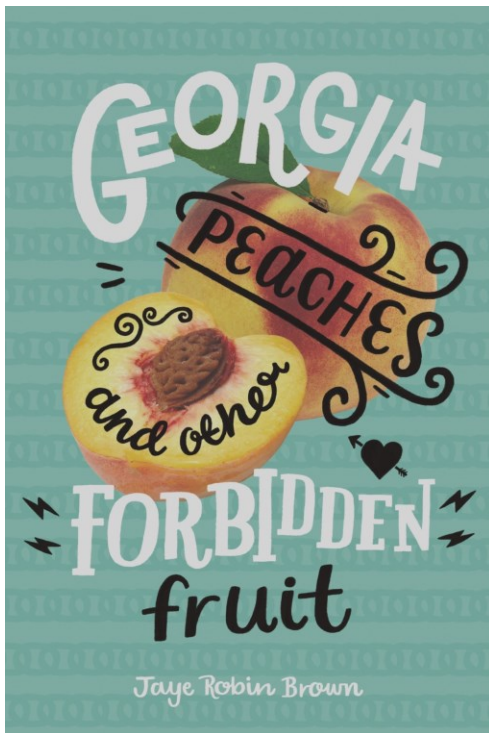


GEORGIA PEACHES AND OTHER FORBIDDEN FRUIT



Young Adult

By Jaye Robin Brown

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CONTENT WARNING

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Book Summary:

A homosexual high school senior moves to another town and becomes romantically involved with another girl despite a promise to her father she would hide her true sexuality in the new town.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; sexual nudity; profanity and derogatory term use; alcohol use by minors; alternate sexualities; and controversial religious commentary.

3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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2	Not the word I would have used, but I get her point. Rome, Georgia, is definitely where queer girls go to die.
3	<p>She does look hot, inappropriate crush on your best friend hot, but I would never tell her that in a million years. Dana’s ego is massive enough without compliments from me. “Blondie seems to think so.” I nod toward the late twentyish, early thirtyish bi-curious cougar Dana had been flirting with before she deigned to check in on me.</p> <p>...She digs a flask from her pocket and swigs before passing it to me, never taking her eyes off the woman, who blushes red to her scalp line under Dana’s scrutiny.</p> <p>I hold up my hand and wave it away.</p> <p>“Aw, come on, liquid courage.”</p> <p>“I told you. Dry wedding.”</p> <p>...“I dressed up for you and your dad. There’s no way I’m staying sober.” Dana’s eyes hone in on my new stepmom’s thirty-two-year-old ass. She elbows me. “Three’s a total MILF.”</p> <p>...“Put your pecker back in your pants, party girl. That’s my new mama. And can you be a tad more discreet with the flask? Three’s mother keeps giving us the stink eye.”</p>
5	<p>The woman grins and I sense trouble. Dad has been pretty cool about my sexuality, what with him being a preacher and all, but I’m also cool, too.</p> <p>...Dana, however, has no such inhibitions, and she’s got her freak flag lit in neon rainbow lights.</p>
7	<p>I quickly lost interest in an endless string of nothing hookups, and older women, even when attractive, aren’t my thing. I have definite fantasies of finding the one, but I doubt that’s going to happen now that I’m moving to the land of “Who’s your boyfriend?” Plus, Dana’s always by my side, sort of a combination queer crusader and safety net. She’s like my girlfriend, just not in the girlfriend-that-I-kiss or have-my-heart-broken-by kind of way. It’s the perfect symbiotic relationship—I’m her wing girl and she’s my fauxmance.</p> <p>...I wonder how long this hookup will take.</p> <p>“Sounds more fun than here.” Cougar Jen is actually growling.</p>
8	Cougar Jen giggles. For real, a grown-ass woman giggling. “You want to hit the minibar in my room, first?”
11	Even having to listen to Dana talk, ad nauseam, about her Cougar Jen hookup was worth avoiding two weeks of awkward.
13	<p>I look to the sky. “Really, Goddess?”</p> <p>...“I want you to lie low. Don’t be so boldly out of the closet up here.”</p> <p>I can’t even process this nugget. My father, the one who’s said he supports me one hundred percent, is taking some percentage of that back. He knows I have a handle on the right time and the wrong time to wave my sexuality.</p> <p>...“You for real are asking me to pass? To completely hide my gay?”</p>
14	“Elizabeth’s mother was apoplectic about seeing Dana and one of the wedding guests fooling around in the hall outside her room. It was everything Elizabeth could do to talk her mother off the ledge, to convince her she hadn’t married into the den of Satan.”
16	But since I came out. The whole being-gay-and-a-preacher’s-daughter thing comes with some weird mixed messaging—Jesus Loves You. Well, maybe not you. It’s been a constant internal struggle, having grown up in a religious household, desperately wanting to believe in the great goodness all around me, yet hearing so much hate even when my dad did his best

