BOOK REVIEW
A Love Story Starring My Dead Best Friend
By Emily Horner

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT AVAILABLE AT TEXAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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want to pounce on a job right away without making a plan or waiting for everything to line up perfectly.

“Yeah,” I said. “Yeah, actually, I kind of do.”

I looked at her, trying to find something on the surface that would tell me who she was and why she did anything she did, and I couldn’t even begin to guess at her motives, or figure out whether or not I could put even a thread of trust in her. But she just shrugged and started to walk to her car, waving me forward over her shoulder.

I took the front wheel off my bike and loaded it into the trunk of her little black SUV, and we were off. For a while we didn’t talk, and Heather spun between the radio stations so that we would have something to break the silence.

“So, are you ever going to explain why you’re not going back to St. Joseph’s next year?”

“Oh, you know Catholic schools. The gangs, the drugs, the violence.”

“No, really.”

Quiet. “Aw, hell,” she said in the end. “I guess I have to start somewhere. Have you ever had one of those breakups that is so boiling-in-oil painful that you can’t even stand to go to the same school anymore, lest you catch a glimpse of their face in the hallway and start crying all over your math test?”

“No,” I said honestly. “But I get the running away from your problems part. It’s stupid, though, right? They always end up following us around anyway.”

to when they came on MTV. All of us, grass-stained and heartbroken; me, off-key and singing anyway. Because Julia used to tell me to.

We started reassembling our old routines, bit by bit. We started hanging out under the big oak tree for lunch again. And then, one day a week and a half after the memorial, Ollie came up to us holding a huge sheaf of paper in his hands.

“You know how Julia was working on a big secret project?”

“Wait, that was a real secret project?” Amy said. “I sort of assumed the secret project was making out with you.” And I snickered, even though I shouldn’t have snickered, because every so often I would e-mail her or pass her a note inviting her somewhere, and she’d just answer CAN’T, SEKRIT PROJECT. And then I’d assume the same thing.

“Much more exciting than that,” Ollie said, and he started passing out his photocopies—thick enough that they were held together with the big industrial-size staples. The first page bore its title in a big typewriter font:

TOTALLY SWEET NINJA DEATH SQUAD
LIBRETTO & SCORE
MUSIC & LYRICS BY JULIA REINHOFER

P.S. THIS IS NOT A REAL DRAFT, SO STOP READING, OKAY?

P.P.S. I REALLY MEAN IT. WAIT FOR THE SECOND DRAFT OR I KILL YOU.

“This is what we’re going to do,” Ollie said.
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"That's all?" It came out as a squeak. "She was good!"

"This isn't a popularity contest. It's not about who I think is a decent human being. But she can act, and she can sing, and she's graceful on her feet, and I think this play deserves that much. Julia deserves that much."

"No. She deserves better than this thing where we're at each other's throats and miserable. And do you really think she'd be happy about putting Heather in the play after how horrible she's been—not just to me, to everybody who didn't fit in? Jon, you remember what she was like to you. And Julia too."

Jon looked at the floor. "Yeah," he muttered. "But a constant barrage of love-grade teasing and snarling is sort of the definition of middle school. If it hadn't been her it would've been someone else."

"It was a long time ago anyway," Ollie said. "And if you don't get that, maybe you should just go."

"Please. No. "Don't shut me out of this."

"You don't get it, do you?" Ollie said. He only took a step toward me, but it made me back away until I was all the way out in the deserted hall. The others were staring at me from behind him. "I'm just saying what everybody knows. You kept leaning on Julia's pity even after the friendship was over, and she let you."

I was stinging-eyed with the shock that he'd actually say it out loud, but I wiped my face with the back of my hand and bit my lip and kept staring up at him.

"Maybe she felt sorry for you because you didn't have any other friends, and maybe she was flattered by you hanging around like a lovesick puppy, but you can't mistake that for real friendship."

He turned away sharply. "And I'm not flattered that you wanted to fuck my girlfriend."

I took it like a slap, biting the inside of my cheek. One second more and I would've shoved him; but Lissa was already between us. "Time out, time out, time out."

Jon pulled me out down the hallway, and the door slammed shut. I ran, but he ran to keep up with me.

"Why are you the one who's going after me?" I snapped. "Is it like some gay person thing?"

"It's because if I stayed back there with Oliver, I'd have to beat him up."

"Well, okay," I said. "Get on it."

"Cassie, calm down." He sighed. "No, never mind. Get pissed off. You've got that right. But he didn't mean it, and you know that."

"Don't apologize for him."

"I'm not!" Jon said. "I'm just saying."

