

Asexual Teen Stories



By Emma Bolch

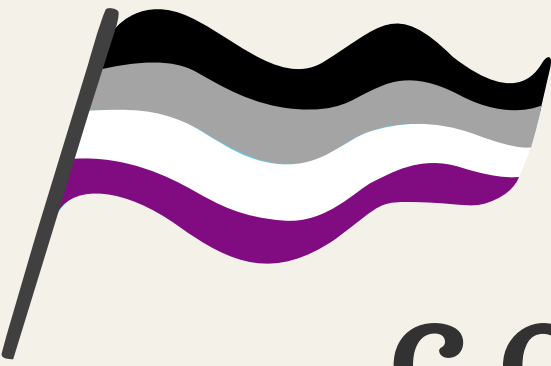


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INTRODUCTION

I used to be homophobic until I started seeing queer representation. Books like *Wings of Fire* and shows like *The Owl House* helped me understand and empathize with a community I was never taught about by my parents or at school.

However, even when I learned about new LGBTQ terms, I started questioning my own identity. I knew I wasn't gay, but it didn't feel like I felt attracted the same way everyone else did. In fact, in elementary school, I gaslit myself into thinking I had crushes on boys I was friends with because adults and the media I consumed back then said that girls and boys couldn't be just friends. I became even more confused and even traumatized after learning about sex ed in seventh grade. I assumed everyone around me felt the same way, but when I asked a friend, she said she thought it was interesting. It was then that I realized I was the only person in my class grossed out by the idea of sex. Needing an answer, I took an "Am I Gay?" quiz, and it told me I was asexual: an orientation of having little to no sexual attraction. After doing more research on asexuality, it felt like I was a part of something, and I was proud of my identity.

But when I started coming out to others, most of them had no idea what asexual meant. Once I told my dad I was asexual, he said, “No, you’re not, Emma; you can’t reproduce asexually.” This made me more insecure about my identity to the point that I wouldn't tell others I’m asexual unless I knew they were queer or at least an ally.

Eventually, I became tired of being the only asexual person in my friend group. So I used my Gold Award in Girl Scouts, where we’re supposed to address a problem in our community, and made a club at my high school, the Aromantic Asexual Student Union. However, after promoting my club at the school fair, one classmate asked me what asexual meant, and after explaining it, he said, “sounds fake.” I was used to others misunderstanding asexuality, but it was the first time I ever experienced acephobia. Later I realized that while asexuals don’t seem as “oppressed” as other queer groups like the gays and transgenders, they still struggle with unawareness that leads to assumptions that they are ill for not feeling sexual attraction, and even being in danger from mental illness, corrective rape, and conversion therapy.

To spread awareness, I made a documentary called *The Invisible Life of Asexuals and Aromantics*, where I interviewed teenagers on their struggles being asexual and aromantic in a culture focused on romance and sex. I also interviewed coordinator La Gina Gomez, who said that in order for the asexual community to be accepted, we need to spread awareness, especially in queer spaces.

When she mentioned awareness, I noticed how there wasn't much asexual representation in the media. If more stories focused on asexuality, that would have helped me find out my identity sooner. I would help others learn and understand asexuality, like how queer representation helped me understand the LGBTQ community. So I started a research paper, *Rewriting Asexual Representation: Examining the intersection of Asexuality, Gender, Race, and Disability Through Critical Analysis and Creative Reimagining*, where I specifically analyzed two pieces of literature: *Let's Talk About Love and Being Ace*. After this research, I realized there was a need to not only write more asexual stories but stories with diverse characters, as most asexual characters currently are white.

As a response, I wrote these three stories, *Misplaced*, *Embraced*, and *Alone on the Dance Floor*, to tell asexual stories of teenagers of color. As a dream author, I hope these stories encourage people not only to write more stories with asexual characters, but also to show them in a positive light by making them complex and giving them other identities unrelated to asexuality, so the public, in return, can be more understanding of asexuality.



Short Story #1

Misplaced

by Emma Bolch

Kiera rang the doorbell. The frigid air brushed against her exposed hands, forcing them to retreat into the warmth of her pockets.

“Coming!” someone inside yelled.

Kiera twisted her feet, counting the seconds before hearing running footsteps. The door swung open, revealing her best friend Phoebe.

“Kiera!” Phoebe grinned. Strands of her light blond hair were falling out of her ponytail onto her freckled face, as if she forgot to brush it. They hadn’t had a sleepover in over six months. In the four years that Kiera had known her, Phoebe was remembered for one thing: her energy. Kiera would know because when they became friends in sixth grade, it was after some boys in PE were using her as a target in dodgeball, and out of nowhere, Phoebe showed up at her side, tossed a ball at one of their faces, and was sent home after “accidentally” knocking the boy’s teeth out.

“Hi Phebes,” Kiera waved shyly.

“Come in!” Phoebe grabbed Kiera’s hand, making her yelp, as she pulled her inside. As the door shut behind them, Kiera turned her head and smiled at Luna, whose olive skin and straight brown hair fell to her shoulders. She was the newest addition to their friend group, joining a little less than a year ago. Kiera was the first to meet her after they sat together in Biology their freshman year. They didn’t talk at first— Kiera was too shy— but eventually they made small talk, complimenting each other’s pencil cases. After Kiera introduced her to the rest of her friends, Phoebe and Luna started spending a lot of time together. At first, Kiera was worried that Phoebe just liked Luna better and that Phoebe no longer wanted to hang out with her. That was until she once walked in on them making out in the girls’ bathroom.

As they exchanged hellos, Phoebe wrapped her arm around her girlfriend's shoulder and led her to the couch. Kiera followed and threw her backpack by the couch next to all of the crumpled sleeping bags and deflated bean bags.

"Is that Kiera?"