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	to shield me. About a year ago, I decided starting my own ministry within his could be an amazing way to help other queer and faith-filled youth.
18	Once I'm in, proving my salt, gaining my own following, then I can pull out the big guns . . . and, blam—queer girl sucker punch. I can do anything for a year if there's a rainbow at the end of it. If they love my dad, they'll love me. And maybe once they love me, I can make some real change and talk about being young, queer, and faithful. It might make this worth it. ...Because for the first time since I told him my truth, he's acting like it may be a problem.
20	She knew what the wedding was going to be like. She knew the folks there were on the more conservative end of the spectrum. Who the hell acts like that in the hallway at the Ritz-Carlton? ...“No way. I did us a favor. The trip is on, and besides, you're going to get that stupid show you wanted. I swear, I do not understand why you're still all up in Jesus's house. You know those people don't like homos.” “Wrong. Some of those people. And that's the whole point—my show is supposed to change hearts and minds.”
29	Before she married a man with a queer daughter.
35	But church scares her, I get it; some so-called Christians are assholes to girls like us. Which is what makes this radio show I'm giving up my life for so important. I want her to feel equally accepted, whether in a faith community or at a Tegan and Sara concert.
46	Dear heavenly Father or Mother—' cause, you know, who knows if you're really a guy—give me the strength to follow my dad's wishes and the strength not to kick some dumb country girl's ass. Sorry. Rear end. Amen. Joanna. For some reason, I've always felt the need to author my prayers. Maybe there's a filing system up there and I don't want to make it any harder for her or him than it already is.
47	Dad walks into the kitchen, still in his robe. “Joanna is her own brand of force.” He kisses his bride's cheek, then snugs her close, his chin nuzzling into the hollow of her neck and his hand following the curve of her body like he's forgotten I'm even here. Please don't let me see morning wood.
52	I really am walking into a den of lions. I have mad respect for the faithful, but sometimes that faith involves cruelty to people like me. The real me, Jo. And if the pastor is any indication of the flavor of his followers, I'm in for it.
58	Other than that, the room is bland. What's the point in unpacking, though? All the things that will make my room feel like me—my Pride memorabilia, pictures of Dana and me, my coveted Ruby Rose poster—won't fall into Dad, or should I say Mrs. Foley, approved décor. ...And even though Mary Carlson thinks I'm straight (go me) and dating her brother, I couldn't stop glancing her way during youth group.
59	You playing it safe? Condoms in my pocket, bitch. ...I'm not her mother, and even if I am a bore compared to her when it comes to drinking and drugs, she doesn't have to treat me like I bring her down.
85	“Uh. Um. I haven't dated much.” Hooked up? Sure. Dated? Love? Not so much. Boys? Never. “You're lucky. I hate it. All the groping.” Then she blushes. “Does that make me sound weird? Jessica and Betsy are all about it. Betsy and Jake are actually having sex, which she loves to

