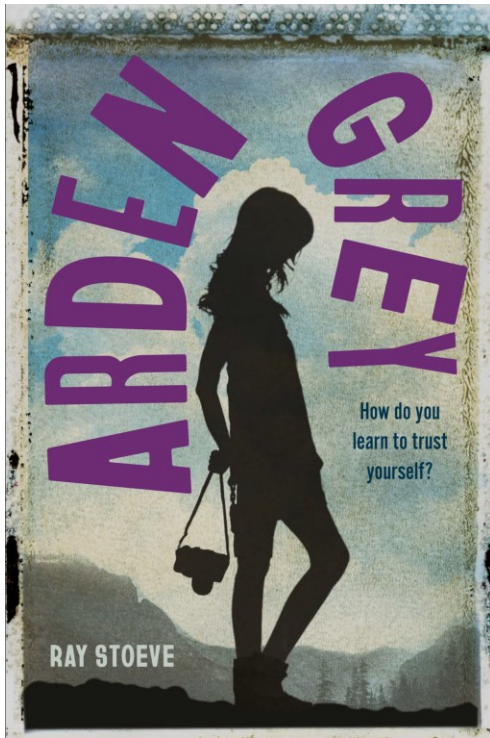


ARDEN GREY



Young Adult

By Ray Stoeve

ISBN: 978-1-68335-949-4

Book Summary:

A sixteen-year-old girl attempts to discover her sexuality while her best friend and father enter romantic relationships.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit alternate gender ideologies; inexplicit sexual activities; alternate sexualities; self-harm involving cutting; profanity and derogatory terms; controversial religious commentary; reference to illegal drug use; and alcohol use by minors.

2 /5

Teen Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
v	To queer friendships, in all their magical and life-giving forms
1	<p>Tanner may be the worst human in the world, but grievous bodily harm isn't my style. "An expression! Ladies, gentlemen, and nonbinary honored guests, I see an actual facial expression."</p> <p>...Jamie and I have been best friends since freshman year of high school, and sometimes people think we're dating, but that's just weird. I don't like anyone like that. Not boys or girls or anyone else. Why would I need to date when I have friends? Okay, one friend. But the point stands. I'm not interested in any of that stuff—not romance, not sex.</p> <p>..."Are you done yet?" I ask.</p> <p>"Nope. Gotta get those muscles. Make the most of that testosterone." Another pull-up. "Hashtag trans guy life."</p> <p>"Hashtag trans formation," I say as his chin barely clears the bar.</p>
6	<p>"Arden!" Jamie's mom Kim beams at me, then guns it away from the curb. She's cut her hair again, in what Jamie and I call the "Ellen DeGeneres": short, blond, and very, very gay. Jamie's other mom, Lisa, is more of a Ponytail Lesbian.</p>
16	<p>"Shit!" he says, voice ringing through the closed door. I walk out of my room, laughing. "I mean, not actual shit, I'm just peeing in here. I forgot to do my shot this morning. Can we go to my house?"</p> <p>...In his bedroom, Jamie assembles his supplies for his testosterone shot. I've seen him do it a hundred times, but I've never thought to take a picture.</p> <p>"Can I?" I ask, holding up the camera.</p> <p>"Sure." He's focused on the T in its tiny bottle, upended on the needle as he draws it out. I stand on the carpet in front of him and lift the camera. Click. He removes the vial, switches the needle out for a smaller one, and buries it in the fat on his stomach.</p> <p>"My manniversary is coming up," he says as he pushes the testosterone, suspended in golden oil, out of the needle and under his skin.</p> <p>"I can't believe you've been on T for a year," I say, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of him. "We should celebrate."</p>
23	<p>We were learning about sexual orientation in sophomore health class and our teacher (Mr. Feldman, second-most Politically Aware Teacher in the school, after the history teacher, Ms. Maldonado) was talking about the LGBT acronym. Specifically, the rest of it: QIAP, etcetera, etcetera.</p> <p>Vanessa Flores, the secretary of the Queer Alliance, was expounding on the meaning of asexuality, and I found myself nodding. I could relate to it.</p> <p>...The next week when people were buying tickets for the spring dance, Tanner and his buddies were hassling every girl who came into class, asking them about their date status. When he shouted at me from across the room, I ignored him. He repeated the question. And then: "What are you, Arden, asexual? Have you ever even been to a dance?"</p> <p>I dropped into my seat, but the blush turned my face hot and I knew he saw it, because he started cackling, shoving back and forth with his buddies the way guys do when they think they've said something clever.</p>
29	<p>There are celebrities I think are cute. Ones I've loved so much I've imagined us on dates or holding hands. Which maybe means I do care about romance. But the idea of dating someone in my real life makes my brain itch and my stomach turn over. If I dated someone, they might want to kiss, which wouldn't be terrible.</p>

