



Ace of Hearts

MYRIAD AUGUSTINE

How do you find the love that's right for you?

Ace of Hearts

A new, bigger school gives Alvin the chance to start over — and to finally fit in when he finds the school's gay community. But when his new friends discover that Alvin has never actually been with a guy, they make it their mission to hook him up with the three hottest boys in school. There's the strongly ambitious Alistair — gunning to be a gay leader in politics. Jesse, the jock, is known for wild parties and breaking hearts. The edgy-looking, denim-clad Rowan is a bit of a mystery — and pops up in and out of Alvin's life at the oddest times. What makes Alvin hesitant, however, is that he's not sure he's interested in getting physical, ever, with anyone. Eventually the question on Alvin's mind can't be ignored: if he's not interested in being intimate with boys, how can he ever have a relationship with one?

MYRIAD AUGUSTINE is a queer, non-binary, intersectional feminist. They founded and co-run Wheelhouse, a nonprofit designed to be a supporting resource for people facing barriers of accessibility. This is their first teen novel. Myriad lives in Toronto, Ontario.



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*To the Alvin that never got this story, and to all the other
Alvins who have been waiting for it.*

01

Wake Up New

“I HAVE LITERALLY *nothing* to wear, Meliss.”

“Alvin, there’s no *way* that’s true.”

Alvin rolled his eyes. He threw another shirt onto the growing pile on his bed, then fell back dramatically onto it.

“Okay, not *literally*,” he admitted. “But everything I own is too boring or too safe or just too . . . *straight*.”

There was a pause, and then Melissa asked carefully, “Isn’t that kind of what we always shop for?”

Alvin's best friend wasn't wrong. At the small public school in Oakville they'd gone to, Alvin had always played it safe while Melissa urged him to be a little more . . . himself. They'd become fast friends in grade three, when their parents bought cookie-cutter houses on the same street. They both struggled with being outcasts. Melissa was bullied because of her weight. Alvin had been labelled gay by the other boys for all kinds of reasons he could never quite keep track of. The first time it happened was when Alvin said he was more interested in reading when everyone else wanted to play baseball. Then because they discovered he still played with a train set when he was twelve. Because he had tried to explain how suspension bridges worked. Once, because he had refused to snap a girl's bra strap.

The thing was, Alvin *was* gay. He just knew it had nothing to do with any of that.

Melissa had taken what other people tried to hurt her with and turned it into her armour. She was the first to call herself fat ("It's just a word!" she would say).

She wore what she wanted, when she wanted, whether it was a leopard print crop top in class or a bikini at the pool. The occasional asshole still tried to get a rise out of Melissa with an unimaginative joke. But she always laughed it off and responded with something far more cutting. Later she might vent about it, or cry if she needed to, but that was just between her and Alvin. Melissa was happy with who she was. More often than not, she used her reputation as a fierce fat babe to intervene when anyone was giving Alvin a hard time.

Alvin had never figured out how to own his outcast status in the same way. Maybe it was because everyone who accused him of being gay had such wrong ideas of what that meant. *He'd* known he was gay as soon as he learned the word for it, and had come out to his parents before he started high school. They didn't really get it either, but at least they cautiously accepted it. After grades nine and ten passed without Alvin bringing any boys home (or anywhere else), they seemed to conveniently "forget" that he had come out to them. They had even gone back to asking when he

and Melissa were getting married. Alvin had planned to enter high school with a new sense of who he was: *out and proud*. But he had found himself surrounded by the same kids who were there in elementary school — and the same dumb jokes. Since there was no one who interested him, what was the point of being the only gay kid, except to invite more bullying?

Then everything changed again. Alvin’s dad had gotten a job teaching at the university in Mississauga. Since Alvin’s mom worked from home, the family had moved to be closer to the campus. It was hard to accept suddenly being two bus rides away from Melissa instead of a one-minute walk. But Alvin felt hopeful that this could be a fresh start in all the ways high school hadn’t been.

“Hellooo, did you die?” came Melissa’s voice. “All I can see is shirt.”

Alvin sighed and raised his phone so that the camera wasn’t buried in his chest. He could see that Melissa was, as usual, cycling through every filter. The current one — cartoon puppy ears and a wagging

tongue — clashed with her carefully drawn eyebrows.

“Yeah, I know that’s what I always go for,” said Alvin. “I just . . . I don’t know. Everything’s going to be different. Maybe I want to be different too.”

The words hurt to say out loud. Alvin’s anger and embarrassment welled up along with the lump in his throat, and he quickly added, “God, that sounds pathetic, doesn’t it? Like I’m some lost little lamb making my way in the big city. And it’s not even really a city! Mississauga’s just . . . a glorified suburb!” He let out a wordless screech of frustration, at himself and at the situation. Melissa laughed, and he couldn’t help but laugh as well. “Our school had, what, two hundred kids? St. Salmerón’s has *two thousand*. And it’s Catholic. And I know *no one*. And —”

Mercifully, Melissa cut off this line of thinking. Her words reminded Alvin just why they were friends. “You’re *not* pathetic. And you *don’t* want to be different. You just . . . want to be more *you*. And this is the perfect time to figure out what that looks like.”

Alvin barely had time to wipe his eyes with an old

T-shirt from the reject pile before Melissa continued. “Now, drag your sorry ass off the bed and point me back at the closet!” she barked. “I want to see that shirt I bought you for your sweet sixteen!”

Laughing, Alvin slid off the clothes-covered bed onto the floor. He ignored her usual crassness for a moment and gazed at Melissa through the phone.

“Seriously,” he said softly, “what am I going to do without you around?”

But Melissa wasn’t letting him slide back into despair. “I’m still going to be around. You’ve moved to ’Sauga, not Saskatchewan. Texts still work. Phones still exist. There are buses . . . usually. And once I get my licence, I’ll be at your house every weekend.”

Alvin rolled his eyes. “That’s definitely not gonna make my parents stop hoping we’ll get married.” He stood up and switched from selfie mode. Melissa’s face disappeared from his screen, but now she could see the few pieces remaining in his ransacked closet.

“No . . . no . . .” he heard her disembodied voice say. “Okay, maybe that shirt I got you is a *bit* too gay

for your first day.” He imagined her inspecting every piece before sliding the hanger aside. “Wait, hold up. Switch me back.”

Melissa’s face popped back up, with no filter this time. Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Alvin. Daniel. Persaud. Doesn’t your new school have uniforms?”

As soon as she full-named him, Alvin flushed. He could never keep up a lie once Melissa caught him in it. He carefully tilted the phone so that she couldn’t see the many McCartney’s bags on his chair, holding a week’s worth of button-up shirts and slacks.

“Well . . . yes, technically. But the first civvies day is the second Friday in. So I need to —” He held the phone away from his ear until she was done swearing.