicked with. I mean, I did, I guess. But Georgia was trapped in repression city, so ...yeah." ...It's not that I want Pip to teach me the ways of being queer. ..."There was, um ... there was one girl who, like, wanted to get with me a couple of times, so obviously I developed a massive crush on her, but she got a boyfriend like two weeks later and told me she'd kissed me as a joke and she was straight after all." ..."I think I'm probably pansexual," I say. ..."Yeah, I ... I dunno. I know there's a whole 'bi versus pan' thing, but ... the 'attraction regardless of gender' thing ... I like that. I relate to that. Feels vague enough not to stress me out." ..."I kissed my friend Beth," I continue. "When we were like thirteen. At some house party." Pip's eyes widen. "No way." "Yeah. She was, like, fully straight and definitely did it for boy attention. That's also what I thought I was doing, but looking back, I was one hundred percent into it." She grins. "You know, they say it's a classic teen queer girl experience to have had an incredibly dramatic, mildly homoerotic breakup with a best friend." ..."Wow." I smile. I know she's kind of joking, but knowing that's a thing actually makes me feel a little comforted. "I guess I am a real queer girl."</p>

Page	Content
413	<p>And when she looks at my lips, my sleep-addled mind takes that as the signal, and I lean in and kiss her.</p>
414	<p>In the two seconds that Rooney’s lips are touching mine, my brain takes me through a thousand thoughts: Holy shit. Holy fucking shit, I’m dying. I’m dying. Are my hands shaking? If she hadn’t kissed me then, I would have kissed her. Wow, her lips are soft. Oh no, wait, this wasn’t supposed to happen, she’s going to leave me, she’s going to make out with me and then stomp on my fucking heart. ...No, kiss her back right now. Oh my God, I’m gonna make out with a hot mean girl in my bed. ...She slowly comes back to me. I put my hand on her waist. She cups my cheek. And then we’re kissing again. At first, it’s just one kiss. But then it’s another. And then she’s pushing closer to me still, and I can wrap my arm around her waist and fully pull her against me, and she’s kissing me harder, pressing against me and pulling back but never taking her mouth from mine, and I’m light-headed as wisps of her hair brush my skin— Oh God, we’re making out. It’s like we both realize what’s happening at the same time. There’s a pause, a tiny moment where her lips leave mine, and I dare to open my eyes just a little, just to see if she’s regretting this, just to ask whether she really means it, but before I can focus enough to think, she kisses me again, hard. I get a sudden flash of memory—the bouncy castle battle. For a while, it feels like that, sweaty excitement and frantically pushing and pulling at each other, her rolling on top of me and pressing me into my mattress, our hands swapping positions, hers on my waist, mine on her shoulders. She makes a noise. I die. And then she gets closer and we slow down, kissing and hugging at the same time, and we do that for, God, I don’t know, I don’t even know, I can’t even think. At one point her mouth moves away, towards my jaw, and then my neck, and she whispers, “Can I do that?” and I just make a noise and nod because I can’t think, I can’t form words, I’ve forgotten how to fucking speak—She is really good at this. As soon as I think it, she pulls back, hovering on top of me, just far enough away that I can’t quite make out all the features of her face. “D’you wanna stop?” My cheeks are burning. “N-no. Why?” “You froze there for a second.” “Yeah, well, you’re really good at this.” My hands are shaking, so I curl them into fists. “I ... I haven’t had much practice.” She grins and then her hands slot into mine, unclenching my fingers. “Well, you don’t need practice.” And then we’re kissing again.</p>
416	<p>I have never felt more turned on in my fucking life. I feel horrible as soon as I think it. I don’t want Pip to be just another person I’ve slept with. We absolutely, definitely, should not have sex right now. So I focus on kissing her. She says she isn’t well-practiced, and I can sort of tell, but there’s something impossibly attractive about that too, the fact that she’s trying so hard, the fact that she wants this to be as good as possible. I put my hands on her waist again, because that feels like the safe zone, even</p>