Page	Content
30	<p>In bed that night, I tap through my Google Calendar, checking out what homework is due next week. A box pops up for Friday night: JAMIE'S ONE YEAR ON T. Right. We talked about that.</p> <p>I text him. your manniversary is Friday. what do you wanna do? ONE WEEK BABY! Um idk. movie night? we ALWAYS do movie night. you've been on t a whole year! we could burn my bras? you STILL have them???? wow jamie</p>
39	<p>Jamie floats from moment to moment that week, texting me when Caroline smiles at him in class, or when she reveals yet another thing they have in common (her lesbian aunt and his lesbian moms; younger sisters; a fixation on the same Seattle Sounders soccer player).</p>
40	<p>I don't know if I even believe in female or male anymore. Biological sex is kind of meaningless when you think about it. Why do body parts somehow symbolize gender? Makes no sense. Jamie's a guy. I'm a girl. Body parts have nothing to do with it. It's how we feel inside.</p>
41	<p>"Why do you have gay porn on your wall?" Garrett asked when I put the photo up in June. "Just because she's a lesbian in a bra doesn't mean it's porn." I rolled my eyes at him. Of all the things I don't want to discuss with my thirteen-year-old brother, porn and my sexuality are at the top of the list.</p> <p>...But Hayley Kiyoko is gorgeous. I'll give him that. I might even say she's hot, except "hot" feels like a word someone would use if they wanted to do it with the person they were talking about. And I don't want to have sex with her. I just want to cuddle and talk and maybe kiss.</p> <p>This is what's confusing to me. I get crushes. I have romantic feelings for people. For girls—it's always girls. Laverne Cox smiles at me from beside Hayley, and next to her, Janelle Monae. Liking girls isn't really a big deal to me. At least, not when they're celebrities. But a girl I could actually date? One who would want to cuddle and talk and kiss, and maybe other things, too, things I know I don't want, the same way I know what I do want? Terrifying.</p>
56	<p>"It was so hot," Jamie says. "She, like, backed into the wall and pulled me against her, and then boom!" He throws his hands out. "We were making out."</p> <p>"Whoa." I nod, trying to look impressed, but I just feel tense and exposed, as if I'm the one grabbed and kissed instead. I don't like the feeling, and the mental image makes my brain twitch.</p> <p>..."I'm sorry. I forget you're asexual sometimes."</p> <p>I shrug again, as if I can throw off that word and everything it means, or might mean, about me. "I don't know if I'm asexual. I just don't like talking about sex. Or thinking about it. I just don't get it."</p> <p>"That's pretty much the definition of 'ace.'"</p> <p>..."What about the girlfriend you told me about, the one you had in middle school?"</p> <p>"That was middle school." He drums his fingers on his thighs. "And, I don't know. She liked the girl me. Caroline likes the boy me."</p> <p>Oh. Of course. I'm such an asshole. This is important to Jamie for more reasons than just the making out.</p> <p>"When I started transitioning, I thought no one would ever want to date me," he says softly.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>“But she does. She knows I’m trans and she doesn’t care. Being trans is just part of who I am, instead of all of who I am. She gets that.”</p>
58	<p>“Let’s do this,” Jamie says with a grin, and douses the wood in gasoline from a small canister he brought. He pulls a plastic bag and a box of matches out of his pack. Inside the bag is a pile of bras—regular ones and sports bras. Jamie lights the match as I step back. He tosses it in, and the wood goes up in a whoosh of flame. Jamie yelps with glee. We each grab a bra, Jamie whirling his around his head before tossing it onto the fire. I drop my selection on top, and the flames gobble the material. Pretty soon there’s a hunk of melted, smoldering fabric in the pit, the fire dying down slowly. Jamie dashes down to the water and back up, racing around the iron ring and back to the water again, whooping. “Burn, baby, burn!” he screeches. “Never again! Binders only!”</p> <p>...“I can’t wait till I’m eighteen,” he says, smoothing his hands down his chest, flattened by the binder under his shirt. His moms’ one stipulation when he came out was that he couldn’t get surgery until he was legally an adult. I still wasn’t sure Jamie had forgiven them for that, but he hadn’t talked about it in a while. He was so angry back then, raging about how they didn’t understand the torture of living in a body that didn’t feel like his, how he was almost sixteen and there were surgeons who would do it with parental consent, and why couldn’t they just give him that? I had to agree. His moms thought they were making the sensible choice. Surgery seemed like a big deal. And it was, but not the way they thought. I knew Jamie would be happier with a flat chest. But they didn’t back down. Eventually, especially after he started hormones, Jamie stopped talking about it as much.</p>
70	<p>In the kitchen, Jamie finds what he’s looking for: beer. He cracks open two and hands one to Caroline, offering me the other.</p> <p>...Marc reaches over and grabs a beer, tossing it to me, and I catch it reflexively. He cracks one of his own.</p> <p>...I stare at the beer in my hand. I’ve had a few sips of beer and wine before, at home when my parents had some with dinner, but never enough to get drunk. I pop the tab and take a sip. Jamie and Caroline laugh as I stick my tongue out.</p> <p>“It’s an acquired taste,” Caroline says, as if she’s drunk a lot of beers. Maybe she has. I’ve heard stories about the boys’ soccer team and their parties from Jamie. The girls’ team is probably the same.</p> <p>An hour later, Jamie and Caroline are drunk and grinding on each other in the living room.</p> <p>...I finished my beer, even though I hated every second of it, and now my body feels warm, my head fuzzy. Time moves slower.</p>
72	<p>“You’re the senior homecoming king. The captain of the basketball team. You must have girls all over you. If you’re straight. I guess you could be gay. Or bi.”</p> <p>...He shakes his head, looking away into the crowd. “I’m not anything.”</p> <p>...“What do you mean?”</p> <p>He shrugs. “Never mind. I’m gonna get another beer.”</p> <p>...Marc Davis isn’t anything? Isn’t straight, gay, or bi? Isn’t interested in anyone? What does that mean?</p> <p>I stew on that for an hour, until Caroline finally sobers up enough to drive. She’s still a little tipsy, and I think about protesting for a minute, but neither Jamie nor I have our licenses</p>

