

(NOT) ALONE

Amber Twist

The hall was jammed with people dancing, eating/drinking and chatting away. Despite wearing a Pride outfit, Kam felt they stood out like a sore thumb – or worse than a sore thumb. They decided to just make a beeline for the bleachers and sit on their lonesome.

They gazed at the sea of people and began to feel...empty. This was normal due to how Kam struggled with many things that made them feel this way.

They didn't socialise well like others could, they were like the definition of shy, and they always felt awkward at social events like this.

When they were about eight or nine Kam's parents took them to a specialist to find out why their child acted this way. The doctor diagnosed Kam with a condition called Autism – but Kam still didn't feel like... *them*.

All the way through intermediate school they discovered many things on the internet and learnt about the LGBTQIA+ community.

Kam was still confused about many areas of it but still accepted the people of the community nonetheless. As Kam learnt more about the different genders and sexualities, they began to develop a feeling of relatability with many of them. They eventually came out to their parents as gender neutral and stated that their sexuality was demiromantic. Kam's parents accepted them wholeheartedly; although when they came out to other family members some did not approve and scolded them for being so strange and abnormal.



Thankfully, Kam's parents protected them. But even then, Kam didn't feel great. Despite having a family that supported them Kam still felt sad and alone; as if the world was against them in some way...

Then came high school. Kam was still bad at socialising but they made it through fine, ignoring the constant depression lurking in the back of their mind that everyone hated them and that they would *die alone*.

Until a certain Wednesday morning, Kam was in art class (their favourite subject) and was sculpting something odd while they listened to music. When a *hand* landed on Kam's *shoulder*.

Alarms went off in their head as they quickly removed their headphones and turned around to find the perpetrator of *the touch*. It was Darrell, a classmate of Kam's. He had a lopsided smile and he cringed slightly as he retracted his hand. "Sorry, Kam," he apologised. "But Mister Larry wants everyone's attention." Darrell gestured towards the teacher.

Kam nodded their thanks and turned to Mister Larry, trying to ignore the imposing thought: *'He thinks you're disgusting, that's why he cringed'*.

"Alright, class, big announcement: the principal has decided that in honour of Pride Month we will be holding a 'Rainbow Dance'!" Kam piqued up in interest, previous thoughts dispersing. "You have to wear colours that either represent you or just the rainbow flag itself. Everyone is welcome and everything will be supplied; though, the principal *is* asking for..."

Mister Larry's voice drowned out as Kam immersed themselves with their thoughts. *I think I should go...* they thought silently as everyone packed up ready for lunch. It was a big step; it *was* a social event after all. But once home, Kam started scouring their room for clothes to wear to the dance, deciding to throw caution into the wind and go.



Eventually, they had to call out to their Mum for some help. Mum to the rescue as Kam went to the dance in a bright rainbow outfit with a bright smile.

And now Kam was frowning sadly and felt like they didn't matter, or something like that, it was hard for them to pinpoint these kinds of emotions. Kam took to staring at the floor and staring into space rather than attempt to mingle or even dance. They were so lost in their imaginative world that they didn't notice someone approaching them.

"Hey, Kam." said person nearly jumped out of their skin. They looked up and saw Darrell again. He was wearing a suit of all shades of blue; Kam immediately recognized it as the male gay flag. Darrell had an apologetic smile again. "Sorry for startling you again. Man, am I seriously *that* scary? Maybe that's why I don't have a boyfriend yet." Darrell laughed and Kam joined in after a few seconds.

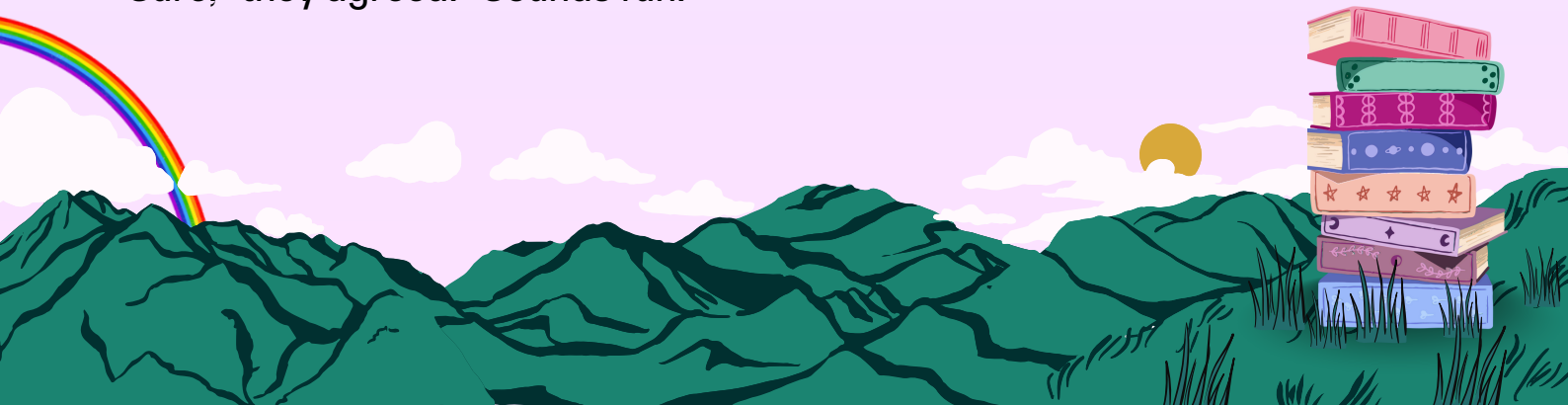
"What are you doing over here, Darrell? Are your friends not here?" Kam inquired once the giggling died down.

