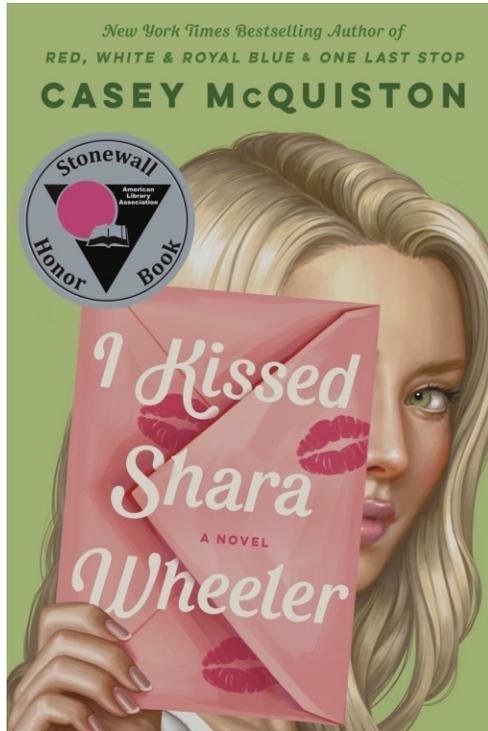


# I KISSED SHARA WHEELER



*Young Adult*

**By Casey McQuiston**

ISBN: 9781250244468

## **Book Summary:**

A high school girl runs away and leaves notes for those she has recently kissed including a girl, her male neighbor, and her longtime boyfriend questioning his gender.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains inexplicit sexual activities; inexplicit sexual nudity; references to alcohol and drug use by minors; profanity; alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; and controversial political and social commentary; and controversial and inflammatory religious commentary.

**2** /5

**Teen Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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vii	Dear Reader, If you come to this story from the South or from a Southern Baptist or Evangelical Christian background, you may recognize some of the culture it describes. Much of it is approached with humor, because sometimes you really do have to laugh. ...To explore all of this, I Kissed Shara Wheeler includes elements of religious trauma and homophobia.
4	Where's the Glossier Gang now? Nursing their prom hangovers, Chloe guesses.
8	Shara kissed Rory.
12	But ... that lip gloss. Vanilla and mint. It's absolutely, 100 percent the lip gloss she was wearing when they kissed. Chloe would never, ever forget that scent. Which means Shara bought it specifically to kiss Chloe with.
13	She kissed me, like really kissed me, like KISSED me, and then she was GONE.
17	"I told Georgia that we have to do movie night at her place this week because Ash wants to watch that Labyrinth movie your mom mentioned, and if my dad walks in and sees David Bowie's junk in white spandex, he is going to have some questions that I'm not interested in answering. So, we're--"
18	He definitely at least knows her as that weird queer girl from LA with two lesbian moms, like everyone else does, but does he know who she is?
19	"He kissed Shara. And so did I," Chloe says, stepping up like the Spartacus of people who have kissed Smith Parker's girlfriend. "I mean, she kissed me, if we're being specific. But I kissed her back."
21	Chloe didn't go to homecoming, but she saw Shara's dress on Instagram like everyone else alive. It was only a blue silk slip with a modest neckline, but it stuck to her like water, and she wasn't wearing a bra. For a whole week, nobody at school would shut up about it. BBC News at 9, the headlines: GOD'S FAVORITE DAUGHTER SHOWS ONE HINT OF NIP.
29	(No, Chloe still hasn't found her own note from Shara. Yes, she has checked everywhere, including the pocket of the oxford that was pressed up against Shara's cotton polo when they kissed.)
41	Chloe counts at least three different hand-drawn penises.
42	"Chill. We only steal the signs of things named after some old racist. It's not my fault that's all of them here."
46	3. No student may smoke, drink, dance, or have sex, which means half the students are smoking, drinking, dancing, having sex, and lying about it. Pills are fine. If you're on the football team, just ask Emma Grace's dad to write you a prescription. 4. Technically, since dancing is Sinful and Horny (same thing), there is no Willowgrove Christian Academy Homecoming Dance or Willowgrove Christian Academy Prom. There is, however, a prom hosted by a group of Willowgrove parents and unaffiliated with the school, which everyone attends at an off-site location.
49	Benjy takes the bait. "Not yet. My new fear is that he'll be a hot straight guy. I cannot spend my first year away from home with an unrequited crush on a guy who wears neckties to football games."
63	Every teacher has to sign a "morality clause" saying they won't drink or express political opinions or be gay, and while Mr. Truman has never said he's gay, he is a single fortysomething choir director with an extensive collection of slouchy sweaters. Some of the sweaters even have elbow patches. Like, come on.