Page	Content
	and it's too late to catch the bus. I sit in the backseat, clutching the safety handle above the door while Jamie nuzzles her neck at the red lights.
83	But not as important as someone he can make out with.
91	I know what he means: I don't understand romance, sex, the way it makes people feel, the way it makes them act. Except I do. I've spent my whole life watching other people freak out over attractive celebrities, watched countless romcoms where people fall in love and have sex after a single glance, seen my parents fight one day and then seem completely fine the next. It just never seemed realistic, or healthy, or fun to me. Just exhausting. And I've never felt that way, never been swept off my feet or wanted to rip someone's clothes off the moment I met them.
106	"We haven't hung out in so long." I smile. "I know, right?" Of course I know. "I'm starving. Let's get some Dick's," he says with heavy innuendo, wiggling his eyebrows, and I laugh. Those jokes never get old, even though they still make me a little uncomfortable.
111	We'd made a Jeopardy-style game, but with the definitions of different genders and sexualities.
126	When he leaves, I start <i>To All the Boys I've Loved Before</i> for the third time. It's my current favorite movie. There isn't any sex, and not even much kissing, but it's still romantic and fun. If I dated someone, I would want it to be like Lara Jean and Peter. Except, you know. With a girl.
135	"Natalia," she says, shaking my hand with a smile. "She/ her." ..."This is Arden," Ryan says. "What are your pronouns, honey?" "She/ her," I say, a little dazed.
139	We're not big on Christmas; Mom was an atheist. Is an atheist. She only abandoned us three months ago and already I'm forgetting to talk about her as if she's still here.
143	I sneak glances as we pass: someone in a leather jacket covered in patches, a girl with her head tipped back and tattoos crawling up her neck, two boys kissing against the building's wall. In the hallway, we pass people whose genders I can only guess at, but won't, because I know that's rude and it doesn't matter anyway. ...People fill the gallery, hands curved around wine glasses. Dad heads to the open bar to get a beer and I hover by the table of food, eyeing the crackers and cheese.
152	"I can't believe this. I came here because I wanted to tell you, even though you don't want to hear it—I know we were taking space, but you're still my best friend, and I wanted you to know—I wanted you to be the first to know that we had sex last night, but all you can think about is yourself." ...They had sex? Last night? When he should have been at the gallery? ..."She told me this would happen." He shakes his head. "She was right. You don't get it." "What." I force the words out. "What do you mean." "You're aro-ace. We're not." He shrugs. "You can't understand what it's like, to fall in love, to want to be with someone like that."
154	If he really loves her. If that's what he meant when he said I couldn't understand what it's like to fall in love. To want someone in that way. What way? Sexually? He says it so easily, as if one follows the other, as if you can't separate them.