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	talk about. Gemma wants to be all about it if she could find a guy to handle her brainpower. But me? It sort of wigs me out.”
89	Especially when she’s elbowing me in the sides in a completely unsubtle way to point out the boy she wants me to hook up with. “Y’all want a beer?” Gemma eyes the keg suspiciously.
90	Especially when she’s elbowing me in the sides in a completely unsubtle way to point out the boy she wants me to hook up with. “Y’all want a beer?” Gemma eyes the keg suspiciously.
92	In the kitchen, we find liquor and mixers. I figure I’ll keep my mantle of designated driver going, because even though I’m tempted to get pissed to survive this messed-up night, I’m not sure how much the others are drinking. “You don’t drink?” George asks. I grab a ginger ale and untwist the cap. “Sometimes. But not often. And never much. I don’t like feeling out of control.” ...My mind fires with images of Hellcat Coffee, Dana, GSA meetings that were more like hookup gatherings, masquerade balls, and parties, parties, parties.
95	She groans. “One more football play and I would have reached for a third Jell-O shot. I had to get away or I’d end up wasted.” ...Normally when I’m in a tiny four by six room, I’m either having a clandestine make-out session or bullshitting with Dana and fixing my eyeliner.
99	“Let’s hear it.” Gemma groans. “Hear what?” I ask from the driver’s seat. “The hookup report, of course.” Jessica laughs. “And you have to start, new girl.” ...Betsy leans forward and slugs her. “Please, I have some decorum.” “Is that what you call what happens when you and Jake disappear into folks’ parents’ bedrooms?” My eyes flit to the rearview mirror in time to see Gemma’s eyebrow arch to the roof of the car. “We’re in love, guys. It took nine months before we finally did it. Quit making me feel bad. It’s natural.” ...“I, you know, touched.” She points to her pants, then she squeals and covers her eyes again and whispers, “His boner.” “That’s it?” Betsy says, disappointment in her voice. “You didn’t even go down on him?” “Ewww, no.” Jessica pushes her. “That’s skanky.” “You’re too Baptist for your own good.” “You’re still our lone shark, Betsy girl, but Jessica here is gaining.” Gemma has her arms folded across her chest.
100	“And if you had a boyfriend”—I’d like to follow my own rule and add or girlfriend for good measure, but I don’t know how it’d fly—“you were in love with, you’d eventually have sex, wouldn’t you?” She shrugs. “Probably.”
101	“And you, Mary Carlson. You and Chaz were looking cozy. Any thoughts of kissing?” Mary Carlson glances at me. “Yeah, I had thoughts of kissing.”
102	“God,” Betsy groans. “I’m saddled with another virgin?”

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103	<p>Gemma interrupts. "He can say penis. He has one. We have vaginas. And these are breasts." She holds her hands under her boobs and B.T.B. blushes red under the yellow of his onesie's hood. "Why people want to call their parts things like bananas, and hoohoos, and the ladies, is beyond me. Be specific."</p> <p>"Fine, then, Dr. Gemma," Betsy says. "Get your ripe gluteus maximus up those stairs so we can take the bras off our breasts."</p>
111	<p>"You're being dramatic, Dana. I'm not trying to unqueer myself. I'm just saying, it's kind of nice to take a minute to be quiet about it."</p> <p>"Whatever, pass girl. You have to get your ass down here and prove to me how gay you are or I'm revoking your queer card."</p>
113	<p>I'm not any less of a lesbian than she is.</p>
119	<p>"It's just, well, I've got two moms and I freaking hate it when people hate on that stuff. Your dad makes Mom feel like she can have her religion and her partner."</p> <p>...I George's moms are gay, then I maybe can tell him about me.</p>
120	<p>Coming out to a stranger is always the scariest thing in the world.</p> <p>... "Your real mom is gay?"</p> <p>... "No, she's dead. That's not what I meant. Me. I am. I do. Like girls, that is."</p>
123	<p>Her shirt gaps forward and I divert my eyes but not quick enough that I don't see a gentle swell of breast beneath a lilac lace bra.</p>
131	<p>Chaz tries to finagle a bottle of the house Chianti, but it's a no-go. The waitress isn't buying his fake ID or our baby faces.</p>
136	<p>He's laughing because I held his hand during a two-girls-kissing scene.</p> <p>Chaz of course is oblivious as he leans back behind us to mouth to George, "That was fucking hot, man."</p>
137	<p>"Freaking lezbos." Chaz points at the girls in front of us. "It's one thing to see two hot girls in a movie, but them . . ." He shudders without finishing his sentence. Oh man, this is hard. I want to jump all over his ass and feed it to him for dessert. Just because those girls don't meet his internet porn ideals .</p> <p>... "Don't be a douche, Talbott. We're not living in the dark ages. Girls and girls get married now, you know."</p> <p>"I don't care what the law of the freaking land is, homes. It's not God's law and it's not natural. Not like this."</p> <p>... "Those girls are in drama. The one on the left was the lead in last year's spring musical. I don't think they're gay. They're nice."</p> <p>Why are nice and gay mutually exclusive? Maybe the gaydar I hoped Mary Carlson was wielding is not as finely tuned as I dreamed, but more likely, it's not there at all, because those girls definitely are together.</p>
141	<p>In the parking lot, Chaz makes his first significant play, pulling Mary Carlson's held hand, swinging her around in front of him, then without so much as sweet talk or how do you do leans down and presses those perfect fat hetero lips against hers.</p> <p>...When they get to his car she kisses him, before sliding into the passenger seat.</p>
149	<p>She's no doubt hoping she'll soon have someone to talk to about the problems of vaginal dryness and the best brand of condom.</p>