Kiera's oldest friend, Elijah, poked his head out of the kitchen. He was holding a bowl and a whisk, with tomato sauce spilling onto his apron. Kiera had known Eli since they could walk. They lived in the same neighborhood, and their parents were best friends. From hosting barbecues to throwing frisbees in the park, they saw each other almost every day. Eli was also Kiera's only friend before Phoebe, because he was the only person she could talk to without stuttering.

"Hi Eli," Kiera waved as she plopped on the couch.

Phoebe's parents were gone for the weekend, visiting her grandma in Utah. They told Phoebe she could stay home alone to catch up on homework, but she was forbidden to throw any parties. However, they never said no to sleepovers. Despite that, Kiera knew that by tomorrow morning, Phoebe's home would become a junkyard.

Phoebe blocked Kiera's view of the TV and pressed a button, turning the black void into a rainbow path with Mario on a go-kart. Phoebe dived into the beanbag next to her and handed Kiera a Nintendo controller.

"Ready to lose?" She looked up at Kiera and grinned.

"In your dreams," said Kiera as she took the controller from her hand and held it like a weapon. Luna groaned and sat next to Phoebe.

"Can you please not go so hard? You never let me win."

“Boo hoo, you gonna play or what?” Phoebe waved another controller in front of Luna’s face as she rolled her eyes and grabbed it.

Five minutes into the race, Luna, surprisingly, was in fourth place with Phoebe in fifth. Kiera could tell that it wasn’t gonna last.

“Oh come on, what was that for!” Luna yelled after Phoebe threw a banana at her, causing her to swirl off track and Phoebe to race past her.

She snorted as she said, “You snooze, you lose.” Luna then grabbed a pillow from the couch and threw it at her.

“Oh, you wanna go? I’ll give you a fight!” She pushed her girlfriend in the face, and the two started wrestling each other. Kiera lowered her controller to look at them. She couldn’t deny that they were cute and that they brought out the best in each other. Phoebe’s energetic and confident personality and Luna’s grounded and understanding nature mixed perfectly with each other.

They continued giggling until Luna stole back her controller from Phoebe.

“All right,” Phoebe exhaled as another laugh escaped her. “You win this time,” she said before placing her hand on Luna’s...thigh? Kiera froze. She was expecting Luna to flinch and Phoebe’s hand to retract and for her to start apologizing profusely. But Luna didn’t move, didn’t even seem bothered. Was this normal? Kiera kept staring at them, waiting for something to happen. Nothing did. *Maybe I’m just overreacting?* But it didn’t feel that way. She continued to look at her friends, but their figures started to blur. Their voices became echoes she couldn’t make out. She felt herself being drawn away. Her breaths became heavy, clogging in her throat.

“WINNER!” The sound from the TV brought Kiera back to the couch, with the controller she forgot was in her hand. She glanced at the screen with Phoebe’s Mario in first place, while her Toadette was in last place.

“Yesss! Victory is mine!!!” Phoebe cheered, throwing her arms in the air.

“For the hundredth time,” Luna groaned, rolling her eyes. She turned to Kiera.

“Kiera, were you even trying? Last time I checked, you were a lot better at me.” Kiera blinked for a few seconds and gulped before nervously laughing,

“I must’ve not been paying attention.” Kiera’s weight shifted as she felt someone jump onto the space next to her. She tilted her head up to see Eli.

“The pizza is in the oven. It should be done in 10 minutes.”

“Good because I could eat a horse,” Phoebe said while rubbing her belly.

“Sooo,” Eli said as all eyes turned to him. “I was at Sammy’s place this weekend, and....”

“And...what?” Kiera chuckled.

“And... he came out as bi!” The girl’s eyes widened before they started screaming. Phoebe jumped onto the couch and started shaking Elijah’s shoulders.

“Why didn’t you tell us sooner?” Kiera gently pushed Phoebe aside, allowing Eli a second to breathe.

“I wanted to wait for the right moment to tell you guys. I still don’t know if he likes me back.” His face reddened while he rubbed the back of his neck.

“Oh come on! Why wouldn’t he like you? You’re smart, funny, and the guy must trust you if he felt comfortable enough to come out to you,” Luna said. Kiera nodded before adding, “Right, but if he says anything that hurts you...” Phoebe playfully shoved her before saying, “Hey, back off, let the kid have his moment.”

“You’re only seven months older than me,” he replied.

“Hush, child,” she said as she patted Eli on his head, despite him being five inches taller.

Though Phoebe and Eli were very close friends, they’ve always had this kind of rivalry. Eli has always been Kiera’s best friend since preschool. However, in sixth grade, when they were put in different classes, she met Phoebe and became very close with her. Elijah got jealous, and the two would always fight over Kiera until she was able to convince them they could all be friends. They agreed on it, for the most part.

“Soooo Kiera.” All eyes turned to her as Luna looked at her with a smug expression.

“Do you fancy anyone at the moment?”

“Oooh,” Phoebe and Elijah said as they scooted closer, hands resting on their chins.

Kiera pondered the boys at her school, and though some of them were really handsome and good-looking, she didn’t feel anything for them. Kiera didn’t really have crushes. Well, she had crushes on fictional characters, like Zuko or Kovu, but they didn’t really count. Kiera would have a crush every couple of years here and there—after getting to know them and finding out they had a nice sense of humor—but they usually didn’t last long, and weirdly, she would get over them easily. She often compared hers to her friends’ crushes, and they just seemed different. She didn’t want to kiss them, she didn’t want to hold their hand, and she didn’t even want to touch them. It’s as if she didn’t feel a desire she was supposed to have.

So with the certainty that no one was currently on her mind, Kiera shook her head, “I don't have a crush on anyone.”

“Aww,” they moaned.

“What, crushes aren't my thing,” she shrugged.

“Maybe you haven't had your gay awakening yet,” Phoebe teased.

“Oh shut up, Phebes,” Luna said, elbowing Phoebe on the side. “Kiera already told us she's straight, right Ki Ki?”

