



The Black Flamingo

Author: *Dean Atta*

Category: YA&Teen

Description: Winner of the Stonewall Book Award: a YA verse novel about coming of age, being yourself, and the power of drag.

Michael is a mixed-race gay teen growing up in London. All his life, he's navigated what it means to be Greek-Cypriot and Jamaican—but never quite feeling Greek or Black enough.

As he gets older, Michael's coming out is only the start of learning who he is and where he fits in. When he discovers the Drag Society, he finally finds where he belongs—and the Black Flamingo is born.

Told with raw honesty, insight, and lyricism, this debut novel explores the layers of identity that make us who we are—and allow us to shine.

A Time Magazine Best YA Book Of All Time

Total Pages (Source): 13

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

I am the black flamingo.

The black flamingo is me trying to find myself.

This book is a fairy tale in which I am the prince

and the princess. I am the king and the queen.

I am my own wicked witch and fairy godmother.

This book is a fairy tale in which I'm cursed and blessed by others.

But, finally, I am the fairy finding my own magic .

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

Today is my sixth birthday and I'm hiding in my room.

Last year, for my birthday, Uncle B bought me this Casio watch.

Look —it lights up and is water-resistant.

That means I can wear it in the bath.

Last night, when Mummy was making dinner, I snuck into her bedroom and looked inside her wardrobe, parting clothes to see the back where she always hides my presents.

I picked up the parcel, feeling the shape of the long, thin box, inside the silver wrapping paper.

It was definitely the right shape to be a Barbie!

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

At school, we play Kiss Chase.

When we were in the little playground we had toys to play with but here in the big playground we just have each other.

I usually chase Amber and Laura, who slow down when I chase them, and speed up when Callum runs after them, but he always catches up, eventually.

Emily shakes her head at Callum and says “Time out” when he runs toward her.

Emily and I have agreed not to kiss.

“Because best friends don’t kiss,” says Emily.

I don’t mind not kissing Emily.

I don’t tell Emily that when no one else can see, behind the big tree, I kiss Callum and Jamal and Toby.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

I'm singing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" with Anna, helping Mum to put her to bed.

Mum says, "You have such a beautiful voice, Michael.

your singing teacher told me about a special school you could go to with an excellent choir.

It's an all-boys school in Camden." I like boys.

I like Camden.

I like when we go to Camden Market.

It's full of crazy, colorful clothes.

We walk by the canal after, if it's a sunny day.

But we don't go often because it's far away.

Emily is going to a private school that Mum says we can't afford.

Callum says he doesn't know what school he's going to yet.

But Callum doesn't sing, so he can't come with me.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

Dear Rowan, I've liked you for so long.

You're always so smiley.

You seem so carefree.

I don't know you very well but I really like what I see.

I like your ginger hair, your freckles.

You're cool but kind of goofy.

You're so confident in drama.

I wish we had more classes together.

Maybe we would know each other better.

In drama we're always pretending to be someone else.

Maybe that's school in general? I don't want to pretend with you.

I like you.

Although I don't really know you, I'd like to.

So please write back or tell me when you see me, will you go out with me? Michael

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

Sometimes I find notes in my schoolbag.

They are quotes from the Bible.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

(LEVITICUS 18:22) If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death.

(LEVITICUS 20:13) I don't tell Daisy or anyone about them.

I never let my bag out of my sight and yet the notes keep turning up.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

Mum is going through a phase of making us any meal on request:

jerk chicken or curried goat with rice and peas, ackee and saltfish, stuffed grape leaves, shepherd's pie, Sunday roast.

Mum buys me and Anna games consoles, phones, clothes, anything she can afford, and, when she can't afford it, she borrows money to send me to hip-hop dance class and Anna to ballet and, now, to take us on our first vacation.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

The weekend before I turn seventeen, Daisy and I go to the cinema to see Moonlight .

Even though it's set in America, I see something of myself on-screen.

I recognize what's missing for them is also missing for me.

I recognize the longing for a man, a father, a lover.