Page	Content
159	So he's probably with his friends. Hopefully not drinking. ...Is Patti Smith gay?
162	There's still a corkboard propped on it, a small drawing of a dick in the corner. Classic.
175	<p>"You're so lucky you live in the gayborhood," she says as we stand at the bus stop.</p> <p>...We board the bus, finding open seats near the back. I tell her about my dad, the bars he used to hang out in before all the straight people moved in. How one night, he met a famous drag queen, and they stayed up all night on a coke bender.</p> <p>"Oh my god." Her mouth opens.</p> <p>"He made me promise never to tell Mom that he told me," I say.</p> <p>"Your dad sounds fun," she says.</p> <p>"What about your parents?"</p> <p>She smiles. "They're adorable. They're both shorter than me and they're super in love. They kiss all the time. It's a little gross sometimes, but I don't mind."</p>
186	<p>"So you're in the Queer Alliance," I say, trying to sound casual.</p> <p>She mumbles affirmation through a mouthful of sandwich. "Joined last year," she says.</p> <p>"When I came out."</p> <p>"How did your parents take it?"</p> <p>She shrugged. "They didn't really get it at first. Mom was like, 'But if you like boys, too, why does it matter if you like girls?' Even though I said I like people of all genders, not just boys and girls. But I think they've accepted it. They might not understand it, but they love me."</p> <p>...People of all genders. I know I don't like boys. I mean, as friends they're fine, and I can see how people find them aesthetically pleasing. But I've never crushed on a boy the way I've crushed on girls. Well, celebrity girls. Am I attracted to nonbinary people, too?</p> <p>..."I mean. I do, too. I like girls, anyway. And maybe nonbinary people, too, I don't know."</p>
188	I don't know if I want to kiss Vanessa or hold her hand. I don't know if this is what a crush feels like or if I just really want to be her friend. But I want to be close to her, and it's a different kind of wanting than when I first befriended Jamie.
189	"I was out," Garrett says, but his voice is too loud, and slurring. He's drunk again.
206	"I knew you weren't asexual. That's not a real thing. You just want to be special."
211	"I don't know, hmm, let's see: My mom left us, my best friend abandoned me, my brother is sneaking out to get drunk with his friends, and it turns out my parents are officially getting a divorce. Where do you want to start?"
216	<p>I sit on the floor, at the small coffee table, and poke at the magazines he has. Mostly Sports Illustrated. I hold up the swimsuit edition with a raised eyebrow.</p> <p>"I haven't looked at that yet," he says.</p> <p>"Come on." I open it. A girl in the smallest bikini I've ever seen stares up at me. I know how I'm supposed to feel, and she's definitely beautiful, but that's all. Maybe I was wrong about Marc.</p> <p>"You remember the party?" he asks.</p> <p>"My first whole beer," I say, closing the magazine. "A truly momentous occasion."</p> <p>"No way," he says. "I'm honored."</p> <p>..."You remember what I said?" He starts talking again before I can answer. "About how I'm not anything. I think I'm asexual."</p> <p>..."Marc. Come on. I asked you about your orientation and you say you're not anything? And then you dip out?"</p>