“Yeah,” she confirmed. Or...was she?

Kiera basically ran to the bathroom and slammed the door, shoving her shaking hands in her jeans. Images of shirtless guys and girls in their bikinis were still swimming in her head. She shivered. Why were her friends so weird?

After everyone ate pizza, they all began talking about their celebrity crushes and went through magazines that showed off Kim Kardashian and Tom Holland. She always felt that it was gross how much skin celebrities showed off. However, she didn't realize until a certain age that when people revealed their skin, it was supposed to attract others.

She remembered when Phoebe and Luna started dating. Phoebe once showed Kiera a picture of Luna in a scarlet bikini and commented on how hot she was. When Kiera was little, she thought that attraction based on someone's body was just creepy. But Phoebe wasn't creepy, and Kiera knew that she loved Luna for far more than just her body.

Kiera walked over to the mirror and looked at her dark braids and hazel eyes. She never understood what others meant when they told her she was really pretty. She never thought that she was ugly exactly; she just didn't see the big deal of being “attractive.” Was something wrong with her? She continued to look at herself. To search for anything missing.

Suddenly the glass cracked. Huh? Kiera started to back away, watching the different angles of her face scrunch up through the broken mirror. She looked around, but she could no longer see the bathtub or the sink, just an empty room with a purple hue swirling around her. She started searching for the door. Running her hands across the walls, she looked for a handle. “Come on, come on.” You’ve never kissed anyone before?

She let go of the wall. And started to back away. “What?” she whispered to herself. Eww a virgin. Kiera closed her eyes and covered her ears. After a moment, she opened one of her eyes and searched the void, trying to look for the voice that was talking to her. You just haven't found the right person. Are you even straight? Maybe you just like girls.

“Go away.” She was starting to shake. She started to back away into a corner as she covered her ears, trying to block out the voices. She sat down, cradling her head as darkness began to surround her. It's going to be okay, she kept telling herself. Over and over again, but they still couldn't block out the voices. They couldn't block out the void. Someone banged at the door.

Kiera jumped. The void was gone and was replaced by the blue wallpaper that was peeling from the ceiling, the steam clinging to the mirror from the shower Luna took earlier, and the door pressed at Kiera's back.

“Yo Ki Ki, hurry up; I need to go,” Phoebe yelled outside.

“Coming,” Kiera replied softly. Slowly, despite her knees wobbling, Kiera stood up. However, she made no effort to open the door behind her. What was wrong with her?

Phoebe and Luna were in the bedroom retrieving the candy stash. However, something told Kiera it was gonna take more than five minutes. She looked at Elijah, who was fixed on the TV, scrolling through different movies. He had a picky taste. By picky, she meant the kind where the whole cast had to sing and dance while wearing leotards out of sequins and jumping over pits of fire. That or just some silly cartoon. Kiera had known Eli since preschool. He was basically like a brother to her. A sometimes crazy and dramatic brother, but still, her brother. She loved her other friends, but sometimes, she felt like she couldn't talk to them about her sexuality. Phoebe would probably just tease her about not having her "gay awakening," and Luna would just say that she hasn't found the right person. If one person was going to take her seriously, it was going to be Eli. She took a deep breath and embraced herself for the awkwardness.

"Hey Eli, how did you figure out you were gay?" He stopped scrolling and turned to her with a raised eyebrow. For a second, Kiera thought she had offended him. She was about to apologize when he replied.

"Well, I always felt attracted to boys. When I was younger, I thought the feeling would just stop or go away, but as I got older, it didn't." He looked away. Kiera remembered the night three years ago; it was past midnight when Eli called her in tears. He told her that he was gay. He was terrified of what people and his family would think. Thankfully, his family was really supportive, and though some assholes at school did bully Eli when they first found out, they forgot about it in a month. Still, she knew this was for him to talk about.

"I started to suppress my feelings and felt like I needed to "fix" myself. I thought it was unnatural for me to find men hot. But, after seeing how many people like me are out there, I realized that there's nothing to fix and that my sexuality is a part of me."

Kiera knew that it was really hard for some people to conclude that they're gay. Not that girls who were queer didn't have it hard, but she knew for a fact that it was a lot harder for boys who were queer. They were more likely to be beaten, to be killed, just for having attractions they're "not supposed to have." She was just relieved that Eli was safe and that no one would ever let that sort of thing happen to him.

"And now I have great friends and a queer group where I can be myself!" Eli said, interrupting her thoughts. He didn't look ashamed; he looked happy. Kiera smiled.

"I'm glad you're in a better place."

"Have you been questioning your sexuality?" he asked, almost as if Kiera were a book he could open and read. She wanted to tell him that she didn't feel the same way other people felt. How she likes boys, but feels as if she's not attracted to them in the way she's supposed to be. How she thinks she's straight, but doesn't feel straight at the same time. She wanted to tell him all these things, but it was like there was an invisible barrier between them. That even if she screamed these words to him, they would just bounce back into her own ears.

"No, I was just curious."

When the other girls came back, Eli had finally picked a movie, *Cats*. However, when Phoebe and Luna saw the preview with Taylor Swift and James Corden covered in fur, they were quick to start yelling, NO! (which Kiera didn't argue with). Eli tried defending his movie taste by claiming that *Cats* was a theater classic. Luna rebutted, saying that even if that was true, the movie was trash. Phoebe then picked *Ironman*, but the other three shook their heads because they all found Marvel boring. Eli asked Kiera what she wanted to watch, and she just said that anything was fine, other than horror. Phoebe smirked and replied, "Oh really," and then everyone had to wrestle the remote out of her hands to stop her from playing *It* or *Annabelle*. After twenty minutes of arguing and fighting, they decided on an LGBTQ romance and comedy.

