BOOK REVIEW: *Her Royal Highness* by Rachel Hawkins

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“Obviously,” Jude echoes, leaning back, too. Her long blond hair is dyed turquoise at the ends, and as she gets situated on the sleeping bags, those bright blue strands brush against my arm, setting my pulse racing and a whole fleet of butterflies loose in my stomach.

But last year, things were different with Jude.

We’ve been friends since we were nine, and I’ve had a crush on her since I was thirteen and realized that I felt the same way about Jude as I did about Lance McHenry from Boys of Summer (look, everyone liked Boys of Summer back then, it wasn’t as embarrassing as it sounds now).

She trails her fingers over my arm, nails lightly scratching my skin, and my breath comes out all shaky as I break out in goose bumps. Each fingernail is painted a different shade of purple, her thumb a pale lavender, her pinky a violet so deep it almost looks black. There in the tent with the summer night all around us, it feels like we could be the only two people in the world right now.

“You’re not turning it down because of me, are you?” she asks, and my heart does a neat little flip in my chest. This . . . thing between me and Jude has been going on since the beginning of the summer, but I’m not used to it yet. Being with her still makes me feel like I’m on some amusement park ride, heart pounding, stomach dropping.
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“It’s okay if you want to admit you can’t stand being away from me,” she teases, and I go to shove at her, but she catches my wrist, tugging me closer so she can kiss me.

Her lips taste like my cherry-vanilla lip balm, and in that moment, there’s only Jude and her mouth and the way she tucks my hair behind my ears as she kisses me.

“More us-y than with Mason?”

The words are out before I even have time to think about them, really, and I immediately wish I could call them back. Mason is Jude’s ex, the boy she’d dated since freshman year, and they broke up last spring. Right before it all started with me and Jude. Since that first kiss, sitting on the floor of her room last month, we haven’t mentioned Mason. It’s been easy, since he’s away at soccer camp or something for part of the summer, but sometimes I wonder how it’ll be when he comes back. I’ve always liked Mason even if I am head over heels for his girlfriend, but there’s no doubt things have been easier with me and Jude without him here.

Jude flops onto her back, studying the ceiling of the tent. “Weren’t we kind of an us even when Mason was around?”

She rolls back onto her side to face me, and I feel my cheeks go hot again, because yeah, we were. There wasn’t any of this kissing or other fun stuff, but she was definitely my favorite person to be around.

“Maybe,” I acknowledge, and she grins before draping an arm over my waist.

Jude kisses me again, and thoughts about Mason, Scotland, and fancy schools with unicorn crests vanish in the warm summer air.

The girl isn’t facing me, but I’d know that hair anywhere.

Jude.

Like all my angsting over her text conjured her up or something. Except I’m pretty sure that if I’d magically made Jude appear, I wouldn’t have also brought forth Mason Coleman.

And they for sure would not be kissing.

My heart is pounding so hard in my chest that it almost hurts, a dull roar in my ears.

They’re kissing, Jude and Mason. Kissing. By the fountain because yay, cliché, I guess, and also kissing, kissing, Jude is kissing someone, and it’s not me, and I am such an idiot.
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Lee throws the socks back at me with a snort. “My dating life is fret-free at the moment. I have a date with Noah this Friday, thankyouverymuch.”

“Chicken Finger Place Guy?”
Lee wrinkles his nose. “Y’all have got to stop calling him that.”
Laughing, I turn back to my packing. “Sorry, you called him that first, and now it’s stuck. I look forward to you one day becoming Mr. Chicken Finger Place Guy.”

“In any case, still worth a shot. And then,” she adds, patting my hand, “we’ll find you a cute local boy.” She winks, long eyelashes fluttering. “Haven’t you always wanted to learn what’s under a Scotsman’s kilt?”
I pout, but she’s right. “I’m not interested in school, not romance.”

“You can do both, you know.” Flora again. She’s leaning back against the booth, arms folded over her chest. “Last time I checked, Gregorstoun wasn’t a nunnery.”

So I just shrug. “Her name was Jude,” I say, and Flora’s gaze flicks over to me for a second before she goes back to studying the other patrons with that carefully schooled bored expression she’s so good at.

“Oh, so when you do decide to get out there, we need to find you a lass instead of a lad, understood.” Saks is cheerful now, grinning

And then she props her head on her hand and says, “At the pub, before the whole unpleasantness, you mentioned liking girls and boys.”

Oh, wow, apparently we’re going to unpack everything personal about me tonight. Joy.

“Yeah,” I say at last. “Equal opportunity dater.”
“Bisexual,” she replies, and my face flushes even as I laugh.
“To get technical, yes, bi. Anything else you want to know about me? Social security number? Embarrassing scars?”

She shrugs, still on her side facing me. “If we’re stuck out here, I figure we might as well try to get to know each other. And me, too.
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With the liking girls and boys. Well, not boys, actually. I mean—she blows out a long breath—"I gave them a try, but it didn’t take."

Okay, that has my attention.

Once again, I roll over to face her. "Didn’t take?" I echo.

Flora traces a pattern on her jacket with one fingernail. "They’re just very... boy, you know?"

I kind of do, and I nod.

"Do people know?" I ask her, and then, since that seems fairly personal, offer up, "My dad and stepmom do. Most of my friends, too. I thought it might be weird or hard to talk to them about it, but everyone was surprisingly cool."

