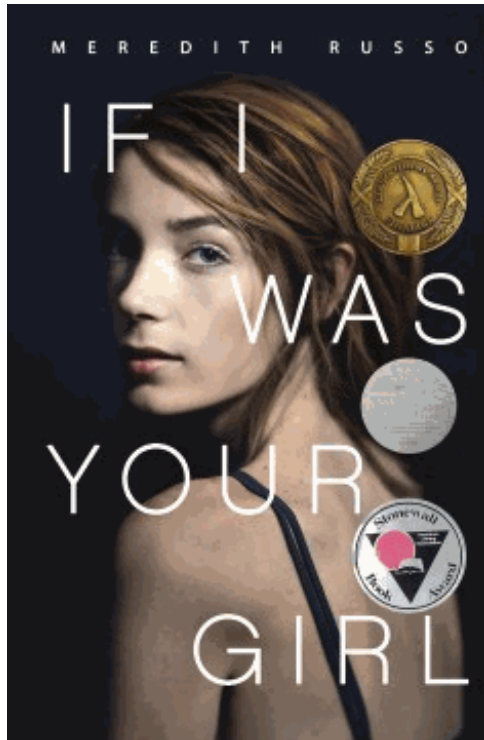


IF I WAS YOUR GIRL



Young Adult

By Meredith Russo

ISBN: 978-1-250-07840-7

Book Summary:

A teenage transgender woman falls in love with a teenage boy and divulges all of their secrets including transitioning and suicide attempt.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; profanity and derogatory terms; controversial social and political commentary; drug and alcohol use; self-harm including attempted suicide.

2 / 5

Teen Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
11	I thought of the words I wrote down for the counselor. I should have been a girl. ...When she spoke next, I listened. "Anything, anyone, is better than a dead son."
12	I gave up trying at five and drank a chocolate-flavored nutritional shake with my medicine: two two-milligram estradiol tablets, which were tiny and blue and tasted like chalk, to feminize my appearance and stand in for the testosterone my body could no longer make, and one ten-milligram Lexapro tablet, which was round and white and waxy, to help me stay calm.
14	I looked down at my lap and tried to will myself out of existence.
20	"We'll see," Bee said, nodding as she put the half-smoked joint back in the lunch box.
21	"I'd give you a ride," she said, "but I don't drive stoned, which is super, super what I am right now. Stoned like a medieval witch..." She snickered dreamily at her joke.
29	"I have a...I have boy parts. I have boy chromosomes. God doesn't make mistakes. So I'm a boy. Scientifically, logically, spiritually, I'm a boy."
30	"Is there anything specific to being a boy that bothers you?" "Clothes," I said quickly. ..."I've wanted to wear girl clothes for as long as I can remember." ..."So when you wrote 'I should have been a girl,' did you mean that you're afraid to come out as gay, or embarrassed that you want to wear women's clothes?..." ..."I don't think God actually cares about that kind of thing, and I could deal with just being gay or whatever...The only time I feel like I have a future at all is if I imagined I'm a girl in it."
31	"Gender identity disorder is in the most current diagnostic manual," he said. "It's a real thing that lots of people experience."
42	She blew her hair back into place and reached for her pipe and a shimmering plastic baggy. She carefully stuffed dried green leaves into the bowl. "Could I get high first?" I said, my hands balled in my lap. ...She nodded, once, and put the pipe and the lighter on the table between us. ...Two more thunderous peals growled at us before I worked up the courage to touch the wavy-lined blue-and-green pipe. Its glassy surface felt like the unicorn tchotchkes in Mom's bedroom. I almost laughed at the association as I picked it up and held it. The mouthpiece tasted warm and wet a Bee instructed me on how to dot it. "Don't cough yet," she said as smoke flooded my lungs. I held my lips shut. My chest heaved and my eyes watered. Finally the sizzle in my chest hurt too much and I let the coughs come. A blinding halo surrounded my head as I bent double, coughing long after my lungs were empty. ...I leaned back in the chair and closed my eyes, a tingling feeling beginning to spread through my body. I felt brave and free in a dizzy, nauseated way.
43	"You're high," she said. She waited for me to calm down and then handed me her phone.
44	"Well, you're high as shit right now, so I'd say you're well on your way. My turn: I've gotten to at least third base in every bathroom at school."

