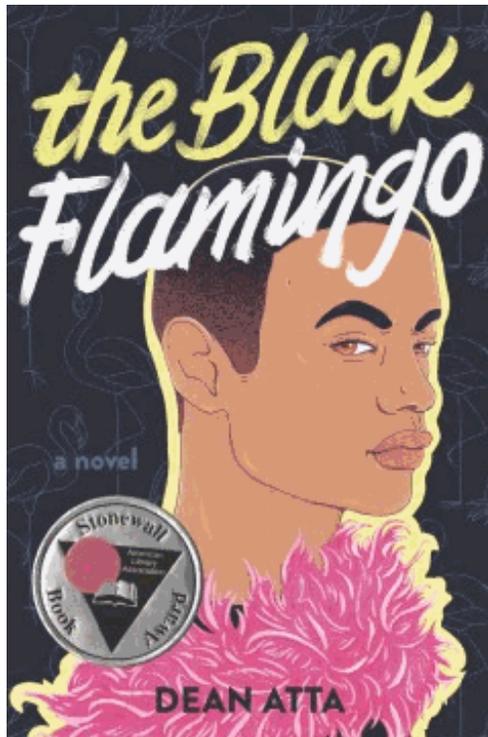


THE BLACK FLAMINGO



Young Adult

By Dean Atta

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Summary of Concerns:

This book contains references to sexuality, inexplicit sexual nudity and sexual activities, illegal drug use, alcohol use; references to alternate genders, racism, and racist commentary.

CITATIONS	
Page	Content
3	But, finally, I am the fairy finding my own magic.
47	She shouts, "What do you mean someone took it? You stupid boy, you have to look after your things? Do you know how much it cost?" "I didn't like it anyway," I say, embarrassed that people might be watching. She slaps me hard across the face.
57	I grab Alistair's hair with my left hand and drag him around the circle two, three times, then lift his head up to see his long hair part to make way for his pretty face and slap him hard with my right hand, down to the ground.
107	I tell him about my letter to Rowan and that I think I'm gay.
109	"Yes, I'm gay," I say, ready for him to hit me.
113	I'm bisexual. Are you?
124	"Batty bwoy!" Meaning less-than-man who is penetrated by or penetrates another less-than-man. I realize this phrase is sexual. This phrase is about sex. It's like shouting out, "You have bum sex!" I've heard it in music, in songs from Jamaica that call for gay men to be killed.
129	I'm nervous taking the condoms in case someone sees them. I download an app that allows me to talk to gay guys in the area. I arrange to meet a guy called Alex after school.
130	We're kneeling on a patch of grass between two graves, kissing with tongues, our mouths dry from the spliff we just smoked. My first spliff, my first proper kiss.
130	He stops. "Do you do poppers?"
130	I'm high on weed, about to lose my virginity in a graveyard. He hands me a small glass bottle full of liquid. I unscrew the top. "Do I drink it?" "No, you hold it under your nose, like this and inhale; it helps you to relax." I follow his instructions. A chemical explosion in my brain, streamers burst forth into a tangled rainbow, then all fades to black.
174	"Would you ever do drag?" Daisy asks, her arm in mine as we walk ahead of Mum and Anna down Shaftesbury Avenue toward Piccadilly Circus. "What, for Halloween? You know I don't do Halloween," I reply. "Not for Halloween," says Daisy. "In general, for fun."
207	I don't tell him I'm excited and nervous about meeting guys, having sex, maybe a relationship. I tell him I'm excited to have my freedom.
209	"...This isn't what I wanted for your moving day but this is what it's like to be black in this country or anywhere in the world. They interrupt our joy. Our history. Our progress. They know they can't kill us all, so you're living your life and suddenly interrupted by white fear or suspicion. They fear sharing anything. Our success is a threat."
222	I go to the LGBT Society. We sit in a circle and go round saying our names and pronouns: he/him, she/her, they/them. How do you want other people to refer to you? A trans man called Seth, with the pronouns he/him, wishes his trans identity wasn't questioned with regard to his body. "I wish people would understand, some men have vagina."

CITATIONS

Page	Content
	<p>My turn: "I'm Mike, he/him."</p> <p>Some Men Have Vaginas He said he was a gay man with a vagina and I, penis heavy and light of foot, wondered if gay meant the same to him as it did to me, wondered if man was in mind or body. Because I wear my man, strip down bare to my man. In the mirror, there, I am. For me, man has merely been a matter of circumstance, not a journey or discovery. I rarely had to fight for it, rarely want to fight against it, never wanted to shed skin to reveal somebody else. I never questioned it until he said, "Some men have vaginas." I understood it to be true but it left me feeling nothing more than a tool, who knew nothing about being a man outside his own body.</p>
226	<p>DRAG SOCIETY In capital letters with a date and time and a room number. Why have I not noticed this poster before now? There's a photo of a group of people of many shapes, colors, and gender expressions in costume and makeup. I make up my mind, I'm going to do that, whatever it is, whatever that means.</p>
230	<p>If you didn't know why we were here, you couldn't tell what brought us together. No one person looks similar to the other. We're not just here because we're "queer"; we're here to create a show together, but first we must get to know each other. "Here at Drag Soc," begins the president, "we use our drag names and pronouns of our drag character. I'm Mzz Behavior, em-zed-zed. You can call me Mzz B and my pronouns are 'they' and 'them.'"</p>
231	<p>I'm not confused; I'm just an overly curious person. So when they say the name and pronoun for their drag characters, I want to ask: Who are you when you aren't in drag?</p>
232	<p>I'm being asked to create a new identity for a different purpose: a stage name.</p>
232	<p>I don't want to assume, I feel too shy to ask, but when I saw that poster I simply knew that Drag Soc was something I had to do. I didn't realize I would need to decide my character as I stepped through the door. Only one name comes to mind. It's like I've said it before: "I am The Black Flamingo and my pronouns are he and him," I declare. I'm sure of this for the first time ever.</p>
232	<p>"I'm just a man and I want to wear a dress and makeup onstage. I want to know how it feels to publicly express a side of me I've only felt privately when playing with my Barbie as a boy. It was only at home that I'd play with that toy; I knew Mum loved me more than anyone else and with her I could be myself. I didn't think boys could do ballet, certainly not a black boy and definitely not me. I was already suspicious that people were nice to me despite me being different. I never wanted to take my difference too far." I continue, "Before I came here I didn't want to wear a dress, I didn't want to be that stereotype. I know that's wrong, my thinking was wrong; the different ones are often the most strong. I know trans and gender-nonconforming people started our movements, won our freedoms. I'm a man and I want to be a fee one. I'm a man and I want to put a dress on."</p>