One hour and twenty minutes later, Kiera was the only one awake. Luna's head was resting on Phoebe's shoulder as they both shared a blanket. On the couch, Eli was snoring with a bowl of popcorn flipped over his head. Despite the bags starting to grow under Kiera's eyes and the clock by the TV telling her to go to bed, she was fixed on the screen.

The two women, Lucy and Susan, decided that the gala that they had been preparing for the whole movie wasn't as eventful as they expected, so they went to Susan's apartment. Kiera didn't think anything of it at first. That was until they went to the bedroom. They both sat down. And Lucy started taking off her dress. Kiera gripped her sleeping bag. Oh no, please don't. The two started kissing, first their lips and then their necks. Then Susan crouched down and started unclipping Lucy's bra. Kiera scrambled. She lunged for the remote. As her hand clasped around the black frame, it almost slipped as she fumbled for buttons, until she pressed the red one: "Off." The screen turned black, reflecting Kiera's exasperated face.

She looked around at her snoring friends. She wondered what they would've thought if they saw her reaction.

She pressed her hands into her face, hard, until the only thing she could see was blackness. Why do I feel like this? She lifted her head, and her eyes found Phoebe's computer.

Kiera pulled it to her lap and typed in the password "Catradora4eva!" (don't ask). Her eyes flinched at the white brightness that displayed the words: Google. Her fingers lingered on the keyboard. For a second, her hand grabbed the top of the computer, and she was about to close it, but she didn't. She took a breath and searched, "Am I gay?"

Many links to articles and quizzes popped up; she clicked on the first one. After answering questions that asked, "Who would you rather date?"

"Boys."

"Do you feel more physically attracted to boys or girls?"

"Neither."

Kiera finally pressed Enter. She waited a minute as the screen loaded, and then something appeared. She leaned closer, and her eyebrows widened. On the screen was a flag she had never seen before. It was a purple rainbow, mixed with black and gray, unlike any LGBTQ flag she had ever seen before. She glanced down below it. "You are asexual!"

Asexual? Kiera had never heard of the word before. She started to scroll down where the definition was displayed. Asexual: having little to no sexual attraction to others. Kiera continued to scroll and read. When she was done, she pulled up other websites and videos that shared the stories of people like her. They shared their experiences of having no celebrity crushes, no desire to kiss someone, and no desire to have sex. Something warmed inside her chest: belonging.

This whole time, she had felt like an alien. That there was something wrong with her and that there was no one else out there who shared the same feeling that lingered inside her. But she was wrong; there were people out there just like her who had been hiding this whole time. She looked up at the TV screen, and her reflection no longer looked lost or misplaced. But found.



Short Story #2

Embraced

by Emma Bolch

Seagulls screeched as they flew across the sky, blocking the sun for a heartbeat. The same sun that was beaming on Kiera's raven hair. Her steps felt uneasy on the creaking pier as she walked behind her best friends: Eli, Phoebe, and Luna. Oh, and Sam, she guessed. Around them, pillars were strung with rainbow banners and balloons. Kids were running past them, ice cream dripping from their cones onto the wooden floorboards. It wasn't even summer break, and the whole world was celebrating.

In front of Kiera, her friends were expressing their relief at finishing their APs and their impatience for school to end. "I can't believe we have another two weeks of torture!" Phoebe groaned while the others murmured in agreement. Despite their dread, Kiera was smiling. Today was gonna be the day.

Kiera flinched at the sound of screaming. She opened her eyes and sighed.

"Geez, can you please give us a warning next time?" Sam scolded while covering his ears. Ignoring him, Eli grabbed him by the shoulders and started shaking him.

"We need to ride that thing right now!" Kiera followed Eli's pointed finger to the roller coaster in front of them, The Plunge of Terror. Despite what others may presume due to Kiera's small size and inability to hold a conversation with strangers without stuttering, Kiera loved roller coasters. The wind in her hair, the rush from the unexpected twists, the feeling that you're about to fall out of your seat even though you're strapped to a restraint. How could anyone hate that feeling? It seemed like Sam was one of those people. He became a ghost as the blood drained from his face.

"Uh yeah, no thank you."

“Come on, you big baby,” Eli said as he tugged Sam by the arm despite his cries.

“Hey guys, wait up!” Kiera yelled. She grinned as she turned to her other friends. “Well, aren’t you guys coming?” She covered her ears again at Luna’s squeal. Phoebe and Luna’s eyes were glued toward the opposite direction of the roller coaster—the carnival booths.

“Oh my God, look!” Luna pointed to a big stuffed Totoro hanging from one of the booths. Phoebe smirked as she rolled up the sleeves of her shirt.

“Popping Balloons. Pfft. This will be a piece of cake.” Luna glanced back at Kiera,

“We’ll catch up with you guys later,” she said before Phoebe took her hand and they ran to the booth.

“Oh, okay, have fun.” Kiera waved even though they were already gone. She turned to join her other friends in line, but stopped. Near the end of the line, Eli was showing Sam something on his phone (probably some meme). As Sam stared at Eli’s screen, he was covering his mouth to hide his snorting. Maybe it was better if she gave them some privacy. She sighed as she started walking away—perks of being the single friend. Okay, technically Eli and Sam weren’t dating, but Kiera knew that it was a matter of time before Eli got impatient with waiting and showed up at Sam’s doorstep with a bouquet of grocery store flowers and an uneven bow tie strapped to his collar. That’s what Phoebe said to her and Luna at the sleepover a month ago when Eli went to the bathroom.

The same sleepover where, after her friends went to sleep, she took the “Am I Gay Quiz” on Phoebe’s computer. After constantly questioning whether she was straight over the past year, she didn’t know what she was expecting. What she didn’t expect was a black and purple flag to appear on her screen. As she skimmed the description below, reading phrases that reflected her in ways she couldn’t put into words until then, she could finally release a breath she didn’t know she was holding, nor for how long she was holding it.

