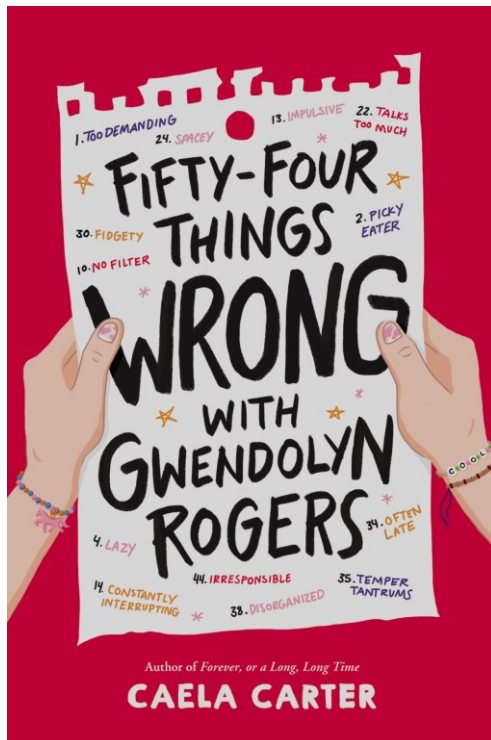


# FIFTY-FOUR THINGS WRONG WITH GWENDOLYN ROGERS



*Juvenile*

**By Caela Carter**

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## Book Summary:

A young girl struggles with a mental disorder.

## Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alternate gender ideologies; references to alcoholism and addiction; and controversial religious commentary.

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/5

Child Guidance  
BookLooks Review Rating

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74	<p>Mom is lucky. Mom isn't a problem. She isn't fifty-four things. She just has a problem. Or she had one.</p> <p>Mom's extra lucky because her problem has a simple solution: stop drinking. She found that solution, and Alcoholics Anonymous, a long, long time ago.</p>
139	<p>The website says that "a power greater than myself" often means God, but it doesn't have to mean the traditional version of God. People come up with a lot of different higher powers to turn themselves over to. The important thing is to really believe in whatever the power is.</p> <p>...But I don't go to church or pray or know what I do and don't believe when it comes to God.</p>
159	<p>"Remember," Mom says, hushed. "It's Alcoholics Anonymous."</p>
176	<p>"Yeah, but also," Marty says, "Hettie and Thaís usually end up spending all this time giggling about boys and looking at their pictures online and . . . well, you know. I'm not into that. I'm glad you figured out how to be cool with me."</p> <p>"Cool with you?" I say. Who wouldn't be cool with Marty?</p> <p>"Yeah, you know, since I came out as NB last year."</p> <p>"You came . . . oh!"</p> <p>This is the stuff that happened with Marty. This is what I'm supposed to know. But what is NB?</p> <p>"It was really hard for a while, TBH," Marty says. "I mean, I thought it would be easy for you guys, but . . . then Thaís was all confused about how to have a best friend who's not . . . who is . . . you know, like me. And you only wanted to hang out with Hettie. It took Hettie a while to get used to it, and it took Thaís longer, and you . . . well, Hettie swore you didn't have a problem with me, but I know it's a lot for people to figure out. Especially when people are busy with their own lives. And you are, of course. I know you found your brother and all that, and that's been good for you. I'm happy for you about that. It just . . . well . . . it makes sense that you didn't really have time to think about how to still be friends with me once I came out as NB. And sometimes that hurts my feel—"</p> <p>...Marty shrugs. "People still accidentally use my old name a lot. I know it was an accident, and you corrected yourself. That's the important part for us."</p> <p>"Us?"</p> <p>"You know, NB people."</p> <p>I have no idea what she's talking about, but I can tell I'm supposed to. I'm trying to figure out a way to ask what NB is when she says, "What do you mean you're socially inept? I haven't heard of that before."</p> <p>... "You're fun. You're perfect. And so am I. I'm just NB."</p> <p>"What is NB?" I ask, finally.</p> <p>"You don't even know what it is?" Marty asks, louder. "All this time I thought you didn't want to be my friend. Just because I was being myself. But it turns out you don't even know?"</p> <p>My mouth opens, but for once there are no words. I shake my head.</p> <p>"It means I figured out I'm not a girl . . . I'm still sort of figuring it out."</p> <p>A lightbulb goes off for me. "Like trans?" I say.</p> <p>"No," Marty says. "It turns out gender identity is a spectrum. Like a number line. Like you know how Mr. Olsen was saying there are infinite numbers between one and zero?"</p> <p>I nod.</p>