Page	Content
	<p>though I want my hands everywhere, anywhere, all at once. Had I even realized how much I've been dying to touch her like this? For months?</p> <p>I kiss her into her pillow and can't stop thinking about how I want this to be perfect. I want to show her I can be better than what she thinks I am, but I also want us to lose it and do everything, feel everything, just because we can and we want to.</p> <p>She pulls away to kiss my neck, just like I'd done to her, but as she does so, she puts a hand on the back of my head, gentle, and it nearly makes me start crying. I definitely do not want that to happen, so I pull away from her and we return to kissing, which feels safer.</p> <p>Or at least I think it does, until she runs her hands down my sides, her fingertips just touching the patch of skin beneath my shirt, and even though I know it's the worst idea in the world, even though this is only the first time we've kissed, even though we should take it slow if we want this to work—</p> <p>I can't. I like her too much. And I want all of her. So badly.</p> <p>I sit upright on top of her, watching the confused expression dawn in her eyes as I move away. Even in the dim light of the room, I can tell she's flushed and out of breath, her curls frizzy and messy, her T-shirt twisted a little around her body, her hands resting cautiously on my hips.</p> <p>In one swift movement, I pull my shirt over my head and drop it on the floor.</p> <p>Her mouth drops open. I can feel how hard she's breathing. And she just stares.</p> <p>I want her to stare.</p> <p>But then she stammers, "Roo, wait, I—I can't see you."</p> <p>It makes me freeze over for a second. A brief moment of panic, before I realize what she means.</p> <p>She looks away and reaches out to the bedside table, fumbles for her glasses, and puts them on.</p> <p>When she stares back up at me, eyes wide, seeing everything, looking once again like the Pip I met in the car park all those months ago, I suddenly feel a new twinge of fear. I am going to ruin this. I am going to ruin her.</p> <p>I drop back down, hovering over her, ignoring the thoughts, not wanting to do anything else until I know for sure that she wants this to go further. I need to hear it.</p> <p>"Is this okay?" I ask.</p> <p>She just makes a small noise and nods frantically.</p> <p>This is a mistake.</p> <p>I'm ruining everything.</p> <p>But we both want it.</p> <p>We start kissing again, her hands slowly moving onto my back, and it gets harder and faster more quickly than before, and now there's a fucking war in my brain. Should I take her shirt off? Should we slow down? Should I pull the covers over us? Should I leave?</p> <p>Should I take this further?</p> <p>I should take this further.</p> <p>Maybe this is the only time we'll ever get to do this.</p> <p>I slide my hand towards the waistband of her shorts, then glance at her expression and—</p> <p>I stop.</p> <p>As my palm brushes the skin of her stomach, Pip's expression changes, and suddenly I have no idea what she's thinking. She looks stuck, her breath caught in her throat—is she scared? Does she hate it? Is she just nervous? Excited? It'd be her first time—does she want it like this, with me? Should we wait? Should we go on a date first? Should we kiss more? Should</p>

Page	Content
	<p>she have this experience with someone better? Someone nicer? Someone more mentally stable?</p> <p>And just like that, my brain breaks.</p> <p>“Oh my God,” I say, without even meaning to.</p>
419	<p>Rooney practically hurls herself out of my bed, just as she was about to—Okay, I wasn’t exactly sure what she thought she was about to do beyond “put hand in shorts,” but I was really fucking excited about it, and now it’s not happening anymore.</p> <p>...My brain is only just processing the fact that I may have been just about to lose my virginity to Rooney Bach, so I fail to say anything in response to this outburst.</p> <p>...We would kiss, or whatever, and then she would realize she didn’t like me after all.</p>
420	How long had we been kissing?
423	<p>AVEN (The Asexual Visibility & Education Network): asexuality.org</p> <p>What Is Asexuality?: whatisasexuality.com</p> <p>Aces & Aros: acesandaros.org</p> <p>AZE, a journal publishing asexual, aromantic, and agender writers and artists: azejournal.com</p> <p>AUREA (Aromantic-spectrum Union for Recognition, Education, and Advocacy): aromanticism.org</p> <p>Indian Aces: facebook.com/ IndianAces</p> <p>Asexual resources at the Trevor Project: thetrevorproject.org/ trvr_support_center/ asexual</p>

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	15
Bitch	2
Dick	4
Fuck	132
Goddamn	1
Piss	8
Queer	26
Shit	69
Tit	1