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73	<p>The last thing Chloe wants to do, definitely at this moment and maybe ever for the rest of her life, is spend her Friday night watching Dixon Wells slobber all over a beer bong with Shara Wheeler’s boyfriend.</p> <p>It’s not that she doesn’t enjoy parties, or large groups of screaming people, or Saturday nights that get a little sloppy. It’s very well-documented by Benjy’s Snapchat stories that she enjoys all those things. She even once almost got French-kissed by Tucker Price from the Quiz Bowl team in his parents’ saltwater jacuzzi.</p> <p>...Dixon is a particular variety of affable jerk prevalent in Alabama: the type who insists it’s okay for him to make offensive jokes because he’s not actually racist/ sexist/ homophobic/ transphobic/ whatever so he doesn’t actually mean them, but aren’t the jokes so funny?</p>
80	<p>Her older sister famously came out as a lesbian two years after graduating, and her dad’s rich because he owns the car dealership across the road from Willowgrove.</p>
84	<p>Upside-down margaritas, apparently, is the name of a party game with no winners and a very basic set of rules. Dixon stands at one end of the yard while a football bro pours tequila and margarita mixer directly into his mouth, and then two more football bros grab him by his outstretched arms and throw him across the yard.</p>
89	<p>“It’s a rule the seniors made last year for Rachel Kennedy, who was a huge bitch but still got to come to parties because she had huge boobs,” Dixon says. He’s looking down now. At her chest, and her wet shirt. Her hands clench into fists at her sides—ever since she sprouted D-cups in tenth grade, a guy staring at her chest has never ended well. “So, as long as you keep wearing that, the Rachel Rule says you can stay.”</p> <p>...“You know that’s how everyone knows you, right? ‘Who’s Chloe Green?’ ‘Oh, she’s that girl from LA with the huge boobs.’”</p> <p>...“It’s a compliment! Look, before they came in, everyone just called you a lesbian, so I’d call this an upgrade. You should be proud of them!”</p> <p>...“No, no, it’s okay,” Chloe says. “I do know what I look like. And one day, when Dixon’s fifty and his second wife has left him because he’s a balding middle school football coach with the personality of a frozen meatloaf, and his kids hate him because he’s never expressed an emotion that’s not impotent rage or horniness, he’s gonna look back on senior year of high school and realize that being prom king was the only thing he ever achieved in his life, and that at his absolute peak, before everything went to shit, that girl from LA with the huge boobs still wouldn’t have slept with him.”</p>
93	<p>“I’m not gay.” She bristles. “I’m bisexual. That’s a thing.”</p>
98	<p>“Coach Wilson takes time away from his busy schedule of training the baseball team to inform six classes of seniors every day that premarital sex is a sin and homosexuals are an abomination. It’s great.”</p> <p>...She releases Chloe, then turns to Chloe’s mom, gathers her up at the waist, and gives her a long, open-mouthed kiss like they’re on the bow of the freaking Titanic.</p>
103	<p>“Chloe, we’re gay. We can’t do math.”</p> <p>...“This is why we need you,” Georgia says. “Once in a generation, there is born a bisexual who can do math. You’re the chosen one.”</p> <p>She switches the call to her laptop and slides Georgia’s face to the side, opening up Chrome while Georgia describes how Ash almost threw up in a bush because they keep insisting they’re not lactose intolerant even though they obviously are.</p>