"Nah, they're here." the boy answered. "I actually came over to ask if you'd like to hang out with us? You're all alone here so we thought, if you wanted, you could be with us!"

To say Kam was shocked was an understatement; their whole mind faltered – thoughts fighting against each other to know if this was just a ploy, a way to make them feel good only for it to come collapsing down on top of them like a heap of bricks, or that it might be genuine.

And yet, Darrell's expression and sincerity of his words seemed honest and true. So Kam threw caution into the wind for a second time that week.

"Sure," they agreed. "Sounds fun."



“Great!” Darrell held out his hand for Kam to take. “Let’s go, I can’t wait to introduce you to the gang!” Kam took the hand and was guided through the crowd of adolescents to a secluded corner of the hall. “Hey, guys, Kam agreed to hang out!” Darrell called out to the small group.

Kam counted a total of three people; one was wearing a crop-top and long skirt that seemed to match the non-binary flag, another that was leaning against the corner with short hair dyed red and wore a suit matching the butch version of the lesbian flag, and the final person was chilling on the floor wearing a dress that matched the transgender flag.

“Awesome! About time we got ‘em here with us.” said the red head. “Name’s Stella, Stel’ for short.”

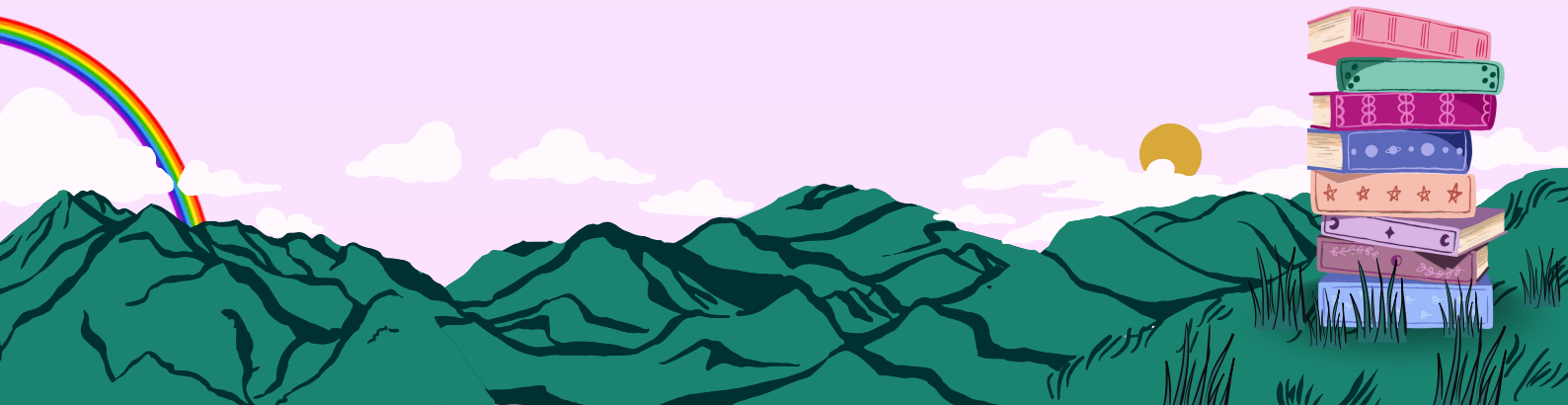
“I’m Robyn with a ‘y’ instead of an ‘i’ – please refer to me as they/them.” introduced the non-binary.

“And I’m Octavia, my deadname was ‘Octavian’ but I decided the ‘n’ had to die with my gender.” everyone laughed, even Kam had a giggle. “What do you go by, Kam?”

“The/It.”

“Sick, anyway, pull up a seat and chill! This party’s a *drag* because of the Fake Allies.” Stella stated.

“Yeah, Bellany and Melody need to stop with the lies.” Darrell agreed as he gave Kam a chair before plopping down next to them on the floor. “They should know by now that everyone in the school hates them.”



And for the rest of the night until the party ended, Kam enjoyed their time with the group. Though, as they were taken back home, they knew that tomorrow they would be alone as always... At least, that's how it always worked.

Kam was driven to school, as normal, went to class as usual then went to have some morning tea when the bell rang...alone...again. They sat under a tree and expected to eat in solitary – when all of a sudden Darrell, Robyn, Stella and Octavia made their way over and sat with Kam.

They were surprised that the group planned to hang out with Kam after the dance, but their lively heart swirled and danced as the group conversed about menial things. Then they hung out again at lunch, then the next day, then through the holidays, then after high school.

After nine years of friendship, Kam attended another party with the group at a wedding; Stella and Octavia's wedding reception. As they all laughed and clinked their drinks, one thought stood out the most in their mind...

'I'm not alone.'