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	<p>“It’s like that. Like there’s male on one side and female on the other and a whole lot in between. Trans means you belong on one edge, even if some people think you should belong on the other. NB means nonbinary. It means I belong somewhere in the middle. Not everyone uses the abbreviation. A lot of people just say nonbinary all the time. But I like NB because it’s easier to text.”</p> <p>“Oh,” I say. “How do you spell it?”</p> <p>Marty tilts her head at me like that’s an odd question. “See?” I say. “I’m weird.” “N-O-N-B-I-N-A-R-Y. Binary means when there are only two choices for something. So nonbinary means, like, not fitting into either of those two choices. And you aren’t weird, Gwendolyn.”</p> <p>“Wait . . .” I say. “Wait.”</p> <p>My heart is beating faster. Anger is stirring a little bit in my ribcage. But I’m not angry at Marty. I’m angry at myself.</p> <p>“It’s OK if it takes you some time to get used to it,” Marty says.</p> <p>“No, it’s not that. It’s . . . that means changing your name was really important,” I cry.</p> <p>“Oh,” Marty says. She looks away from me, toward our sleeping friends. “Yeah.”</p> <p>“And I kept messing it up,” I say.</p> <p>Marty opens her mouth. Then closes it then shrugs.</p> <p>“I didn’t know,” I say. “I thought it was just a new nickname or something. And remembering things like that is hard for me. So I didn’t . . . I didn’t know. But this is different. This is important. I’m not going to mess it up again.”</p> <p>Marty’s eyebrows go up. “A lot of people still mess up and deadname me,” she says. “At least you correct yourself.”</p> <p>...Marty squints behind her glasses. “I guess . . . I might switch my pronouns one day.”</p> <p>“Your pronouns?” I say.</p> <p>“Wow,” Marty whispers. “I haven’t told anyone that yet. It’s weird to say out loud. For now, I’m sticking with she/ her. But I might switch to they/ them. It’s just something I think about.”</p> <p>I nod. “I’ll be ready,” I say. I have a lot to learn about being friends with someone who is NB.</p> <p>“That’s kind of amazing,” I say.</p> <p>“What?” Marty asks.</p> <p>“Just . . . you. That you knew that much about yourself in fourth grade. Like enough to tell all the adults they were wrong about you. You knew something so real and strong and . . . I mean, I’m always waiting for an adult to finally . . . I don’t know . . . I want someone else to teach me how to be, you know? I’m waiting for a therapist or a teacher or my mom or a test to tell me who I am. But no one can figure me out. And you . . . you figured yourself out. And then you taught all of them how you get to be.”</p>
261	<p>She’s basically the opposite of Marty. All the way at the Female End of the spectrum. I wonder if that means they fight like we do sometimes.</p> <p>...It makes me realize that even if we were letter friends, Marty and I wouldn’t be the same. NB is just who you are. It’s the same as girl or boy. Nonbinary is a long word so Marty uses an abbreviation. But it isn’t really a letter thing.</p> <p>...Marty’s room looks like a rainbow exploded inside it. There’s a rainbow bedspread and pillows and a big rainbow flag that says PRIDE hanging on the wall.</p> <p>“I know it’s a lot,” Marty says. Her cheeks turn a little pink like she’s embarrassed. “When I first figured out I was nonbinary, Mom sort of didn’t believe me. She thought I was too young to know. Or she thought it was a phase or something. Then we started seeing a</p>