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153	<p>Betsy butts in. "And y'all make fun of me and Jake. I'm not sure what you call what's going on here."</p> <p>My fantasy, I think.</p> <p>"Multitasking," I say.</p> <p>"Swinging might be more accurate," Betsy jibes.</p> <p>"We're in church!" Jessica crosses her arms across her chest and Pastor Hank cuts us all off with a clap of his hands and B.T.B. steps up to the microphone to start the board game about making responsible Christian life choices.</p> <p>Betsy leans in. "Jessica sure knows a lot about sex for being so prudish."</p>
184	<p>He's a straight girl's wet dream.</p> <p>...My stomach twists and leaps. I have to look away because I want to jump your bones has got to be written all over my face.</p> <p>She steps to the green. "Okay, watch me."</p> <p>Yes, Mary Carlson. I will most definitely watch you.</p>
188	<p>She has to be gay.</p>
199	<p>"I completely gagged when Chaz tried to kiss me. His feelings were hurt so bad he told everyone I was a dyke. Those were the rumors he started and the mean words Barnum doesn't like. But he was . . . right. I like girls and have for a while and I like you."</p> <p>...I'm Joanna Gordon and she doesn't think I'm queer, too.</p>
200	<p>"So are you like, questioning, or something?"</p> <p>She crosses her arms and shakes her head. "No." There's beautiful defiance on her face. "I'm sure of who I am. But I've never found a person to make it worthwhile to come out for. I always thought I'd wait till I got to college."</p>
201	<p>"I've thought about kissing you ever since the night you put my lip gloss on for me." That is definitely not a lie.</p> <p>"You have?" She steps closer, her hands hanging by her sides.</p> <p>...This feeling is like squealing and fireworks, and fuck, I'm not supposed to be getting involved with a girl. Especially not a girl from a conservative Rome family, like Mary Carlson.</p> <p>...I know I should tell her right now that I'm gay. Have been gay. Could write the book on being a teenage lesbian.</p>
203	<p>"Joanna," she says.</p> <p>"Yes?"</p> <p>"I'm going to kiss you now." She pushes her glasses up on top of her head and leans into me, holding tight to my arms. Mine hang awkwardly until she hesitates. I quickly place my hands on her hips and she eases forward again, our lips meeting in the softest hello. It's an entire conversation.</p> <p>"Hello."</p> <p>"Hi."</p> <p>"Hello, again."</p> <p>"Hello to you."</p> <p>And then talking stops as our lips decide they can do away with the pleasantries.</p> <p>Here's what I know. Kissing Mary Carlson is spooning homemade peach ice cream into your mouth on the hottest Georgia day. It is shooting stars and hot lava. It is every goose bump you ever had in your entire life built up and exploding all at once. It is going to be the end of me, but I don't care.</p> <p>...My fingers are hooked into the belt loops of her jeans and I stand on tiptoes, my mouth</p>

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	<p>pressing against her, quieting her with my tongue. When she starts making little moaning sounds, I pull back. I don't want to come across as too experienced.</p> <p>She pulls me back. "Don't you dare stop."</p> <p>"Someone might see us," I whisper.</p> <p>She hooks her leg around mine and pulls me close. Mary Carlson is kind of a tiger. "I don't care."</p> <p>"You don't?" Panic slips into my voice as reason sneaks in.</p>
205	<p>I kiss her again as her answer.</p>
209	<p>I barely have time to drop my backpack on the floor before she takes her hand and lightly pushes me. I plop backward onto her comforter. She straddles my lap and her hair falls around her face. "Do you know how hard it's been not to kiss you every single time I see you?"</p> <p>"How hard?" I ask. My heart flips between sprints and feeling like it's stopped working. She leans in closer. "So, so difficult." She bites at my lips, my neck, my ears. I curl my hands against her hips trying to get her closer. She pushes my arms flat against the bed so they're stretched out above my head and traces her tongue along the underside of one, all the way up to the sensitive flesh near my underarm. I giggle and squirm away from her. "Are you sure you've never done this before?"</p> <p>She moves back to my mouth, nipping at the corners of my lips. "It's like I've been set free. I've thought about nothing but you, and this, since Tuesday."</p> <p>I reach up and twine my hands in her thick hair. Talking stops as we scoot farther onto the bed, rolling to face each other. Mary Carlson pushes the length of her body against me. It's hard to know what to do. One part of me wants to press harder in return, the other wants to slow down and marvel at the down of her skin. I want to see how she connects. The way each curve meets the next. Then there's the part of me that screams stop, "Girl, you are breaking the promise you made to your father and Elizabeth."</p>
212	<p>"I said I'd never met anyone worth coming out for, but I really like you. I think we could be special. This"—she kisses me, teasing my lips into her own—"could be worth it."</p>
213	<p>Her mouth is hungry on my neck, and her hand is getting bolder in the places it goes, and it feels wild to be the one who's the innocent. My legs straighten as Mary Carlson's fingers brush the top of my bra, igniting the sensitive part of my breast. The pattern of my breath changes and I'm about to grab her wrist and push her hand harder against me, when B.T.B's feet thud on the carpet down the hall.</p> <p>Mary Carlson pulls away, but the look on her face is pure power. Me, I'm hanging in the wind, hungry for more than ice cream.</p>
215	<p>Except Gemma's mind is sharp and she's ticking through possibilities and if we keep up our cloak-and-dagger disappearing acts she's going to put it all together until the word lesbians is lit in Hollywood light bulbs.</p>
218	<p>Because he knows I'm gay, I think. "You're jealous," I say.</p>
219	<p>Mary Carlson puts her hands on the sides of my face and draws me into an intense kiss.</p>
221	<p>"Oh wow, look at that, Shelby and Ouiser are kissing. Like for real. That is disgusting. Who would want to do that?"</p> <p>...Gemma looks in the direction we're all looking now. "I don't understand. I mean, I've never had the penis. But I sure do want it one day. What do they even do?"</p> <p>"It's a sin," Jessica adds.</p>