She finally got her answer, but she didn’t wake up her friends to tell them. She’d been trying to come out to her friends ever since, but it never seemed like the right time. At lunch, when Kiera tried to tell her friends, she felt other classmates’ ears pointed toward her. On phone calls, her friends were too busy gushing about a new anime, and when they were listening, her connection would start glitching out to the point where they would hang up. Even when they were hanging out in person and all alone, the words “I’m asexual” died in Kiera’s throat. And in the end, she would change the topic or say Never mind.

Kiera found herself at the edge of the pier. She crossed her arms over the railing, sighing as she looked out toward the sapphire ripples. Maybe today just wasn’t the right day.

Kiera had walked around the boardwalk five times already. Observing friends posing bunny fingers over each other’s heads while getting caricatures or laughing as they stuffed churros in their mouths, cinnamon sugar stuck to the corner of their lips. Kiera’s shoulders sagged. That should be her and her friends right now; instead, they were too busy on their dates. Something vibrated in her pockets. She pulled out her phone, and the black screen read Dad. “Oh shoot”

Kiera rushed to the back of the food court buildings to seek shade. Once she escaped the blistering sun, she clicked on the answer.

“Hey Dad,” she said, bringing the phone closer to her ear.

“Hey sweetie. I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

“Oh no, it’s okay,” Kiera said as she lowered herself to sit behind the building, trying to avoid the chewed-up gum and the bird droppings.

“I’m actually by myself right now”

“What? Why”

“I dunno,” Kiera muttered while stretching her head. “Phoebe is hanging out with Luna, and Eli is hanging out with Sam.”

Her dad chuckled, “Oh sweetie, I’m sorry you have to be the fifth wheel.”

“It’s fine.” She looked back at the boardwalk, eyes wandering to seagulls trying to steal half-eaten pizza from the trashcan.

“Well, I’m sure it won’t be like this forever.” Kiera’s attention drifted back to her dad’s voice. “You’re a sweet and bright girl; you’ll meet someone eventually.” Kiera inhaled; her grip on the phone grew tighter.

“Actually, Dad, I’m...” The words stretched out of her mouth. She paused. Remembering the first and last time she said that word out loud.

Kiera’s parents were setting up the table. Her mom was humming to the violin medley playing from Alexa as she spread the forks and knives on the placemats while her dad was balancing bowls of Caesar salad and mashed potatoes in his arms, trying not to drop them as he made his way from the counter to the table.

Kiera stood at the frame of the doorway. She had been hoping that her friends would be the first people she would come out to, but she never found a good time to do so with them. So she figured she might as well come out to her parents. It couldn't be that bad, right? She knew they weren't homophobic or anything. In fact, since they were a mixed couple (her dad was black and her mom was white), they were more understanding of gay people because they knew what it was like to be told that being with someone they loved was "wrong."

She took a deep breath and stepped into the room. "Mom, Dad." They stopped. Utensils clutched in their hands as they looked up at her.

"I know you're hungry, Kiera, but dinner will be ready in ten minutes," her mom laughed.

"It's not about that." Kiera scratched the back of her neck. "I just want to talk to you about something"

"Okay?" her dad said as they both set down their utensils and plates and sat. Kiera pulled up another chair and sat down, gripping her hands on the table. "Is everything okay, Sweetie?" her dad asked.

"Yeah, I just wanted to tell you... I found out something about myself recently and thought I should tell you"

"Oh, okay."

Her mom laughed, "Kiera, if you're coming out, it's okay; there's nothing to be ashamed of in liking girls"

"No," Kiera waved her hands, "I like boys, but...I'm also not straight"

"Uhhh, what do you mean? Her dad raised her eyebrow.

"I'm..." She looked away, studying the corner of the room. "I'm asexual." She looked back up at her parents. They didn't say anything. They looked at each other, then back at her. A smile grew across their faces, and they burst out laughing.

Kiera shrank in her chair, wishing the ground below would swallow her up.

Her mom wiped tears from her eyes as she caught her breath. "Kiera sweetie, I'm sorry, but you're not asexual; you cannot reproduce on your own."

What. "That's not what I mean," Kiera said, shaking her head.

"Listen, Kiera, if you don't want to be a mom, that's okay." Kiera's dad said, "Grandbabies are a lot of work anyway, but if you do want to have kids without being pregnant, you can always adopt"

"Dad"

"Kiera." Her mom reached over the table, touching her shoulder. "We understand that this is a big moment in your life and that some of your friends are dating. And that you're single, but you will find someone." Kiera glanced at her mother's hand. While her touch was warm, Kiera's shoulders stiffened.

"Yeah." She mumbled, not meeting her mom's eyes. She stood up. The chair scooted under her.

"I'm gonna go." She turned and started walking away.

"Kiera, where are you going?" her dad called.

"I'm just not hungry," she lied, not looking back.

"Kiera?" her dad asked, interrupting her thoughts.

She sighed, " Never mind, I'll talk to you later"

She hung up before he could respond. Groaning, she slouched. The back of her head hit the wall. She couldn't even say the word asexual.

The red table was starting to burn Kiera's arms. Kiera slurped a chocolate milkshake, grumbling when her straw clogged up. She was supposed to be hanging out with her friends. Screaming on roller coasters and getting scammed at ring toss. But here she was. Sitting alone, drinking a half-melted milkshake.

"Kiera?" She choked. Chocolate splattered out of her mouth onto the red table. She wiped her mouth. And looked up to see a boy whose usually well-kept black hair was tousled, covering his face.

"Oh, hi Sam," she said as he sat down. While Phoebe and Luna were ecstatic about Eli's crush on Sam, Kiera was well...skeptical. She just thought that Eli could do better.

She and Eli first met Sam earlier this year in Chemistry. One day, she was talking about Demon Slayer with Eli when they heard a scoff. They turned their heads to Sam, who said: "Only nerds watch that kind of stuff." Kiera blushed and hid her face behind her notebook while Eli's jaw clenched.

