

An illustration of a street scene. In the background, there is a building with orange walls and several windows with blue shutters. A tree with green leaves and a brown trunk is on the left. The ground is a mix of pink and orange tones.

BOOK CLUB KIT

An illustration of two people walking. On the left, a person with short brown hair is wearing a blue jacket with several patches, including one that says 'GIRLS WHO TRILL' and another that says 'TRANS EQUALITY NOW'. They are also wearing orange pants and black boots. On the right, a person with short brown hair is wearing a black blazer over a blue shirt and black pants, walking with their hands in their pockets. The background features diagonal stripes in shades of pink and orange.

JUST
AS YOU
ARE

BY CAMILLE KELLOGG

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which characters resonated with you most? Which characters surprised you most, and why?
2. *Nether Fields*, the queer magazine where the friends work, is on the verge of shutting down at the start of novel. "This magazine meant a lot to so many people. It helped queer people feel seen." Discuss the importance of representation. What happens when marginalized communities are not represented in society, and what are the benefits of being seen?
3. The rooms at *Nether Fields* are named after queer trailblazers: Janelle Monae, Hayley Kiyoko, Rosie O'Donnell, and Alison Bechdel, to name a few. If you had the opportunity to name three conference rooms after famous, pioneering queer folk, who would you choose, and why?
4. "Whenever Liz went on a date with someone masculine of center, she found herself acting more feminine. . . .When she was the more masculine one, she found herself standing taller or offering to open jars. The truth was, she liked both versions of herself." Butch. Femme. Somewhere in between or none of the above. How does gender presentation play a role in *Just As You Are*?
5. Discuss some of your first dates. Were they magical, comical, or natural disasters? Where are some good places to go on a first date? Describe an ideal first date.
6. What did you think of Daria when she was first introduced? How did your feelings for her change over the course of the novel? Was there a particular spot where you thought Liz had misjudged her?
7. Liz and her friends share an apartment. Bailey and Daria have more opulent lives: Hamptons, Upper West Side, posh Boston suburbs. How does class shape the plot?
8. Why do you think that opposites attract?
9. Liz is known at the magazine, for better or worse, for her listicles. What kind of listicles are you drawn to? Which topics make you click?
10. What do you make of Lydia? They sleep with Weston, lash out at Liz, then blow up everyone's lives, including their own. Why do you think they behaved this way?
11. Reflect on Liz and Jane. Through the ups and down, they remained besties. What do you think is the secret to their friendship?
12. Discuss the pros and cons of social media as its depicted in the novel.
13. After reading *Just As You Are*, what is the biggest takeaway regarding romantic relationships and close friendships?
14. *Just As You Are* is described as a *Pride and Prejudice*-inspired romance. What other classics would you like to see with a queer romcom makeover?

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

LIZ

Sex, relationship, and advice columnist
who needs some of her own

JANE

Transgender rights journalist and
great cook, about to fall hard fast

LYDIA

Tech-savvy with a confident swagger.
A disruptor, in every sense.

KATIE

Crushing on Lydia. Some things
never change. But they will.

CHARLOTTE

Activist, mentor, and extremely
dedicated founder of *Nether Fields*

BAILEY

New owner of magazine; good-natured
and genuine, with an interest in Jane

DARIA

The other owner, who Liz considers
arrogant, annoying, and sexy as hell

CHECK OUT THE *JUST AS YOU ARE* PLAYLIST ON SPOTIFY:

GIRLS LIKE GIRLS | HAYLEY KIYOKO

GIRLFRIEND | REBECCA BLACK

MAKE ME FEEL | JANELLE MONAE

COOL FOR THE SUMMER | DEMI LOVATO

GIRLS | BEATRICE ELI

PUSSY IS GOD | KING PRINCESS

GIRLFRIEND | SIENA LIGGINS

**HUNTIN', FISHIN', AND
LOVIN' EVERY DAY** | LUKE BRYAN

CLOSER | TEGAN AND SARA

GIRLS | GIRL IN RED

I CAN BE YOUR MAN | BETTY WHO

READ AN ENTRY FROM LIZ BAKER'S BLOG:

CONFESSIONS OF A NEW YORK DYKE

By Colby Anderson | Post #8

Hey queerdos! Colby here. It's my second week as a New York City babe. As you know, my first big city lesbian bar experience did not go as planned—I thought going from my small college town to here would be like going from instant ramen to an all-you-can-eat buffet, but instead I felt like a stale jelly donut in the office breakroom. Maybe it was silly to imagine that I'd be instantly swarmed by hot queers dying to know who I was and where I came from, but to leave the bar without one single phone number?? Absolutely unacceptable.

So I've decided that I, Colby Anderson, need to kickstart my glamorous new life in true 80s movies fashion: with a makeover. I mean, in college, the height of lesbian fashion was Birkenstocks and flannels. But there were people in that bar dressed like they were going to the Met Gala. I guess people weren't lying about New Yorkers being fashionable AF. Turns out, I'm going to need some black clothes stat. So last Saturday I braved my way into Manhattan (with only a few subway-related mishaps) and all the way to the Gap.

Now I'm very familiar with the Gap. My mom used to take me there for school clothes every year as a kid—an endeavor that always managed to end in screaming matches through a dressing room door. But this time, I wanted to go in the men's section.

When I was at the gay bar last weekend, looking around at all the cool, fashionable queers and generally feeling insecure, I couldn't stop looking at all the masc of center people, with their button down shirts and floral vests, their big boots and baggy jeans, their belt buckles and silver chain necklaces. I couldn't stop staring. I felt this really strong wave of . . . something in my chest. Longing? Jealousy? Whatever it was, it made me feel the way I felt as a little kid when I used to try to tag along with my older sister and her friends.

