

★ **Never Kiss Your Roommate**

Philline Harms

Wattpad Books (Jun 1, 2021)

Softcover \$10.99 (352pp)

978-1-989365-81-6

In Philline Harms's young adult novel *Never Kiss Your Roommate*, two new students at an atypical school find out that, when the paths of the desperate and the avoidant collide, the stakes are perilous.

Perched above the town of Gloomswick, Seven Hills is a modern international boarding school that's "a little less Hogwarts and a lot more Dracula." While some of its students are driven to succeed at all costs, others are desperate to avoid the past—and no student is outside the purview of the *Chitter Chatter*, the school's anonymous gossip blog.

Seven Hills' students aren't a monolith of heteronormative, upper class whiteness. In fact, it's just the opposite. Different cultural backgrounds, various degrees of passing, and family structures all influence the students' experiences of big tent identity categories like race and gender. Throughout, the book captures the messy ways that identity and experience fuse with hormones and high emotions. As a result, each character is complex and deep, whether they're displaying great insights or making tremendous mistakes.

Though the book includes pop cultural, gothic noir, and romance elements, the interpersonal, contemporary issues that its focal students, Evelyn and Seth, navigate are quintessentially young adult ones. As they come out to each other, make friends, reflect on family, and fall in love, they stutter-step their way toward vulnerability, self-acceptance, and trust. Even in the midst of fizzy romances, they validate each others' experiences and model consent—not just about how to be queer, but in the difficulty and necessity of unlearning the shame around it.

For all the queer people who fell in love with, and felt betrayed by, books about magical boarding schools, *Never Kiss Your Roommate* is the book they've always deserved. Here, the real magic is that queer love is very, very real.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May / June 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.