"Well, at least nerds don't wear basic-ass white shirts online for 100 dollars that cost like 10 bucks in Walmart." He said that louder than he probably meant to. Classmates nearby heard and burst out laughing, causing Sam's face to redden. For the next three months, Eli made it his mission to embarrass Sam and make fun of his height (He is 5 '6) while Sam responded by rolling his eyes or flipping him off. However, one day, the class had to work on an experiment report in pairs. Obviously, Kiera and Eli were planning to work together, but Mr. Roberts interrupted them, saying he had already assigned them pairs. Eli and Sam were paired together. Despite both their pleas, Mr. Roberts refused to group them with anyone else.

To Kiera's surprise, however, one day she came to class, and Sam was sitting where she usually sat next to Eli, and they were...laughing? When Sam spotted her, he shot straight up, muttered some apology before fleeing to his normal seat.

When Kiera sat down next to Eli and raised her eyebrow, he said, "He's actually not that bad when you get to know him." Months later, here they are.

"Are you alright?" Sam asked. Kiera didn't expect that.

"Umm yeah, er, I dunno," she said, holding her head in her hands. "Where's Eli?"

"He's getting us some food; he promised to buy me something if I threw up." Kiera covered her mouth, but she couldn't hide her snicker. Sam glared at her. "I thought that you would be hanging out with Phoebe and Luna." Kiera took another sip of her milkshake, even though it was now warm.

"Phoebe is trying to win Luna some Totoro plushie. I was gonna join you two, but then I decided you would probably want some privacy."

"Oh, uh," he stuttered, "why would...you know what, never mind," he waved off. "I'm sorry about that; Eli wouldn't have wanted you to spend the day by yourself."

"It's okay, I'm used to it," she said as she stared at the lid of her drink, popping the plastic bubbles.

"What do you mean?"

Kiera sighed. Well, it's not like Sam was going to care. "It's just...I was hoping today would be the day I could come out to my friends as..."

"As...what?" Sam asked.

"As...as ace." She looked away.

Kiera waited for the questions. Waited for “what the hell is asexual” or “that sounds fake,” but instead Sam chuckled, “Oh, I’m sorry, I don’t know what that is. Can you explain?”

“It basically means I don’t feel sexual attraction. Like at all. I mean, I can tell who is attractive, and I still have romantic attraction, meaning I still want to date eventually, but...” She turned her head. “I’m worried that my friends are gonna judge me. That they’re not gonna understand me because they’re not asexual.” She gripped her hair. Crap, why was she telling Sam this? It’s not like he was going to under...She turned her head around, hearing a noise she didn’t expect: laughter.

He caught his breath. “I’m sorry, Kiera, I don’t mean to laugh.” He said, wiping a tear from his eye, “But you are a part of the gayest, weirdest friend group I have ever met. What makes you think for a second they’re going to judge you?”

Kiera fiddled with her fingers. “Well...none of them are asexual; they all feel sexual attraction, which there is nothing wrong with, but...It also means that it’s hard for them to relate to me.”

“So! I’m bi, and Eli’s not. Maybe he can’t always relate to my sexuality because he doesn’t like girls, but he’s been my biggest supporter.” Kiera looked up at Sam. She tried to form words, but nothing came. She looked back down at the table. “We all have different sexualities. I’m bi, you’re ace, Phoebe’s pan, and Eli and Luna are gay, but we all have been through the same experience. We’re all told at some point during our lives how we’re supposed to feel. However, as we grow older, we realize that how we feel might be different than what we knew was right.” Kiera abandoned her gaze at the table and tilted her chin up.

“Look, it was really hard for me figuring out I’m bisexual and even harder coming out. Yes, some people judged me and weren’t exactly supportive, but there were a lot of people who were, and I know I don’t know your friends as well as you do, but from what I see, they adore you. And they’ll support you no matter what. Even if you revealed that you were secretly an alien this whole time.”

Even as Kiera covered her face with her hand, she couldn’t hide her smile that was peeking next to her fingertips. He did have a point. Wow, from all the people she thought would give her a pep talk, she didn’t expect it to be Sam. She laughed; she guessed Eli was right-Sam did have a soft spot.

“Thank you.” She smiled, sitting up straighter. “I think I’m ready”

“Ready for what?” Sam jumped as Eli popped out of the corner with one arm around Sam’s shoulders and the other carrying a hot dog. Sam looked at Eli’s arm and blushed. On the opposite side, Phoebe and Luna appeared, one giant Totoro in Luna’s arms.

“It took two hours and fifty dollars, but I won it.” Phoebe beamed as sweat poured down her face. Kiera was sure they could have bought that same plush on Amazon for twenty dollars.

“So what do we want to do next?” Eli said, removing his arm from Sam’s shoulders. “I was thinking we could go to the arcade or-”

“Actually,” Sam interrupted, placing a hand on Eli’s shoulder. Eli looked down at his shoulder, surprised by the touch. Sam noticed and immediately retracted his hand. “Kiera has something she wants to tell you guys.” All eyes went to Kiera.

“Well...” she scanned over her friends' faces when her eyes landed on Sam. He gave her a nod. *They're your friends; they'll support you no matter what. Even if you revealed that you were secretly an alien this whole time.* She closed her eyes. Taking in a deep breath, then releasing it. She opened her eyes. “I’m asexual.” She waited. For a few seconds, her friends were silent, processing her words.

Then Phoebe squealed before wrapping her arms around her, “Oh My God! That’s amazing! I’m so proud of you.” As Phoebe let go of Kiera, Kiera turned her head to Eli, who was smiling.

“Honestly, I’m not surprised. You have been sticking your tongue out at every kiss scene since we were seven.”

“I’m sorry.” They all turned their heads to Luna. “I hope I’m not sounding ignorant, but what does asexual mean?”

