



# If I Was Your Girl

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

**If I Was Your Girl** opens with a letter from author Meredith Russo to her readers explaining that she is a trans woman, and that the book is 'the story I needed when I was fourteen, confused, and hungry for someone to tell me things were going to be okay.' The novel that follows is honest, moving and indeed full of hope.

Amanda was born a boy, but has always known she should have been a girl. After a serious suicide attempt she is diagnosed with gender identity disorder and begins the process of physical transition. Her mum supports her but after constant bullying at school and a violent physical attack she decides to move to live with her dad in a small Tennessee town, where no-one knows that she used to be Andrew. She's quickly accepted, makes friends and falls for Grant, a boy who's had troubles of his own to deal with. All goes well until the one person she confided in cruelly reveals Amanda's secret, along with those of some of her classmates, at the school prom.

Russo admits that she gives Amanda lots of breaks - she's slim, pretty, passes for a girl with little or no effort. Yet, despite this, readers are in no doubt as to how difficult and even dangerous Amanda's life is: we see her mum mourning the boy that she's lost; see how hard it is for her father to accept his child in her new body, and recognise his constant fear that she will be found out and hurt as a result; it's revealed that a friend from her support group killed herself. It's made clear too though that Amanda has no choice in living how she does; only as a girl can she be truly herself, and happy. Too many of her friends too have secret lives, hiding who they really are from friends and family, and living half-lives as a result. In one key scene, her mother identifies Amanda's light-headedness at seeing her new reflection in a mirror not as sickness, as Amanda thinks, but joy. It's Amanda's decision to be who she is that allows her a real chance for happiness, and leads her finally to acknowledge that she deserves to be loved.

It's impossible not to be caught up in Amanda's story, and even if the book occasionally slips into cliché and some of the supporting characters are stereotypes, it remains powerful, touching and important.

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