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	<p>family therapist and Mom completely flipped her approach and now she's, like, determined to prove that she accepts my gender identity."</p> <p>...I sit next to her on the rainbow bedspread.</p> <p>"Your mom thought there was something wrong with being nonbinary?" I ask.</p> <p>"Her and everyone else I know."</p> <p>"Why?" I say.</p> <p>"People are stupid," Marty says. She pauses and looks out her window. "That's sort of why I haven't changed my pronouns yet. I want to. I don't like being called she. But I also don't want to explain a million times a day that people need to call me they. I don't want to hear people mess up. Especially Mr. Olsen. He'd probably be all gross and sarcastic about it."</p> <p>"Why would he be sarcastic about a pronoun?" I ask.</p> <p>..."What?" Marty says. "Why?"</p> <p>"Because there's nothing wrong with you," I say.</p> <p>Marty nods, still looking out the window. "I know."</p> <p>"Why should he care about a stupid pronoun? That would be a dumb thing for even Mr. Olsen to be sarcastic about."</p> <p>"I know," Marty says. "I know that . . . now. I'm in therapy."</p> <p>"You are?" I ask.</p> <p>..."No, I just don't get why you would need therapy. I mean, it's not like there's something wrong with you."</p> <p>"Oh," Marty says. The sarcasm is gone as suddenly as it came. "Um . . . I guess I'm in therapy because . . . other people think there's something wrong with me?" Marty shrugs.</p> <p>"My therapist says some people get mad when they don't understand something. Or someone."</p> <p>"That's a stupid reason to get mad." Anger shakes my rib cage, just a little. Where did he come from?</p> <p>"Yeah," Marty looks down. "People get mad at me for just being me. A lot."</p> <p>"That's not OK!"</p> <p>Anger is awake for Marty. That's new.</p> <p>"I know," Marty says. "My therapist says there's a whole lot of people who think that gender is just about what's in your pants. And they think, for some reason, that I should live my whole life the way they want me to, even though they aren't me."</p> <p>"Then they're the ones who should be in therapy!"</p> <p>..."But . . . there's nothing wrong with you."</p> <p>"You keep saying that." Marty says. "I know there's nothing wrong with me, but that doesn't mean everyone does, OK?" She looks annoyed even though she keeps saying such nice things about me.</p> <p>...I'm going to practice talking about Marty the right way in my head so that I don't mess up when they're ready to ask everyone to use the they/ them pronouns.</p> <p>"Nonbinary isn't, like, a problem," I say, trying to explain myself to them. "It's not a disorder. It's just . . . a description. It's not like ADHD after all."</p> <p>"Oh," Marty says. "Oh. That's what you mean. That's . . . true."</p> <p>"See? I don't get it," I say.</p> <p>"No," they say. "You do."</p> <p>"But I'm in therapy because the problem is in my own self. Not because other people are stupid. I'm not saying that's worse, just that . . . I'm worse."</p>

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266	<p>“OK. In my support group this weekend, I was using the letters. You know, NB?”</p> <p>I nod.</p> <p>“It turns out we aren’t supposed to use those letters. In, like, internet words or whatever, NB also means Not Black, so my support group was talking about how we shouldn’t also use those letters. Especially because a lot of the kids in my support group are Black, so they’re nonbinary but not NB.”</p> <p>...“So, it turns out nonbinary people are supposed to spell out the letters when we text. Like text them the way they sound. E-N-B-Y. Get it? Enby.”</p> <p>“Oh,” I say. I understand the spelling, but I don’t really get her point. No matter what letters you use, there’s nothing wrong with being enby or NB, or enby but not NB.</p> <p>“So that’s a word. You write it like a word. Not letters. Get it?”</p>