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106	Maybe she's on a beach in Gulf Shores getting her toes licked by a college sophomore named Brayden.
109	Once, the Spanish teacher got up with an easel pad, drew a diagram of two stick men on a deserted island, and told them the fact that humanity would go extinct on that island was proof God doesn't want anyone to be gay. ...“Remember last year when they had that cop come and try to scare us about drugs, but he ended up telling us exactly how many ounces of weed you can carry without getting arrested?”
119	dude i hooked up with the Mistress of Pain herself last night at the Quiz Bowl party Chloe Green????? what happened? made out in the hot tub
120	Because my friend Tucker told me he made out with her in his parents jacuzzi and I was just wondering if she liked him
137	And I know the card at Dixon's house should have been exactly where I put it, because before I left, I texted him that if it was moved, I would tell Emma Grace and Mackenzie that he's been feeling up both of them behind the other's back.
138	“You get horny for books—”
150	“Because Shara said if I ever told anyone she helped me with the music, she'd report me to her dad for smoking weed.”
151	They tried to play, but by the end of the first quarter, everyone was soaked, and nobody wanted to be out there anymore. Smith, I met you right here, under the bleachers, and I kissed you ...You looked miserable, and that was before you even saw me kiss Smith right in front of you.
165	“Not unless you're into marriage dramas about straight white people who can't stop having affairs,” Georgia says. “I'm good,” Chloe says. “Let me know if you have any horny monsters though.” “You know I'm always on horny monster watch for you,” Georgia says. She glances around, making sure they're alone before she adds, lower, “And lesbians with swords.” ...The first time she came over to Chloe's, she stood across the room staring at Chloe's moms making dinner together for so long that Chloe worried she might be homophobic. It wasn't until later, when they were on her bedroom floor cutting pictures out of magazines to stick to their notebooks, that Georgia quietly mentioned she'd never seen a married lesbian couple in real life, and Chloe figured out what was going on.
185	“That works for me,” Ash says. “My ideal body is no body at all.” Chloe snorts. “Just a head floating above a sexy void.” “That's so gender of me,” Ash says, beginning to chisel out Smith's cheekbones. ...“I'm really sorry if this is a stupid question,” Smith says to Ash, “and you don't have to answer it, but ... the thing you said about gender. Can you explain the whole nonbinary thing to me?” ...Their parents don't know, and the Willowgrove faculty would probably go into collective cardiac arrest if a student asked for their deadname to be dropped from class rosters. But last year, one of their TikToks about weird earrings went viral, and everyone in school saw their pronouns in their bio, so that was pretty much it. ...“When you first started at Willowgrove, back in middle school, you had to tell all your

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	<p>teachers to call you Smith, right?” Ash asks. Their brush starts moving again. “Because it’s not your first name?”</p> <p>...“How do you know you’re not a William?”</p> <p>“I don’t know. I just ... do.”</p> <p>“Okay, so,” Ash says. “That’s how I felt about being a girl. When I was a kid, I thought I didn’t like girly things, but then I got older and realized that I liked some girly things, but I hated that liking them made people think I was a girl, because on some level I always knew I wasn’t one. So then I thought maybe I was actually a boy, because I wanted to be feminine the way boys can be feminine, but then I’d look at other boys and I wasn’t one of them either. I knew I wasn’t a girl, and I wasn’t a boy. Like if someone yelled your first name at you. You might answer to it, but it wouldn’t feel right, because that’s not you.”</p> <p>...Chloe winces, but Ash seems unbothered. “Because I’m still not a girl, so I don’t like it when someone takes one look at me and automatically shoves me into the girl category in their brain. The hair helps.”</p> <p>“Okay, but I feel like that too, and I’m not nonbinary.”</p> <p>There’s the slightest change in Ash’s face. “What do you mean?”</p> <p>“Like ... I like my body, because it’s fast and strong and good at football. But it also has to be a dude’s body, because I play football. So like, maybe sometimes I wish it was smaller or softer or ... different ... but I don’t really have a choice. And I can wear stuff like my letterman jacket and feel better because I could be shaped like anything under that, and I can imagine that maybe I’m not shaped like a dude sometimes. But that’s not the same thing as what you’re talking about, right?”</p> <p>“Are there ... times you don’t want to be a dude?”</p> <p>Smith’s eyes are closed so Ash can keep working, but his eyebrows furrow above them.</p> <p>“Does it matter? I’d have to be a guy no matter what.”</p>
188	<p>“I have great skin,” Ace says. “Which you should remember from all the times you kissed me.”</p> <p>...“I love kissing people,” Ace says. “It’s like, a hobby of mine. I would describe myself as a make-out hobbyist.”</p>
190	<p>All of this started with three kisses: Chloe, Smith, Rory. They’ve been to Dixon’s house, where Shara last kissed Smith, and the roof where she kissed Rory. The only place left, the only kiss they haven’t revisited, is Chloe’s.</p>
191	<p>It must have been here, hidden and still drying, when Shara pulled her close and kissed her.</p>
199	<p>But, of course, it wasn’t chance. It was planned: Chloe’s usual path to fifth hour, soft fingers around Chloe’s wrist, vanilla and mint lip gloss. She didn’t just get kissed—there was a second when she lost the plot completely and did some embarrassingly desperate leaning—but the circumstances of the leaning only happened because Shara planned them.</p>
201	<p>It’s hard for her to wrap her brain around it sometimes—the idea that for most people from here, the stuff she hears in Bible class is reality. Who would she be if she hadn’t been raised by two moms and a small army of gay middle-aged Californians? What if Willowgrove had always been her whole world, and the people in charge of it, who left their classroom door unlocked for her and cracked jokes with her like they saw her as a person, told her gently but firmly that she was wrong? That there was something inside of her—even if she hadn’t named it yet—that needed to be fixed?</p>