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45	<p>"I tried to kill myself my sophomore year," I said. Her eyes widened. "How?" "It was a few weeks after my mom broke her leg. Her prescription painkillers were sitting out. I took too many." "How many's too man?" "Whole bottle," I said, chewing my fingernails. "Why, though?" I just shook my head. "I'm glad you didn't," Bee said. "Kill yourself, I mean." She met my eyes as she put her cigarette on the table. "I'm bisexual." ..."I thought maybe you were smoking."</p>
53	<p>I started to say I didn't drink either, but then I remembered I had gotten high two days before, and suddenly a beer hardly felt adventurous at all.</p>
55	<p>"I'm having fun," I said, taking another sip of beer. ..."I'm having a good time, I promise." I was starting to feel a little dizzy and realized the beer was finally having an effect.</p>
56	<p>My head was buzzing pleasantly as I hopped down and followed him.</p>
58	<p>"You talking about Tommy? Grant' little gay boyfriend?" ..."The new girl know you've got a vagina?" ..."Have another drink, bud."</p>
74	<p>She showed me how she drank a special medicine so that when she grew up she became a woman instead of a man. She told me that the way I felt like a girl inside of me was a true thing, and was not bad or wrong.</p>
75	<p>I just knew Dad would be so happy when he found out he had a daughter and not a son, but maybe he would also feel silly that he and Mom made such a silly mistake?</p>
77	<p>I looked at my shoes and felt myself starting to cry, which was a bad thing because Dad said crying was for girls, but I knew I was a girl but Dad thought that was a joke and he seemed angry about it and thinking about that made me cry even harder.</p>
81	<p>"Not really," I said, still a little dizzy from the beer.</p>
83	<p>I wanted to let him know how much it meant to me to have found someone out here, in this place, who would stand up for someone like Tommy, who would stand up for someone like the boy I used to be.</p>
89	<p>I put his arm over my shoulder and immediately recognized the smell of whiskey.</p>
100	<p>I took a minute to actually read the bumper stickers this time, out of morbid curiosity: JESUS WAS A CONSERVATIVE, one read, and RIGHTS COME FROM GOD NOT GOVERNMENT; ILLEGAL ALIENS! EXACTLY WHICH PART DID YOU NOT UNDERSTAND? And I CAN'T HELP THAT I'M HOMOPHOBIC...I WAS BORN THAT WAY!</p>
118	<p>"I'm gonna grab a beer first."</p>
128	<p>"How often do you think about women having sex with each other?"</p>
129	<p>"...Homophobes think about gay sex all the time because they wanna have it. They insist being gay is a choice because every single day they have to choose not to</p>

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	<p>have the kind of sex they want. Homophobes are super gay." ...We shared a quick horrified glance, and then I waved as much of our smoke away as I could while Bee stowed the joint. It was last period, but that was hardly an excuse for smoking on school grounds.</p>
130	<p>"Worst-case scenario? He maybe smelled some wee. They can't kick you out over a smell."</p>
154	<p>"...God, I still remember that letter you sent when you started your hormone pills, where you told me you'd been a girl all along..."</p>
162	<p>My eyes landed on a cluster of pill bottles on the sink: Seroquel, 800 mg, for Ruby Everett. When I was in the mental hospital after my suicide attempt, one of the other patients had been on that medication for delusions and hallucinations.</p>
170	<p>I closed my eyes and tossed my shirt aside with trembling hands. We came together again and his hands were everywhere, on my back and sides and stomach and tracing my ribs. He reached behind me and, without breaking the kiss, started to unclasp my bra. Instinctively I backed away again, leaving my bra clasped.</p>
172	<p>It turned out he'd been going out in the woods to an RV with some buddies and cookin' meth for years.</p>
186	<p>He was on his fourth beer and I had just finished my second, feeling like a lightweight to already be as giddy as I was.</p>
189	<p>Parker stood just behind them, a beer in his hand, trying to look nonchalant. ..."She finally put out?"</p>
190	<p>"She at least let you see her tits?"</p>
195	<p>"...If she were a guy I'd have bailed as soon as I realized she wanted more from me than sex and the occasional hangout."</p>
196	<p>"So there's about seven thousand, four hundred people in Lambertville, and queer people represent about ten percent of the population. That's, what, seven hundred and forty people right there. Let's assume women are an even half of that, and you can assume there are three hundred ninety bisexual or lesbian women in this town. "It seems high because queer people in the South are addicted to the closet," she said...</p>
200	<p>"And it's like, the rape was something I could put behind me, at least most days. I don't really think about it, anymore. But if I'd come forward, yeah, he might not've gone to jail, but it would've been in the news, and those girls and their parents would've had a chance of avoiding what happened.</p>
201	<p>"I'm transsexual."</p>
202	<p>"I've seen...what's the word? Transgendered?" "'Trans people' is the best," I said, my voice barely above a whisper. "I've seen trans people in movies and TV shows, but judging by how unrealistic and shitty bi characters tend to be, I'm gonna assume I know nothing. So what's okay for me to ask?" "Don't ask about my genitals," I said, balling up my skirt and looking up at the clouds. "Just don't."</p>