Page	Content
	<p>...“It’s just weird,” he says. “My whole life I thought there was something wrong with me. And then Jamie mentioned asexuality one day and I was like, wait. I’m not the only one? And I looked up that word and it’s just so perfect. It explains everything. I never think about sex. Like, ever.” He waves his hand at the stack of magazines. “I even tried, you know.” He cups his hand and makes a jerking motion. “Nothing. I just have no interest in it. I want to date people, but how am I supposed to when everyone else wants to have sex? And expects me to want to?”</p> <p>“I know.”</p> <p>“It’s easier for you,” he says. “People don’t have stereotypes about girls and sex.”</p> <p>“Hello? Slut-shaming?” I turn my palms up.</p> <p>“That’s true.” He takes his arm off his face. “But like, people expect guys to want sex all the time. They don’t do that for girls.”</p> <p>“Doesn’t mean it’s easier. People still expect you to want to make out and have sex once you’re dating someone, no matter who you are.”</p> <p>“You’re right. It’s just a lot of pressure. People think I want to bone anything that moves because I’m a guy, and doubly so because I’m captain of the basketball team. Don’t even get me started on stereotypes about Black guys.”</p> <p>...“I bet if anyone saw us leaving together, they’d probably think we’re dating,” he says, glancing at me.</p> <p>“I mean, I like girls,” I say.</p> <p>He grins. “I know.”</p> <p>“What? How do you know?” I cross my arms.</p> <p>“Same way you knew about me. I can see it every time you look at Vanessa. You are in loooove,” he says, drawing out the last word.</p>
225	<p>He crosses to the stove, embracing Claudia from behind. She leans back to kiss him and I look at Vanessa, who raises an eyebrow.</p> <p>“I told you,” she says.</p> <p>“Told her what?” Francisco selects a knife and cutting board and begins chopping the onion Claudia hands him.</p> <p>“About your shameless PDA,” Vanessa says.</p> <p>Claudia laughs like a church bell. “Shameless is right! No shame here.” She winks at Francisco.</p>
229	<p>“So, when did you know?” she asks.</p> <p>I think for a minute. “I don’t know,” I say finally. “I was always into girl celebrities, not boys.” I’m careful with my language. She doesn’t need to know that my version of being into someone means holding hands, means wanting to be near them, but not in a naked way. Except maybe emotionally. Which is how I’m starting to feel right now—like my fear fell away with my hair and there’s just me beside her on the bed, nothing holding me back.</p> <p>“Saaaame,” she says. “At first, I was like, do I want to be with them or just be them? Turns out it’s both.” We laugh. “I mean, boys are cute. I’d date one. But I’m more interested in girls right now.” She holds my gaze with hers, and then her eyes shift, down to my mouth.</p>
238	<p>“And I don’t know. I thought maybe you liked me, too. It felt like we had this moment at our sleepover. I wanted to kiss you so bad. But then you got up and when you came back, everything was different.” She chews on her bottom lip.</p>
239	<p>“I think I might be . . .” I hesitate. “I might be asexual.” Her mouth forms a silent O and she sits back, just a little bit.</p>