As the credits roll, Daisy and I stand and put our coats on.

It's dark but I recognize Kieran, sitting two rows behind us.

I don't recognize the girl Kieran has his arm around.

I don't think he sees me.

I nudge Daisy.

"Look, it's Kieran." I think I'm too loud, as he looks our way.

Daisy and I link arms and scuttle out as quick as we can without actually running.

We burst out laughing when we get outside.

Daisy says, "That's cool that Kieran came to see this film.

Do you think that was his girlfriend? It definitely looked like a date."

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

Uncle B drives me and my stuff to university.

He tells me how proud he is, asks what I'm excited about and what I'm nervous about.

I don't tell him I'm excited and nervous about meeting guys, having sex, maybe a relationship.

I tell him I'm excited to have my freedom.

We're five minutes from our destination according to his GPS, and we hear sirens and see flashing lights.

It's the police behind us.

My uncle pulls over, I think, at first, to let them pass, but I soon realize that they are pulling us over.

They ask my uncle if this is his car, to see his license, where are we going.

They tell him it's a very nice car, ask him what he does for a living.

My usually polite uncle is abrupt with the police, asks them what business they have stopping him.

Was he speeding? Was there a problem with one of his lights? Did he fit the description of a suspect they're looking for? The police say we can be on our way and

to have a nice day.

They get back in their car and drive away.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

Uncle B begins: “There’s always something.

No matter how hard you work.

No matter how well you do.

How successful or respectable.

There’s always something that will remind you you shouldn’t get too comfortable.

I always thought education and money was going to earn me respect, but a successful black man is a threat.

Pulling me over for driving a nice car.

This isn’t what I wanted for your moving day but this is what it’s like to be black in this country or anywhere in the world.

They interrupt our joy.

Our history.

Our progress.

They know they can’t stop us unless they kill us but they can’t kill us all, so you’re

living your life and suddenly interrupted by white fear or suspicion.

They fear sharing anything.

Our success is a threat.” I’ve never heard my uncle speak in these terms, of them and us .

I’ve never thought in these terms.

Until today.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

I've seen Kinky Boots and RuPaul's Race .

In advanced drama we were told DRAG stands for Dressed Resembling A Girl.

It happened in theater in original stagings of plays by Shakespeare.

Women were not allowed to perform.

Young men would play the female roles.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

How to Do Drag Your gender matters but should not limit you.

Know your audience; if possible, see shows at the venue before you perform there.

Know that your audience wants to be entertained.

Know that you don't necessarily have to give your audience or anyone what they want.

Know that your audience makes assumptions about you, your gender presentation, and the gender you were assigned at birth.

Your gender is not what this is about.

Remember that this is a character, it's gender play but not necessarily about your gender.

Know what you want to do before you decide how you want to look.

Get friends to help you.

If you don't have friends, make some.

Watch online tutorials.

Remember eyebrows are sisters, not twins.

Go to makeup counters in department stores and try their products.

Keep the receipts—they often convince you to buy more than you need or will ever use.

Know that your skin tone matters—not just for finding the right shade of foundation but also for finding the right tone for your act.

Do NOT do blackface ..

unless ...

No, just don't do it.

Remember makeup doesn't make your drag work, clothes don't make your drag work— your attitude and intentions are what make it work.

Aesthetic isn't everything but don't look a mess...

unless it's on purpose.

Do everything with purpose.

Be in control, even if you plan to make it look like chaos.

Read the room.

Be shady but not bitchy.

Don't punch or kick downward at groups in society with less power or privilege than you.

Tuck it away, if you want to.

Stuff your trousers with a sock, if you want to.

Wear a chest plate to give you pecs and abs or boobs, if you want to.

Pad hips and bum, if you want to.

Cinch your waist, if you want to.

Shave or add hair, if you want to.

Make none of the above adjustments if you don't want to.

Know why you want to do this.