"Well, don't. I brought the back of my hand up against my cheek again and realized that I had stopped crying. This was the story of my life since middle school. I knew how to deal by now:

"I'll kick his ass if he doesn't apologize. Cut him some slack, though, just for now. It's not such a good time for him."

"It's not party time for any of us! I don't see why he gets more slack than me just because they were having sex."

"You're right," he said, and was quiet.

We were both quiet for several minutes. "You'll kick his ass for me?" I barely managed to smile.

"Maybe not. I could put superglue on him in his sleep, though."

"That works."

I could breathe again. I was not some pathetic friendless creature, if I had Jon.

I pulled myself up onto a table and sat there, swinging my legs in the air. Not calm, not yet, but cooling down.

"Hey," I said, "can I ask you a question I'm pretty sure I don't want to know the answer to?"

"Shoot."

"Was Ollie really, actually . . . jealous? Of us?"

"Kind of," Jon said. "In the sense that he was jealous when he wasn't Julia's first, second, and third priority, yeah. But he wasn't worried about you putting the moves on her."

"Oh?" I said as noncommittally as possible.

He was very slow to answer, and when he finally said something, it was, "Well, um, it's just . . . ."

"It's just I wouldn't know how to put the moves on someone if I had a color diagram and an instruction booklet."

Jon grinned at me. "I wouldn't go that far. You're good with color diagrams."

"It's not fair. You keep your hair short and admit to liking math and don't wear makeup—which, by the way, I am not allowed to do—and don't take an interest in fashion—which, by the way, I am also not allowed to do—and you make it to sixteen years old without ever having had a boyfriend, or even getting kissed, and everybody decides that you're a lesbian. Even if Heather Galloway had never told everybody that I was."

"Lissa says that homophobia is a tool the patriarchy uses to scare straight people into gender conformity," he deadpanned.

I blinked.

"Yeah, well, Lissa paints her nails, and wears more skirts than I do."

Still, he didn't ask. He had more sense than that, and maybe he'd been through too much of life to ask what I had been asking myself since I first discovered that everyone had reached that consensus without asking me.

Because, here was the thing. There was not and had never been a single boy who I really found attractive in an I-want-to-take-off-your-pants-now kind of way. Not in school, not among one-hit-wonder boy-bands and movie stars. I listened to other girls fawning over this one or that one and I just didn't get it. But there wasn't a single girl either. So clearly there was something terribly wrong with me, and I was probably only attracted to Mongolians or something. I probably wouldn't even make it to cat lady status when I got old. Guinea pig woman, maybe.
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Galloway had never told everybody that I was."

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status when I got old. Guinea pig woman, maybe.

Dad pushed his glasses up along his nose and frowned.
My parents were Quakers, and beyond being pacifists,
and not allowing makeup and cable TV, this was what
they believed in. When the Spirit tells you to do some-
thing, you had better be listening. Even if it seems crazy,
even if it seems dangerous, you had better be prepared
to take a step outside what is safe and sane.

I didn’t believe that God told some guy, however many
thousands of years ago, "Hey, build a ginormous boat
in this desert over here." I liked it as a story, though, because
it seemed like the kind of thing God ought to say. There
were crazy stupid things that needed to get done, or should
have gotten done, or turned out to be wonderful when they
did get done. And maybe, if God ever did tell people what
to do, it was to stick up for these crazy stupid things that
no one in their right mind would ever do otherwise.

Things had shifted in the hour and a half I’d been think-
ing about this. It wasn’t just that I didn’t want to work
on their play, and it wasn’t just that I didn’t want to
have to deal with Heather and Oliver. I imagined the
long flat yellow fields out on the road, where the sky
is enormous and you feel like you could go on forever,
and I wanted that like I wanted air or water. I wanted to
be swallowed up in that great expanse of nothingness. I
wanted to devote myself to a purpose.

I looked up, and Dad was looking out of the garage,
PROFANITY COUNT AND OTHER SENSITIVE WORDS

F*ck – 1  
S*cks – 4  
D*mn – 5  
Sex – 5  
B*tch – 3  
Condoms – 1  
Beer – 3  
H*ll – 7  
Kill – 7  
Gay – 13  
Jesus (in vain) – 3  
God (in vain) – 16

RED FLAGS
Language
Drinking
NORMALIZING:

Over the course of the last several years, subjects not consistent with most citizens of the United States are being normalized and pushed into our society via social media, TV, music and our public school system.

This book falls under the definition of Normalization.

Definition:
Normalizing a person refers to social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as “normal” through repetition or through ideology and propaganda. To alter, modify, convert, change, adapt.

CONCLUSION

Not appropriate literary content for K-12 schools.