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224	<p>Mary Carlson shuts the door and locks it. I mimic Betsy, throwing myself at her so her back hits the towel rack with a thud. "Ouch," she laughs.</p> <p>"Sorry, not sorry." I kiss up her neck, biting at the ends of her ears, the part about me acting innocent gone. I let my hand trail up the side of her soft sweater, then bring my thumb over the top of her bra. When she gasps, I push up her sweater and let my fingers trail along her stomach, marveling in the fine hairs along the surface of her golden left-over tan skin, and the gold ring in her belly button. She's breathing super heavy, so when someone knocks on the door, I bark, "What?" like I've forgotten where I am or something.</p> <p>Mary Carlson pushes me back with a smirk on her face.</p>
225	<p>God, there's a prostitute in here with crack stuck in her dreads.</p>
229	<p>Then she laughs as my lips open immediately to hers and she works me up into a heavy-breathing puddle of take-me-now in zero to five seconds.</p> <p>"Does this look like I'm trying to ditch you?" My hands crawl through her messed-up morning hair and I bury my nose in the crook of her neck before pulling her pajama top askew and tracing my tongue along the top of her shoulder. I know she's kidding, but she's intense, too, like underneath the joking maybe she has a sense that something is the tiniest bit off and it's making her insecure.</p>
248	<p>The microwave dings and I turn my mouth so it presses against hers and I talk directly onto her lips. "Shallow girl."</p> <p>"Just a little," she says and takes my bottom lip in her teeth. Instant fire lights me up. She starts to push me back against the kitchen table, but I grab her arms and stop her.</p> <p>She whines.</p> <p>I put my hands on her shoulders. "Though definitely a benefit of being at my dad's empty office, it's not why I brought you here, and if he found out I was using this as a clandestine hookup spot, he would take my key."</p>
250	<p>Inside I'm babbling, my brain stringing imaginary sentences together to show her how important this is and why she's going to need to understand if in three weeks I panic and don't follow through on coming out.</p> <p>...For now I want to stop thinking about it and the best way to stop talking is with a kiss.</p>
251	<p>"Girl." Gemma glares at her. "Some people like the vagina and the penis. Some the penis and the penis. Some the . . ."</p>
257	<p>"Is this what I think it is? You getting the house ready?" She nudges me. "Are you going to deflower your pretty church girl? Breaking all of Daddy's rules?"</p>
258	<p>She glances sideways, her smile shy. "It's just, you've gotten so pretty these past few months. The hair, the makeup . . ."</p> <p>My mouth starts to drop, but then the sparkle in her eye glints and I push her over. "Don't be an asswipe."</p> <p>She busts out laughing. "Oh my God, the look on your face was priceless. I scared the shit out of you. You really thought I was going to kiss you."</p> <p>"Har, har. I only thought you'd lost your damn mind."</p> <p>But she's right. I did think she was going to kiss me. And it confused me, because a part of me, an old part, was inches away from going along with it.</p>
260	<p>I shake myself into alertness, then kiss her on the lips.</p>
261	<p>"Do you want something to drink? We have all the usuals, milk, juice, sweet tea, there might be some ginger ale, or there's drink drinks, too."</p>