Phoebe gasped. “Oh my gosh! Babe, have you not played that Kahoot I sent you on every LGBTQ term?”

“No, it’s okay,” Kiera said. “Asexual means having little to no sexual attraction. Some of us do experience a little sexual attraction and maybe even still want to have sex, but as of now that’s not the case for me.”

“If you don’t mind me asking”, Phoebe asked, “how did you find out you are ace?”

“I found out at the sleepover last month. I used your computer to take an “Am I Gay” quiz.”

“Huh.” Phoebe tilted her head. “So that’s why I have been getting a lot of posts about asexuality on my feed.”

“Wait a minute.” Eli looked at Sam. “Did Kiera come out to you before us?”

“Wait a minute.” Eli looked at Sam. “Did Kiera come out to you before us?”

“Uhhh,” Sam shrank in his seat, looking shorter than he already was.

“What!” Phoebe shouted. “You told Sam before any of us? Honestly, Kiera, I’m kinda offended”

“Hey!” Sam said, crossing his arms.

“In my defense, I didn’t know how you guys were gonna react,” Kiera said, rubbing the back of her neck as her face flushed.

“Aww,” Luna said before wrapping her arms around Kiera’s shoulders.

“Kiera, we’re your friends. Of course we support you!”

Phoebe joined the hug from behind. “Yeah, you can’t get rid of us that easily”

“Group hug!” Eli yelled.

“Oh no.” Sam tried to slip away, but Eli grabbed him.

“Oh yes, Sammy, now get in here!” He said before trapping Sam and the rest of them in a bear hug.

Kiera smiled as she looked at her friends. She couldn’t believe she thought they wouldn’t have supported her. She guessed she was too caught up in her own worries and doubts that she ignored the obvious. Her friends loved her, and nothing was going to change that. Maybe her parents didn’t understand her asexuality. Maybe other teens from school or her teachers wouldn’t either. But as long as she had her friends, that was all that mattered. Kiera squeezed her eyes as she held onto her friends’ embrace.



Short Story #3

Alone on the Dance Floor

by Emma Bolch

Aidan was tired of seeing flyers. They were everywhere. The lockers, the floor- one even flew and landed in his face. “Ahh,” he grabbed the paper, crumpling it in his hands. The title taunted him: “Winter Dance 6:00 pm, bring a date!” If that wasn’t bad enough, on every corner of the hall, someone was asking out their crush with a box of chocolates or a bouquet of flowers. Gross.

“Hey, man!”

His buddy Bryce wrapped their arm around his shoulder, pressing their headphones and glasses against his face. Bryce has been Aidan’s best friend since eighth grade. They’d bonded over skateboarding, rapping, and watching YouTube videos of people attempting crazy stunts. They’d even once started their own channel, but had to delete it after Bryce’s dad caught them as they were about to jump off Bryce’s roof onto a pile of mattresses.

“I see you’re still looking for a date?” they teased. Aidan loved the guy, but he sure could be a pain in the ass.

“Yeah, no thanks. If anything, I’m trying to avoid getting one. Seeing all of these dance proposals is getting on my nerves.”

He really didn’t get the big deal. Sure, he liked partying and dancing, but he didn’t understand the need to try to impress some girl who would most likely not talk to him again. Even if she were interested in being his girlfriend, he didn’t have the time to worship one person by gifting her flowers and jewelry. Oh, and taking her shopping. Ugh, he hated shopping.

Bryce laughed. Tears formed in his eyes, and he couldn't breathe. But as he opened them, he was met with Aidan's deadpan face. He blinked a few times, realizing that Aidan wasn't laughing with him.

"Wait, really? I mean, I understand you like being single and all, but you really haven't asked anyone out?"

"Uhhh."

Well, it's not like he was shy or anything. He could easily get a date if he wanted to. He'd actually noticed some girls checking him out earlier as he was walking down the halls. Normally, any guy would be pleased and maybe wink back, but Aidan pretended he didn't see them and fastened his pace.

"Look, I just haven't found any girls that I'm interested in."

"Okayyy," Bryce said, a thin line drawing his mouth. "Are there any boys you like?"

He wasn't joking. Due to his lack of interest in girls, Aidan had wondered before whether he might like boys instead, especially when his younger cousin, Elijah, came out as gay. He looked across the hall to see some guys come out of the locker room, sweat pouring down their muscles and abs bulging through their shirts. Wait, why was he looking at that?

"No." He shook his head. Bryce frowned.

"Well, I have to go get ready. I'll see you later."

He turned to leave before his eyebrows shot up, and he turned back to Aidan.

"Text me if you need me to set you up with someone, okay?"

"Yeah," Aidan mumbled, even though he knew he probably wasn't going to.

Aidan bought a nice suit, did his hair, but still had no date. At 5:30, Eli picked him up (he would have driven, but his car was towed last week, and he was waiting for his next paycheck at Burger King because his parents refused to pay the 500-dollar fine). As he closed the car door, Aidan nodded to Eli's boyfriend (he thinks?) Samuel, who was way shorter than he expected. While Eli was bickering with Sam about his ridiculous fashion choice of wearing a patterned bow tie, Aidan sulked in the backseat. He really, really, really didn't want to go. He would much rather be at home playing on his Nintendo, listening to music on his headphones, or even, dare he say it, watching *The Bachelor* with his mom.

Despite all of that, Aidan knew he had to go to this stupid dance. Otherwise, Bryce was never gonna stop trying to hook him up with random girls on Instagram. Couldn't it be that bad, right? Aidan leaned his forehead against the icy window as he pondered his non-existent love life. He had never dated or even kissed someone before. Now that he thought about it, he's never really had a crush either. Every time he's watched some cheesy Disney movie, he's assumed the romance was just as fictional as mermaids or fairies. It wasn't, though- romance was real, and he had to find a way to like it.