Page	Content
	<p>"I don't really know for sure. Sometimes I think kissing could be cool, but it also seems really weird to me, and I don't even like thinking about sex." I blush. "Not that I'm assuming we'd have sex. But I just think you should know before you date me. It won't be like a normal relationship."</p> <p>... "But also. I like kissing. And I think about sex." She lets out a short laugh. "Like, a lot. So I think I need to take some time."</p> <p>"Oh." Of course. I know what this means. "It's fine. You don't have to pretend for me."</p> <p>"I'm not—"</p> <p>"Come on." I let out a sharp laugh and she pulls back a little. "It wouldn't work anyway. Just go find someone you can have sex with."</p>
250	<p>"I can't just turn it off. What if she . . . what if she does something?"</p> <p>"What?" I scan for another parking spot; the one in front of our house is taken. "Jamie. Are you serious?"</p> <p>"When I tried to end it before, she cut herself."</p> <p>... The phone buzzes again. I ignore the call again. "She didn't have to. She chose to do that. You didn't put the razor in her hand."</p>
252	<p>"She told me she'd kill herself if I left her. She'd already showed me the cuts she made the last time."</p> <p>... "Have you told your moms?"</p> <p>He shakes his head.</p> <p>"Jamie. You have to tell them."</p> <p>He starts tearing up again. "It's so embarrassing."</p> <p>"They won't think that. They love you."</p> <p>"My mom—Lisa—her ex-husband, he was abusive. I got the relationship talk along with the sex talk. And I still messed up."</p>
253	<p>"Still. What I said about you being aro-ace. I know it's not like that. You're the best friend I've ever had. You understand love better than most people."</p> <p>"I mean. I don't think I'm aromantic."</p> <p>He looks up at me. "What?"</p> <p>"I kind of . . . like someone." I squirm and look away. "I still don't want to have sex. But like. I want to cuddle her and hold her hand. And maybe kiss. Maybe."</p>
268	<p>She nods, her face serious now. "Yeah. If I wanted to just have sex with someone, I would do that."</p>
271	<p>Garrett and I nod, glancing at each other.</p> <p>"And that I had a lot of gay friends."</p> <p>Garrett's leg is bouncing up and down.</p> <p>"I loved your mom." Dad's eyes shine a little bit, and he blinks. "But I'm not just attracted to women."</p> <p>The music of the game on pause tinkles through the quiet living room. Garrett grabs the controller and I almost say something, but he saves the game and turns off the television.</p> <p>"So . . ." He looks at Dad. "You like guys, too?"</p> <p>"There's more than just guys and girls," I say.</p> <p>He rolls his eyes. "I know that."</p> <p>Dad cracks a smile. "I think gender doesn't really matter to me. But yes, I'm attracted to men as well."</p> <p>"You're dating someone," Garrett says. "Is it that Will guy?"</p>

Page	Content
	<p>“Maybe I should have let you do my coming-out speech!” Dad says. His eyebrows draw down and for a second I think he’s angry, but then he bursts out laughing. Garrett and I look at each other, and Garrett shrugs. “It was kind of obvious.”</p> <p>“Not to me,” I say. It didn’t occur to me that Dad would start dating again. But of course, that’s part of breaking up. Eventually people find someone new, if that’s what they want. And now that I think about it, I remember all those random times he seemed so happy, even when stuff with Mom was bad. He was probably happy because of Will.</p> <p>Dad quiets, wiping his eyes. “How do you feel about it?”</p> <p>“It’s okay.” I shrug. I pick at the arm of the chair, trying to imagine Dad with this faceless Will, who in my head looks like an off-brand Adam Rippon. Try to picture them kissing. It’s weird, but not because it’s my dad kissing a guy. My dad kissing anyone is weird, because kissing is weird in general, and especially when it’s your parents doing it.</p> <p>...“Well, I’m straight,” Garrett says.</p>
280	<p>Dear Reader,</p> <p>There are multiple abusive relationships in this book. The way Arden’s mother treats each member of her family is abusive, and the way Caroline treats Jamie is abusive. While the flavor of behavior and tactics vary relationship to relationship, they all qualify as abuse. Arden, Garrett, their dad, and Jamie each deal with and eventually begin to extricate themselves from their abusive relationship, and that makes them survivors. I am a survivor, too, of multiple abusive romantic relationships.</p> <p>Anyone can be abusive, regardless of gender or sexuality, and can enact abuse in any kind of relationship, whether it’s romantic, platonic, or familial. It takes many forms, and these forms are often outlined in what’s called the Power and Control Wheel. This is a tool developed by survivors to showcase the different tactics people who abuse others use to control their victims. Garrett, Jamie, and Arden are all familiar with this wheel thanks to their school health classes, and this helps them identify what’s happening in their relationships. Whether you have concerns about a relationship in your life or not, this wheel can help you learn to identify warning signs. The URL on the following page will take you to the wheel on the website of New Beginnings, a Seattle-based domestic violence organization. This wheel is interactive, and you can click through different parts to learn about different forms of abuse. There are additional resources below the URL if you or someone you know want to talk to a professional, and for thinking about what constitutes healthy relationships.</p>

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	13
Bitch	2
Dick	1
Fuck	30
Goddamn	1
Queer	5
Shit	19