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	<p>...Another two weeks and supposedly we're coming out together, but still. "Like nice, nice?" Mary Carlson lifts up the corner of her mouth, then pulls me toward her, wrapping her legs around me so I'm face-to-face in her embrace. "Nice, like a maybe friend, for when I tell my parents I like to do this." She reaches her hand into my hair and pulls me to her. She starts by pressing tiny kisses along my jaw, then works her way to my mouth. I part my lips to meet her tongue and press against her. Her taste is like molten fire trickling down into every part of me. Ten minutes pass before we break apart.</p> <p>...She locks her eyes on mine but slides her hand under my shirt. Goose bumps rise on my skin. She works her way up toward my bra clasp.</p> <p>I wriggle out of her grasp. "Hey now."</p> <p>Mary Carlson hops off the stool and grabs my hand, pulling me with her. In seconds we're lying on the couch, me stretched full length on top of her. "How are you feeling about all of this?" Her voice is gentle as she runs her fingers in my hair. It's starting to curl slightly on the ends where it's growing out.</p> <p>"Good." I run my fingertips over her cheekbones and down her nose. "This feels good."</p> <p>...My dad was already preaching sermons about tolerance and acceptance and all of God's children long before I was even old enough to know what sexual attraction was, so coming out for me was a nonissue. It was pretty much "Dad, I like girls" over dinner and him asking if I was sure and when I said yes, him telling me he loved me no matter what. But I know, for other people, it can really suck.</p>
264	<p>She silences me with an intense kiss and slides her hand down between my legs. I push her away, for now, even though I'd really like to lock her hand there to do things I've only ever done to myself.</p> <p>"I like when you play hard to get. That is what you're doing, isn't it? This is okay?" She whispers in my ear and tiptoes the scorned hand under my shirt. I mumble a yes and this time I don't stop her when she deftly unclasps my bra. I take off my shirt and reach for hers. She lifts her arms and I throw her shirt to the floor. We push back together, feeling the warmth and silk of each other's skin, our breaths coming faster and harder. Mary Carlson's mouth circles the soft skin of my breasts and I cry, arching up into her as she pushes against me with equal force. I flip over again, straddling her, and kiss my way down her breastbone, taking each nipple lightly between my teeth, scraping ever so softly until she's moaning and bucking against me. She reaches for the button on my pants as I kiss my way down the front of her stomach, my own hands ready to pull her out of her jeans, when I hear something that sounds suspiciously like the engine of a car pulling into the garage.</p>
265	<p>My hands are shaking and my nipples are spotlights under my shirt without a bra to hide them.</p>
266	<p>"Yes, I did. Good manners are a blessing and a virtue, not like that other friend of yours." Then she whispers under her breath, "It's a good thing I got here when I did to make sure that virtue stays intact."</p>
269	<p>I whisper back, "Who knew you were such a wicked, wicked girl, Mary Carlson Bailey?" This gets me a deep kiss.</p>
276	<p>A child who, in all likelihood, won't be gay like me.</p>
294	<p>"Ally? That's rich. Was it my ally who had her hands up my shirt between third and fourth block last Tuesday? One day you'll figure out who you are, Joanna Gordon. And you'll feel just like me. And hopefully the girl you love won't be crushing your heart into dust in the process."</p>