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209	“He has a YouTube channel about why girls at Willowgrove are sluts for taking birth control pills. He doesn’t deserve to come second to me.”
210	“You remember how Shara kissed me?” ...“Stay with me. Shara kissed me, and then she ran away, and then she left me that note. The one I got in the Taco Bell drive-thru.”
225	It’s time for the kick in the teeth—the flat reminder that this is the exact type of joke that straight girls like Shara inflict on girls like Chloe who have the misfortune of being queer in their line of sight.
229	“But deep down, somewhere under all this bullshit, you kissed me because you wanted to.” ...“Then why do you want me to kiss you right now?” ...When she kisses Chloe this time, Chloe’s ready. She knows exactly what she’s doing when she twists her fingers into the loose wisps of hair at the nape of Shara’s neck and kisses her back, hard. Her other hand grips the tulle where it fans out from Shara’s waist and holds Shara’s body up against hers like see, we’re a match, and it works—Shara sighs and lets go of the rail to slide her palm over Chloe’s cheek. ...She doesn’t give herself time to think about the way Shara’s thumb brushes over her cheekbone or the way Shara’s lips feel against hers.
232	Chloe wakes up late the next morning to a text from Smith that says, hey, do you like MarioKart? Which, (a) why and (b) now she feels guilty for yelling at him the other day and (c) yikes, she has to tell Smith she kissed his girlfriend again.
239	“Um. Not because of you. You’re doing great, with all the, um. Identity stuff. Also, pronouns?”
240	She didn’t speak to Chloe’s mom for three years after she came out as a lesbian, but when she heard about the engagement, she showed up in LA with a case of beers as an olive branch and her old wedding dress in a carry-on.
241	When Georgia first told it, she didn’t know the girl’s name, only that she graduated in the late ’90s and came out as a lesbian in front of the whole grade on the senior retreat when everyone was sharing personal testimonies. Another rendition is that this mythical lesbian came to school with her hair dyed blue and got suspended for trying to recruit girls to her satanic sex cult. In a different version, she got busted for having a stash of Playboy magazines in her locker and is now married to a Florida senator.
242	It’s an unpleasant sting when a teacher tells her to stop trying to use Bible verses to prove that the love between her moms can’t be wrong because it says right there that God is love and all love is of God, but—no. No, as long as she can go home at the end of the day and see the two women who raised her sitting on either side of the kitchen table, she knows it’s not true.
250	He slides his sunglasses down his nose and raises an eyebrow. “In fact, I think we might both be gay.”
257	Over their shoulders, Chloe can see the homecoming picture still stuck up on Smith’s locker door. The blue dress, Shara’s God-honoring nip shadows.
265	Her mama coos from the kitchen table, “Sounds like how I used to wear your mom’s welding apron around the house when I was in the mood.”