Now, does that feeling mean that I want to look like all these hot people or fuck them? I have absolutely no idea. But since the idea of sidling up to one of them and trying out my best seduction moves was way too intimidating, I decided trying on some clothes would be a good place to start. I figured I'd just stroll in to the Gap, try some shirts on, and head home. And at first that's what I did. I opened the door, walked towards the men's section, and then—I froze.

Suddenly my mind was on panic mode and I couldn't switch it off. What if someone yelled at me? What if someone from the store told me I wasn't allowed to be in the men's section? What if I got myself banned for life from this entire chain?

Unlikely, I know, but I wasn't exactly thinking clearly. So I about-faced into the women's section and pretended to look through the clothes there to buy some time while I came up with a plan. I flicked through racks full of sweaters and shirts that the high school Colby would have loved

to try on, but none of them felt exciting to me. Instead, I kept glancing over my shoulder at the men's section (which I'm pretty sure made me look WAY more suspicious than if I'd just gone in to look at men's clothes but, you know. Brains are funny that way).

Finally, I came up with this cover story in my head. When I was in the men's section, if anyone asked me what I was doing there, I would just say I was shopping for a present for my brother who's about the same size as me. Genius, right?

Now, reader, you and I both know that an underpaid, under-stimulated salesman at the Gap couldn't care less which section I'm shopping in. But for some reason I needed this cover story in place before I could will myself to walk across the store. Mental armor, if you will.

Now that I had a plan, I marched my way over to the men's section. On that side of the store, the clothes were a LOT more interesting. In the women's section, I must have flicked through ten racks and found one or two things I wanted to wear. In the men's section I felt like I was grabbing every other shirt. I didn't know how they'd look on me but every different style felt like a possibility. A different person I could maybe become. I felt excited about shopping for the first time in years (those mother-daughter shopping fights really did a number on my enthusiasm levels, okay?).

Of course, even though I was excited, I was also tense. Every time a browsing man wandered my way, I jumped about half a foot in the air. Was it just my imagination or were they giving me weird looks? Were they wondering what I was doing there? Were they about to say something? Would they push me up against a clothes rack and demand to know every detail about my fictional brother's fictional gift?

I got increasingly sweaty as I shopped and the pile of shirts in my arm seemed excessively heavy. I kept having these long, drawn-out mental fights, imagining that someone would come up to me and say something rude. In my head, I had very witty retorts, but I'm pretty sure that if someone had actually said anything to me at that moment, I would have dropped my clothing stack and run out of the store.

Having these imagined fights was putting me more and more on edge. Every time another shopper got close, I scuttled away to a different rack like I was playing *Pac-Man*. It also didn't help that men's clothes make no sense. I mean, the pant sizes have numbers??? Not just one number, but two numbers on every tag. There wasn't a small, medium, or large in sight. And did you know that their buttonholes face a different way than women's buttonholes? Seriously, it's almost impressive how many things our country manages to gender.

I already felt way too conspicuous, so instead of spending time trying to puzzle out all the sizing, I just grabbed things at random. Am I an extra small in T-shirts? An extra large? Who knows, just throw 'em on the pile! Pretty soon I was teetering under a stack of shirts the size of the Empire State Building. Which is when a salesperson stepped up behind me and asked if I needed any help.

Reader, I screamed. Not too loud—just a startled kind of yelp. Still, it did not exactly convey poise and confidence.

I spent a couple of minutes spluttering something along the lines of: “Um, just looking for—my brother. Needs a gift. Clothes” before the salesperson finally took pity on me and asked if I needed a dressing room. I managed to say yes and then I scurried after her, eager to hide behind a closed door. Once I was in the dressing room I tried to take deep breaths but my heart was beating like I was about to sky dive. I didn’t realize shopping could be so stressful.

Finally, I calmed down enough to start trying things on. It was a fairly unpleasant experience. In part because I was so sweaty that the clothes stuck to my body as I tried to pull them on (TMI, I know, but this blog is about honest depictions of my life, right? I never said I was cool). And in part because most of the stuff I tried on looked bad. I’m talking shirts with two inches of boob gap between the buttons. Shorts that made my hips bulge out half a mile over the top. Giant polo shirts that made me look like a tent on its way to play golf. Clearly, some mystery of men’s sizing had been lost on me. I didn’t look like a cool, sexy, masculine lesbian. I didn’t look masculine at all. Instead of making me look the way I’d dreamed, these clothes seemed to emphasize exactly the parts of myself that I most wanted to hide.

It was a humbling experience. I’ll even admit that I might have had some tears in my eyes. I’d thought this would be fun—a new step on my journey to self-discovery. Instead, I just felt awkward and embarrassed.

And then I tried on The Shirt.

It just looked like a normal shirt at first—a short-sleeved black button-down shirt. But when I put it on, it immediately felt right. It buttoned without an issue in the front, but it was tight enough to define my shoulders. It hung loose enough to make me look like I had a straight-lined, masculine torso, but it wasn’t so long that it hung halfway to my knees.

It was perfect.

When I looked in the mirror, I got even more tears in my eyes. Because with my short haircut and this shirt on, I looked different. For maybe the first time in my life, I didn’t want to turn away from the mirror. I didn’t stare at myself, cataloging all the parts of my body and face I’d like to change. Instead, I smiled. It felt like some little piece of my heart had just slotted into place and I wanted to stare at myself in the mirror forever.

Oh yeah, a voice inside me whispered. This is who I want to be.

I only ended up with that one shirt, even though I tried on like thirty different things, but reader, it was so worth it. I might never take this shirt off again. I’m wearing it right now. Having it on makes me feel like I made the right decision by impulsively moving to NYC to live my lesbian dreams. It makes me feel like I can find my place and my people in this city.

But will the shirt be enough to get me laid next time I go to the gay bar?? Reader, stay tuned to find out!