CITATIONS

Page	Content
235	I feel safe in this room with my new drag family; I carry this room with me for the rest of the week. This room has many other functions to other people, just another room in the Student's Union building but when we meet here, it's a place without fear.
240	I say, "I don't like white people to know I smoke weed- they assume I'm a drug dealer."
242	Lennie asks me, "If you could have any superpower, what would it be?" I joke, "To be invisible to white people."
272	Men Are Sandcastles Men are sandcastles made out of pebbles and the bucket is patriarchy: If you remove it, we fear we won't be able to hold ourselves together, We pour in cement to fill the gaps to make ourselves concrete constructions.
282	It does kind of make sense and I'm relieved, in a way. It turns out my homophobic best friend is actually gay.
298	"You both need to understand the black woman, black man, black trans person is always last to be thought of as attractive in this white supremacist society..."
299	"You're making a scene"- he sniffs- "and you're smoking weed."
307	I don't say, Coming out as gay. I don't say, Sleeping with men. I say, "Identity and stuff."
314	"You're gay, you're meant to like shopping."
316	Really, it's gonna be part of my drag act. When Drag Soc meets the following week, it feels like a homecoming. My drag family try to help me develop my character more fully.
333	Sienna asked her earlier if she's a trans man, to which she replied, "Nah, I'm a soft butch."
367	Know that your audience makes assumptions about you, your gender presentation, and the gender you were assigned at birth. Your gender is not what this is about. Remember that this is a character, it's gender play but not necessarily about your gender.
368	Be shady but not bitchy. Don't punch or kick downward at groups in society with less power or privilege than you.
370	When it's time to go onstage, know that you're not ready but this is not about being ready, it's not even about being fierce or fearless, it's about being free.
371	What It's Like to be a Black Drag Artist (for those of you who aren't) It's knowing when you step onstage, people will expect you to represent all black people.
371	It's worrying if a white performer will do a blackface act. It's worrying your act is too black, not universal enough.
371	It's doing what feels true. It's knowing that doing drag and being trans are not the same. It's gender nonconforming. It's gender bending. It's gender ascending. It's a performance. It's not letting anyone else tell you what your drag means. It's not really for the audience. It's for your liberation. It's knowing that after this nothing will be the same for you. It's a rebirth.

CITATIONS	
Page	Content
	It's giving birth to yourself. It's giving yourself a new name. It's giving yourself a new narrative. It's not letting anyone forget your name.
371	It's Afrofuturism. It's Afrocentrism. It's black, black, blackity-black. It's batty bwoy, sissy. It's queer, gay, and faggy. It's yours and it's yours.
376	"...Love is a costume. Son is a costume you shrug on and off. Mum is a costume she squeezed herself into, for you. Dad is a costume discarded for other men to try on. Maybe it will fit someone. Maybe you might grow into it. Maybe you might shrink to fit you, Barbie boy."
378	"...I felt queerness made me even less black. Being both black and queer, affirming that I exist, I am here and I have been here long before this moment, the first people were black and queerness predates its modern meaning. Queerness predates its derogatory meaning. Queerness predates colonialism and Christianity. Queerness predates any hate attached to it. I call myself black. I call myself queer. I call myself beautiful. I call myself eternal. I call myself iconic. I call myself futuristic..."
380	Next comes my burlesque routine. I perform a strip tease with my lip sync to "Back to Black" sung by Beyonce. I suggestively open and close the pink faux fur coat before I let it drop to the floor. I snatch off the pink wig and throw it into the audience. I shimmy with the feather boa, then wrap it around a smiling stranger in the front row. I slip out of the tutu and kick it away. The crowd goes wild for it. For me! I stand triumphant in a leotard and heels, a full face of makeup and a beard, and say my final piece.
386	I need to tell you, I'm not straight and you weren't the first guy I've slept with. It's something I say- I tell guys I'm not gay to make them want me, to become a trophy to be won, it's a character I play; it's my performance and I'm good at it. Saying I'm straight suits me, I wouldn't know how to be gay, not publicly, not proudly, not like you.

Profanity	Count
Bitch	2
Shit	1