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	<p>“Jesus Christ.” Chloe sighs.            “So that’s what’s been up with you,” her mom says. “You got a thing for a Christian girl.”            “I don’t—”            “Look, I can’t blame you—all those girls walking around with Jesus right over their boobs? Always seemed like entrapment to me when I was your age.” She pats Chloe on the head.            “Are you pretending to go to church now so you can date somebody’s nice wholesome daughter?”            “It’s not like that,” Chloe insists. Her mama is already singing “Papa Don’t Preach” under her breath. Chloe unclasps the necklace and gathers the chain in her hand. “See? Still the heathen you raised.”</p>
278	<p>She hears about how Summer is majoring in premed and likes banana milkshakes and fantasy novels, how Summer and Ace have finally made up, how Summer’s buying tickets to Hangout Fest because Paramore is playing and they both love beach camping and Hayley Williams, how Georgia is the first girl she’s ever kissed but she has a gay older sister and she’s known she was bi since last year.</p>
279	<p>Willowgrove is the first time she’s been around Christianity, and so to her, that’s what faith is: judgmental, sanctimonious hypocrites hiding hate behind Bible verses, twenty-four-karat crucifix necklaces, and charismatic white pastors with all the horrible secrets that money can protect.</p>
281	<p>“Wheeler banned Chloe from graduation because he thinks she was the one making out with girls in the bathroom,” Benjy tells them.</p>
282	<p>“Like, my little brother likes football too, and he knows the same way I know that Willowgrove is where you go to get into the SEC, but what if he comes here and he likes boys, or finds out he’s not a boy, or whatever—I’m not gonna let them do this to him too. It’s fucked up. It’s fucked up how they make us feel about ourselves, and we put up with it because we don’t think there’s anything we can do about it. We put up with it for so long that we don’t even know who we are, only what they want us to be. And I don’t want to put up with it anymore.”</p>
284	<p>After that: Ash’s friends from art club, guys on the drumline with April, friends of the girl who got expelled for sending nudes, girls who filled out the chorus in Phantom, Summer’s softball teammates, kids from Chloe’s Quiz Bowl group who are still slightly afraid of her.</p>
301	<p>Rumor has it Emma Grace told her that if she wanted people to believe things she says, she shouldn’t have lied about giving her best friend’s crush a handjob at her birthday party.</p>
315	<p>She tips her head forward, and Shara kisses her. Chloe puts her arms around Shara’s neck and kisses her back.            ...It’s a prom night they never had, and she’s found the only person like her in a small town the size of the world, and they’re alone in a quiet room kissing in front of God and everybody.</p>
321	<p>“But, Shara, you’ve known me for four years. When have I ever given you the impression that I’m getting laid? I’ve never even dated anyone.”</p>
322	<p>“Yes, my moms did explain different kinds of sex to me, but it was such an embarrassing conversation that I don’t even remember most of it. And three.”            ...Shara’s hand drops from Chloe’s neck to her shoulder, and then she’s pushing Chloe down on the bed and kissing her, one hand pinning her to the mattress and the other on</p>

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	<p>her waist. It's the first time Shara's kissed her with both intent and confidence, and it's about as thorough and heart-stopping as can be expected of a perfectionist with a competitive streak.</p> <p>Chloe's never been kissed on a bed before. It's her first time feeling the corner of a throw pillow wedged under her head while the mattress springs push her back up into someone else's body. She's never kissed anybody like this.</p> <p>...They've made out for—well, Chloe doesn't know how long. It felt like a long time.</p> <p>There's a faint red mark blooming on Shara's neck, which is probably the coolest thing Chloe has ever seen in her life.</p>
351	Chloe covers Shara's hand with her own. She laces their fingers together and squeezes, and then she kisses Shara into the grass.
353	<p>I wrote this book for the Chloes of the world, but also the Smiths and Rorys and Georgias and Benjys and, yes, even the Sharas. I know intimately that the Bible Belt contains some of the best, warmest, weirdest, queerest kids you'll ever meet, whether or not they even know that last part yet. If you're one of those kids, I wanted this book to exist for you. I think if it had existed for me back then, a lot of things in my life would have been different.</p> <p>...(And also that you deserve ridiculous, over-the-top high school rom-coms about teenagers like you, just like the straight kids have! Don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise!)</p>
355	And, finally, let's hear it one more time for queer kids in red states and conservative religious communities. I love y'all so much. It may feel sometimes like nobody knows or cares that you're there, doing your best to get through it, carrying all that weight, but I know it.

Profanity	Count
Ass	22
Bitch	9
Dick	6
Fuck	28
Piss	10
Shit	41