

The Poison Ivy Itch

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It starts with *Batman*.

Your brother brings home Batman books from the school library, and, being the bookworm you are, you read them when he isn't looking. It's a very particular issue that catches your eye, because it's the one that features, in your seven-year-old opinion, quite possibly the coolest character ever.

Poison Ivy.

She's wearing a prison uniform in the illustration, but she looks confident. Cocky, even. You know you're supposed to be rooting against her, but you can't bring yourself to. You don't know what it is about her, but you get the book out yourself. You don't even read the rest of the story. Why would you? The best part is all on that one page.

Eventually, you move on. Later that year, you make a new friend. A *boy*. You're walking along the field with him when you hear it.

"Boyfriend and girlfriend!" It's unimaginably stupid, but it boils your blood and makes your lungs burst with the urge to scream at them. It's the same reaction you have to that question, the one that's always asked in the same hushed, excited tone while the other girls giggle.

"So, which boy do you like?"



You actually give it a lot of thought. Which boy *do* you like? You scan the candidates. There are a few obvious choices, like the cocky (not in a good way, like Poison Ivy) drummer with dark eyes that some of the girls go crazy over, or the idiot who's always been mean to you - all the adults say that that means he likes you. Neither of them seems quite right, though.

Eventually, you decide on the blonde one, the one who sings in the band, because he's nice. He isn't quite right either, but you both enjoy music and he's taller than you, so he must be your crush.

It's about this time that you realise how much you aren't looking forward to getting married and having kids. Some women don't, obviously, but you aren't one of *them*. Still, you begin to view it as a form of death, a splitting of the soul. Thinking about your future makes you feel numb. You'll probably meet a guy at university because no one now makes you feel excited about that life. That future version of you may as well be a different person. At least everyone feels this way.

It's high school by the time you first meet out and proud queer people. Your new friends, most of whom are bisexual, are confident and amazing and fabulous. Next to them, you're just "the token straight friend." Still, you find this world of rainbow flags and communities fascinating. Not that you're gay or anything.

And then you hear about asexuality - not feeling sexual attraction. Is that even possible? How can asexuality be a thing when everyone hates the idea of sex? *You've* always felt that way, so it must be normal because you're... well you *thought* you were heterosexual.

It takes a few months of mulling over before it begins to feel cosy and you realise that yes, that's me. It's scary letting go of your heterosexuality, but it never really fit you, anyway, like trying to squeeze into a shirt two sizes too small and praying that nobody notices. Asexuality is comfortable, like a favourite old jumper. It makes you feel safe.

The realisation leads you to consider other possibilities in your romantic orientation. You conduct a thought experiment. Imagine kissing a boy. Eh. Now imagine kissing a girl. Ok. Nicer? Maybe. Probably. Definitely? You begin to seriously warm to the possibility that you may not be heteroromantic. Or like boys at all, for that matter.

You feel your future splitting open like a chrysalis, letting in light. It doesn't have to be grey. You can do whatever you want. For the first time in your life, you feel truly excited about it. A part of you whispers that this is how it was always supposed to be.

An asexual jumper with a lesbian beanie. You think that Poison Ivy would be proud.