When they reached the party, Aidan was pleasantly surprised. Sure, it was in the school gym, so it kinda smelled like cheese, but there were also cut-out paper snowflakes hanging dangling down the walls, lights that changed every few seconds like the opening screen of his monitor. There was even a disco ball! Eli's friends Phoebe and Luna (who, of course, are also dating) came up to him and his maybe date to say hi. Aidan left them to search for Bryce.

He spotted Bryce across the room, but he decided not to bother them since he was talking to Maya. Bryce was also wearing contacts, which he almost never wore, so Aidan guessed that this night was important to him. Some DJ started playing some music, so Aidan decided to go to the dance floor. He was having a good time, showing off his moves and letting the music take control of his body, when all of a sudden the music shifted from a loud, get-your-blood-pumping beat into a soft and slow melody. Aidan looked around and noticed everyone was paired up with their arms on each other's waist, slowly dancing.

A finger tapped his shoulder, and he looked down to see Amber Lee. She was wearing a yellow dress, gold braids in her hair, and her makeup was done just right. She looked very pretty. But that didn't give Aidan the butterflies or the feeling he was supposed to have.

"Wanna dance?" she asked.

Why not? He didn't know what he was doing, but Amber didn't seem to mind. Every time he accidentally stepped on her heels and apologized, she giggled. Eventually her hands went to his abs (he wasn't shredded, but he had some muscles). She traced them and her arm reached up to his chest. He wanted it to stop. He wanted the music to stop, the dancing to stop, and he wanted Amber to stop touching him.

She looked up at his eyes, and Aidan felt sweat pouring down his face. He wanted to scream, but no words came out. Amber went for it and kissed him, pressing her lips into his. He hated it; he wanted to throw up; he wanted fresh air, not the feeling of this girl's breath and body against his. He hated this, he hated this, he hated this. He wished the ground beneath his feet would crumble and swallow him whole. He pushed her away. Amber stumbled back, her eyebrows raised.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, stepping back. He sighed and turned his back. As he walked away, he could hear her scoff. He gripped his head as his vision started to blur. Why did he push her? He quickened his pace, keeping his eyes glued to the ground, worrying if any other teens saw what happened. He hoped Bryce didn’t see. He would have slapped him and said, “dude what is wrong with you? Why would you push off a perfectly nice girl?”

He grabbed a drink from the snack bar and leaned against the wall. What was wrong with him? Teenagers were supposed to like kissing; they were supposed to like the idea of romance and having someone to be close to. So why didn’t he?

A soft voice broke through his thoughts. “Hey, are you okay?”

Aidan looked down to see Kiera, one of Eli’s best friends.

“I saw what happened. Are you okay?” she asked again, tilting her head. Oh, he wasn’t really planning on talking about that.

“Uh, I don’t know. Geez, I’m sorry you had to see that. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I shouldn’t have...”

“No!” Her voice surprised him. “Don’t apologize; you shouldn’t have to kiss someone if you don’t want to.”

He sighed, then looked around, noticing she was all alone with no date. “Hey Kiera, don’t you have a date?” She was silent. He was about to apologize for offending her when she burst into laughter.

“Oh no, I came alone. Well, technically I came with Phoebe and Luna, but I don’t have a date.” Aidan raised an eyebrow.

“Really? No one asked you out? I don’t see why. You’re really nice, and pretty.” She shrugged.

“Honestly, I’m not really interested in anyone right now. Even if some guy asked me out, I most likely would’ve turned him down. I guess I’m just too asexual to really care.”

“Asexual?”

“Oh, I thought Eli would have told you by now, but yeah. I’m ace.”

“Uh... what exactly does that mean?” He felt embarrassed, being a senior and asking a junior about an LGBTQ term, especially since he had a queer cousin.

“Well, I found out a while ago after watching a movie at a sleepover, but it basically means I don’t find people sexually attractive. Like the idea of touching or kissing someone freaks me out.” Aidan looked back at the dance floor, where he pushed Amber off after she kissed him. Could I be ace?

“Oh, but I can still have romantic interest and want to date eventually.” His excitement dropped.

“Oh, I guess I’m not ace then.” He looked at the ground, hating himself for thinking for a second that maybe there was a reason why he couldn’t be normal.

“You can be ace and not have romantic feelings. That’s called Asexual and Aromantic.” Aidan looked up again as his eyes widened. The words tingled in his head. Hearing something so unknown yet familiar made him wish those words weren’t just words, like something he could grab to see if they were real and not just his imagination.

“It can also be aroace for short. It means you don’t have either sexual or romantic attraction.”

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“It can also be aroace for short. It means you don’t have either sexual or romantic attraction.”

“Aroace,” he repeated. The words felt like they belonged to him.

“Hey KiKi!” The two turned around to see Phoebe waving Kiera over.

“Well, I hope you figure it out, ” Kiera said, waving to him before running to her friends. Aidan waved back as he gazed across the dance room. Everywhere, couples were holding each other, hand in hand, except him. Instead of rolling his eyes or scoffing, he smiled. For the first time all night, the sight of dancing couples didn’t make him want to throw up.

This zine contains three fictional short stories centered around asexuality. The first two stories, *Misplaced* and *Embraced*, follow a teenage girl, Kiera, who fears not being accepted by her queer friend group after finding out she's asexual. The third story, *Alone on the Dance Floor*, follows another character, Aidan, who is forced to attend his school's Winter Dance and struggles to understand why he doesn't want romance or sex when everyone else does.

These stories are important because there not only needs to be more asexual representation in the media, but there needs to be accurate representation. This means teaching the audience what asexuality is, the struggles asexuals face, and the beauty of coming to embrace one's identity. Kiera and Aidan also address the need to write more asexual characters of color, as most asexual characters that do exist are white. The goal of these stories is not only to spread awareness but to help readers empathize with asexuals and to help asexual readers feel seen and understood.