"My family is not quite as cool," Flora says. "My brothers know, and they’re fine with it. Papa would rather not acknowledge that any of his children are sexual creatures, and Mummy is pretending it’s simply a phase and I’ll eventually do my family duty. Marry some chinless duke with three hundred acres."

She flops over onto her back, one arm stretched out at her side, the other resting on her chest. "Have three or four royal bairns. Give them obnoxious names."

"What?"

Stepping closer, Flora murmurs, "Why is it dumb, Quint?"

And then... holy crap, she’s kissing me.

Flora’s hands are cold on my cheeks, or maybe it’s just that my face is hot, but I can feel each of her fingertips on my skin, pressing in like a brand, and my own hands come up to catch her wrists. It shouldn’t be a big surprise that Flora is such a stellar kisser, but my knees didn’t get the message because they’re trembling like I just did four laps around the school.

And underneath my fingers, I can feel the steady pulse of Flora’s heartbeat, a reminder that I’m not the only one feeling shook here.

Smiling against her mouth, I pull back a little, and she grins at me, that real smile that probably shows too many teeth to be a Proper Princess Smile, but the one that is definitely my favorite.
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Then it fades from her face, and a trio of wrinkles appears between her perfectly groomed eyebrows. “Oh god, is this too much?” she breathes. “Is it too soon, do you need more time? I can give you more time, if you want, I just... I just felt like I had to kiss you, so I did.”

Pulling back even more, I raise my eyebrows at her. “Are you, Princess Flora Ghislaine Mary Baird, actually saying you might have rushed into something? Like, you’re admitting that?”

Then, as we approach a rise in the path, she reaches out and grabs my hand, pulling me behind a rock formation to press a quick but heated kiss to my mouth, and yeah.

Maybe I haven’t forgotten what this feels like, because I’m not sure I’ve ever felt anything like this.

Pulling back, she studies my face for a long moment, then runs her thumb over my lower lip, sending a shower of sparkles through my blood.

Then I lean in to kiss her, and this time, there’s nothing quick about it.
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But Flora is definitely not shy, kissing me back with her hand at the back of my head, and soon it’s not so much kissing as it is making out, my paper and laptop and own name pretty much forgotten.

It’s not just the kissing (although I like that a lot) but all of it.

The way Flora’s fingers always dance over any piece of exposed skin, turning places I never thought of as all that sexy—the insides of my elbows, the spaces between my fingers, my forehead—into pulse points of want.

How her usually imperious “Quint” sounds so different when it’s whispered against the damp skin of my neck.

Or how she makes me so different. Bolder and braver, quicker to touch her in all the places where she wants to touch me.

This is one of those times when I feel like I can’t stop touching her, even with all our clothes on, and I probably would stay there wrapped up in her forever if my phone didn’t suddenly chime.

“My best friend,” I say, distracted as I mess with my hair. “How do people already know this stuff?”

Flora lifts one shoulder, heading back to my bed. “They always do,” she says before settling back down with her laptop. “And honestly, I’m glad this time. Maybe now Mummy will understand that I’m gay, not ‘going through a phase.”

“I love you, Flora,” I say, and even though there’s a crowd around us, and bodyguards and other royals, it feels like it’s just us. Like we’re back in our room at Gregorstoun, or out on the moors under the stars. “And yes, sometimes you make me crazy, and we’re definitely going to have to talk about the whole high-handed thing, but . . . it’s worth it. You’re worth it.”

Flora laughs at that, the real kind that shows her teeth, and her hand is tight in mine.

“I’m sorry, too,” she says. “I should’ve told you the truth about Tam, and I definitely shouldn’t have paid your tuition without telling you, but . . .” She shrugs. “What can I say? I’m a mess.”

“You’re not,” I immediately reply, then I rethink that. “Okay, you are, but you’re kind and sweet and lovely, and did I mention the whole
‘in love with you’ part? Because seriously. In love.”

“So I’m your sort of mess, then,” she says, and I reach into my pocket, pulling out the rose quartz.

“You are,” I tell her, pressing the rock into her palm. She looks at it for a long moment before lifting her head to meet my eyes.

“This is a very fine rock,” she says at last, her voice a little tight, and I grin back at her.

“You already have all the fancy jewelry in the world,” I say, “but I can keep you supplied with actual rocks. And read maps for you. And there’s a whole world of laundry out there you don’t even know about. Towels were just the beginning.”

“Well, how can a girl resist such an offer?” Flora says, tossing her hair a bit, and my heart feels so big in my chest, I’m surprised I don’t burst.

“Kiss her, lass!” a man shouts from the crowd, and Flora bursts into giggles, covering her mouth with one gloved hand even as tears sparkle in her eyes.

“Is he talking to me or you?” she asks, and I step forward, shaking my head.

“I don’t know,” I tell her, laying my palm against her cheek. “But it’s good advice, so I’m going to take it.”

And I do.
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PROFANITY COUNT (and other sensitive words) approximate
Bitch 1
Bitchiness 2
Jack*ss 1
D*mn 2
P*ssed 4
*ss 2
Cigarette 3
Christ 1
P*ssed 4
Smart *ss
Sh*te
G* 39
Bullsh*t
Smart-arse 1
Arse 3
Bollocks 8
D*mmi 2
Testicles 1
Bi sexual 1
Unicorn (s) 6
Bi 1
Gay 1

RED FLAGS
Sexual Content
Language
Drinking, Smoking
Grooming for bi-sexual, gay sexual interactions with multiple partners

CONCLUSION
Not appropriate literary content for K-12 schools