If you don't know why, why the hell are you doing this? Really, why the hell are you doing this? Ask yourself the night before, Why the hell am I doing this? Ask yourself the morning of, Why the hell am I doing this? Ask yourself the whole day leading up to your first performance, Why the hell am I doing this? Ask yourself the evening of, Why the hell am I doing this? If you don't come up with an answer, what's the worst that could happen? A wardrobe malfunction? A tech disaster with your music or lighting cues? (Who do you think you are having music and lighting cues?) You could fall off the stage.

You could literally piss or shit yourself if you can't get out of your costume quickly enough when you need the toilet.

When it's time to go onstage, know that you're not ready but this is not about being ready, it's not even about being fierce or fearless, it's about being free.

I don't have a clue what I'm doing but that's not gonna stop me.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 10:22 am

“Can we talk privately?” “Sure,” I say.

I sashay toward the smoking area and he follows.

It’s not so private but at least we can hear each other here.

“So, what’s up?” I ask casually.

“What’s all this?” Jack points at me.

“My brother said you were performing tonight but I thought it would be poetry, like when we first met.

I didn’t know it was going to be a gay night and you’d be dressed like a girl.

I just don’t get this, Mike; you’re a talented writer, you don’t need to do all this, it’s just so embarrassingly extra.

Why can’t you just be a man?” And he’s shouting at me now.

“Why do you have to hide behind a costume like this?” And I don’t know if he’s talking to me or himself.

“You look ridiculous, Mike, I’m embarrassed for you.” And the whole smoking area is looking at us and I don’t know if I should say what I truly want to say to him right now.

Fight or flight? I scream: “You’re embarrassed for me ? I don’t need to be a man for you or anyone else.

I don’t perform for you or anyone else.

What I wear is for me.

What I perform is for me.

What I write is for me.

I’m my own man and you’re a frightened little boy.

Who are you to come here and shout at me? We slept together once, Jack.

You don’t know me.

You don’t know my story and I don’t know yours, but right now I don’t want to.

If this is who you are, Jack, I don’t want to know you anymore.

I was so excited to see you here tonight to support me.

I thought we could be friends or at least get some closure.

Well, this sure is some closure .

You know what? I’m embarrassed, too.

Embarrassed I lost my virginity to you.

What a waste.

What a shame.

But you know what? Whatever!” And this is most of our audience in the smoking area.

They saw my performance earlier and this , this is like an encore for them.

They all start to clap and cheer even louder than before.

I turn and take a bow and when I turn back there’s no sign of Jack.

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How to Come Out as Gay Don't.

Don't come out unless you want to.

Don't come out for anyone else's sake.

Don't come out because you think society expects you to.

Come out for yourself.

Come out to yourself.

Shout, sing it.

Softly stutter.

Correct those who say they knew before you did.

That's not how sexuality works, it's yours to define.

Being effeminate doesn't make you gay.

Being sensitive doesn't make you gay.

Being gay makes you gay.

Be a bit gay, be very gay.

Be the glitter that shows up in unexpected places.

Be Typing ...

on WhatsApp but leave them waiting.

Throw a party for yourself but don't invite anyone else.

Invite everyone to your party but show up late or not at all.

If you're unhappy in the closet but afraid of what's outside, leave the door ajar and call out.

If you're happy in the closet for the time being, play dress-up until you find the right outfit.

Don't worry, it's okay to say you're gay and later exchange it for something else that suits you, fits, feels better.

Watch movies that make it seem a little less scary: Beautiful Thing , Moonlight .

Be southeast London, a daytime dance floor, his head resting on your shoulder.

Be South Beach, Miami, night of water and fire, your head resting on his shoulder.

Be the fabric of his shirt the muscles in his shoulder, your shoulder.

Be the bricks, be the sand.

Be the river, be the ocean.

Remember your life is not a movie.

Accept you will be coming out for your whole life.

Accept advice from people and sources you trust.

If your mother warns you about STDs within minutes of you coming out, try to understand that she loves you and is afraid.

If you come out at fifteen, this is not a badge of honor, it doesn't matter what age you come out.

Be a beautiful thing.

Be the moonlight, too.

Remember you have the right to be proud.

Remember you have the right to be you .