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295	"No. Screw you, Joanna. Run back to your safe little life. In the meantime, I'll be at home, telling my parents I'm queer."
302	Betsy leans forward on the bar. "But I give the best blowjobs when I'm sloppy. And my Jake does like his . . ."
304	"I've been struggling with this for a while and I know it will come as a surprise to all of you, but I hope you'll still be my friends, and anyway I just told my parents, so I'm not going to fake it anymore, but you need to know that I'm a lesbian."
306	"To hell with Gatorade." Betsy puts it on the counter and grabs a hard lemonade and a beer out of the fridge.
311	<p>"Gay is gay, is gay, is disgusting."</p> <p>..."Jake asked me once if I'd ever consider being with a girl."</p> <p>"What'd you say?" I figure I know the answer, but hope conversation will buffer the pokers of jealousy irritating my skin and the plain old irritation of Jessica.</p> <p>"I said if she was hot, then I totally would. But more for the experience than for the lifestyle."</p> <p>"Ho bag," Gemma mutters.</p> <p>"Slut shamer," Betsy fires back.</p>
312	"Is it true? Bailey's a carpet girl now?"
313	<p>Jessica, the hypocrite, says this as her hand, in a Betsy move, slides between Chaz's thighs.</p> <p>..."Pastor Hank is not so close-minded, but he's close-minded enough that he wouldn't allow whatever's happening with your hand and Chaz's lap either. The Bible's only explicit reference to homosexuality is that passage in Leviticus you misquoted, and even it is sort of vague. Man shall not lie with man. Says nothing about sex or love or long-term commitment." Or women, I think.</p>
316	<p>"Ignorant. Dumb. Trapped in the dark ages."</p> <p>She waits.</p> <p>I sigh. "Just some kids mouthing off about homosexuality being a sin. I couldn't take any more today." Elizabeth and I have never had this talk. I was part of the package when she walked into my dad's life, and all I know is she needed me to turn down the volume for her family. Maybe it was really for her. But she was so cool that day at Hellcat. I look at her. "Do you think it's a sin?"</p> <p>..."Part of my growth was watching the world around me change. It made me question some of those ideas I'd been taught were true."</p> <p>I feel like I'm going to be sick. Does Elizabeth think I'm a freak, too?</p>
317	"Is it a sin? I can't answer that with a yes or a no. I'm not the one deciding. There are certainly people in the world making dreadful choices who love people of the opposite sex. Are you a beautiful person who is kind and true and dear and deserving of faith and justice just like the rest of us? Absolutely. I don't think God would have put you here only to torment you."
323	Betsy side whispers to me, "She really needs to get laid."
324	<p>I can't believe that I, a lesbian, am going to give guidance on how to approach Mary Carlson, while pretending to be a straight girl.</p> <p>..."Really, Betsy? Always with the sex." Gemma mouths really to me a second time.</p> <p>George gets bold. "What's wrong with the sex?"</p>

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325	<p>“Ho bag,” Gemma mutters through a laugh. “My repressed little slut shamer.” Betsy plants a kiss on her cheek.</p> <p>“See?” I joke. “You two already have a start on how to be friends with Mary Carlson now that she’s gay.”</p> <p>...“Kidding. Totally kidding. It’s a proven fact that gay girls have zero interest in hooking up with straight girls, unless those straight girls are actually gay girls in disguise.”</p>
343	<p>It’s like she picked the first available queer girl who came along and grabbed her.</p>
352	<p>“Yes. When it’s not wanted. Like a boy wanting a boy. Or say if a girlfriend wants to become a girlfriend.”</p> <p>...“Did you know that one in ten of us is going to turn out some sort of queer? So if any of you have a problem with gay moms or gay nurses or gay policemen or gay friends, you better take the blinkers off your damn eyes and get over it.”</p>
355	<p>She brings her hand to the back of Mary Carlson’s neck and pulls her closer and I look away before I witness their kiss.</p>
362	<p>Someone lets out a low whistle. Inside, a group of friends from my old school greet me with hugs and cheek kisses and even a pinch on the ass.</p>
363	<p>She leans against me, going for the tickle spot.</p> <p>“Dana, quit. I’m sweaty and gross and my boob’s about to pop out.”</p> <p>“Oh yeah?” Her fingers poke at my side. “Let me see what you’ve got in there.”</p> <p>I flash her. It’s not like she hasn’t seen it before.</p> <p>“How come we never . . . ?” She leans her head on my shoulder, not even trying to hide the fact she’s staring down my shirt.</p> <p>I tilt my head slightly toward her. “Are you serious?”</p> <p>She sits up, throws one of her legs over one of mine, and turns to face me. “Who are we kidding? We’re both queer. We’ve been friends forever. We’ve both had feelings for each other—even if they’ve never happened at the same time.”</p> <p>“Dana. You’re a total player. I love you. But I don’t want to date you.”</p> <p>She leans closer. “Come on, just a kiss. Let’s see if we’ve got sparks.”</p> <p>...She’s reaching in for a double-sided tickle.</p> <p>“Uncle, stop, no tickling.”</p> <p>“Let’s kiss then.” She holds up the mistletoe necklace.</p> <p>...Somehow, her tickle hand has moved a little higher against my shirt and my brain’s beeping a warning, but my body reacts by shifting, so Dana comes closer.</p> <p>“That’s my girl.” Dana’s face is all big smile and devilish eyes. “You ready?”</p> <p>I close my eyes and for a split second I wonder, is this where I should have been all along? Her lips meet mine and they’re soft and warm and when she teases my lower lip with her teeth, my mouth opens of its own volition.</p> <p>But then . . . there’s that probing tongue again.</p> <p>Ugh.</p> <p>My best friend cannot kiss for shit.</p> <p>“Dana.” I push her away, but she leans in for one more quick lip-to-lip kiss before falling off my lap.</p> <p>She can’t stop laughing. “You suck.”</p> <p>“No, you suck.”</p>
368	<p>There’s one of Dana and me, mid-worst-kiss-ever, her hand tucked precariously near my boob, the huge rainbow GSA flag in the background.</p>

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369	She holds up her phone with the pictures Deirdre must have texted her, then swipes the screen to reveal my old Insta profile, complete with tons of incriminating, I-am-totally-gay pics.
370	“Lezbos, take it to the house.”
372	“Stupid, right? Like, of all the friends I could make in Rome, I chose the guy with the gay moms and the girl who’s been secretly closeted all these years. I panicked, George. It was so easy to act like it was all new for me, too, and Mary Carlson was so sweet and excited. I didn’t want to bring her down and then I didn’t want to hold her back.”
375	“So the deal is, I’m a lesbian.” ...Gemma rolls her eyes. “Girl, there is no way. You are way too into the penis.”
378	Gemma rolls her eyes. “It’s not our fault you mistook our momentary shock for some kind of can’t-handle-your-business bigots. Our earlier surprise was about Mary Carlson—though we should have probably seen it coming—we were just too close to the tree to see her forest.” Betsy guffaws. “I’m so glad you didn’t say bush.”
379	Betsy leans toward me. “So did you guys, you know, um, do whatever it is that constitutes losing the V-card? Girl-girl style?” ...Betsy sits back. “Well, that’s good. I lost mine to a jerk and it wasn’t till Jake came along that I even thought about kissing a boy again.”
381	Betsy slugs his arm. “Maybe she doesn’t want your big meaty arms groping on her.”
393	“Do y’all care if I catch a ride with my boy and his lesbian BFF?”
394	“Oh, that’s convenient. Do they also know you were already hooking up with some girl in Atlanta?”
400	“I appreciate that, George, as you know I’m not only a Christian, but I’m also a lesbian, and it fills me with such gratitude to have friends who understand my struggles and love me the way God made me.”
409	I suppose I figured she’d show up, it’d be immediate forgiveness, then we’d fall into each other’s arms and kiss all the pain and dishonesty away.
412	Dear heavenly Mother, did I just get permission from Mrs. Bailey to date her daughter? Please let this be true. Amen. Joanna.
415	“Are you going to kiss me or what?” “What.” She pushes her hand against mine in jest and I grab her and hold her in my arms. Then, in front of smiling Jesus and one shocked altar boy who stumbled back in unaware, I kiss her. When I break away, I laugh. “Your lip gloss.” “Peaches,” she says. “My favorite,” I murmur and kiss her again.
416	She rolls over, nestling into me like a stacked spoon. “Sleepy. Too many margaritas.” ...And now a goddess, like my necklace, to symbolize this trip. P-Town. The mecca for queer girls everywhere. ...I move my hand down her thigh. “We do. But then we could come back.” “Our friends would miss us. We shouldn’t deny them their token cute lesbian couple.” I scoot closer to her warm morning body, her smell a combination of sleep and suntan lotion. “We are cute, aren’t we?” I push against her, trying to get her to pay attention to me. “Stop, we can’t be rude,” she whispers.

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	<p>“You’re worried about Dana?” I laugh and nibble on her shoulder. “You seem to have forgotten that when we last saw her she was drinking vodka out of some Boston girl’s navel.”</p> <p>“We’re alone?” Mary Carlson flips over and looks at Dana’s empty bed.</p> <p>“All alone.”</p> <p>Her hand slides down between my legs and I gasp as she finds the perfect spot to touch me. She’s still a tiger. I flip onto my back and she follows me, pressing herself length to length, skin to skin. Things heated up around spring break, but this trip is a whole new level of . . .</p> <p>“Oh, whatever that is you’re doing, don’t you dare stop.” She rocks against me and I pull her as close as she’ll go. Her hair, its usual muss, brushes my face and her eyes are closed now and we are lost in this sea of sweet nothingness . . . everythingness.</p> <p>And then, my phone buzzes.</p> <p>I gasp. Mary Carlson doesn’t stop what she’s doing but my concentration is broken because it’s my dad’s emergency ringtone. He promised to call me from the house phone only if the baby was near.</p> <p>“Baby,” I whisper.</p> <p>“Hmmm,” she says. “Come on, baby.”</p> <p>“No.” I sit up from under her and grab her face. “Baby.”</p>

Profanity /Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	37
Bitch	18
Cunt	1
Dyke	3
Fuck	49
Goddamn	1
Piss	21
Shit	31