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	<p>"Wouldn't matter," Bee said, shrugging.</p> <p>"Thanks." I bit my lip. "Don't ask about surgeries. Don't ask what my name used to be. That's pretty much it."</p>
205	<p>"So glad I haven't hit puberty yet. Maybe I'll be lucky and I never will, or maybe everybody is wrong and when I go through puberty I will turn into a woman like I'm supposed to. Probably not, but at least I can dream"</p>
206	<p>"Maybe one day I can finally be a girl like I'm supposed to, and then he'll see how I feel about him, and maybe he'll feel the same way."</p>
208	<p>"Tinder hookup at first," she said.</p> <p>... "Anyway, it turned out he was one of the, like, five guys on the planet who's willing to date trans women without being a creep about it."</p>
213	<p>"Virginia's my trans mentor," I replied.</p> <p>... "Are all your trans friends as badass as her?"</p>
216	<p>When I was born my parents named me Andrew Hardy and the doctors wrote "male" on my birth certificate. They had no idea who I would grow up to be.</p> <p>... Inside it was a letter that told him everything: my birth name, my suicide attempt, how long I had been on hormones, the effects hormones had had, and the bathroom assault that pushed me into his life. Everything.</p>
219	<p>I took a dose of hydrocodone when I was done dilating. Everything between my thighs and my hips felt like it had been run through a wood chipper, the dilation ritual was a degrading chore, the painkillers reminded me of the time I tried to kill myself- and I still couldn't have been happier. I was finally a girl on the outside too; there was nothing separating me from my body anymore. As the painkillers kicked in I swung my feet off the bed, winced, and shuffled slowly into the hall.</p>
220	<p>"No," Mom said, and I heard her throat clenching. A tear streaked down her cheek, but it wasn't followed by any others. "No, I miss my son."</p>
221	<p>"You tried to kill yourself," she said, rolling her eyes up to heaven and biting her knuckle. "Andrew Hardy was gonna die one way or the other, and one of the choices gave me a daughter in exchange while the other left me with no one."</p>
236	<p>I had never been good at being a boy, and I didn't enjoy it very much, but there were parts to it that made a certain kind of sense- when boys were angry, they showed it with their fists, and then it was done.</p>
245	<p>He reached under my skirt and I stiffened instinctively, still not used to that territory being safe. He looked up at me, eyes wide, and I slowly loosened back up. I nodded and we resumed our kiss as his fingers danced up my thigh and found the top of my leggings, which he slowly pulled down. We both looked at my legs as he unpeeled them. They were November pale, but long and shapely. Seeing him see them, I loved them even more. He ran his hand up my calf to the back of my knee and then up the back of my thigh and I gasped at the realization that touch could be like this. I thought of that poor girl pretending to be a boy who tried to kill herself and I wanted her to see this, to feel this, so she could understand that one day she might not just be okay with her body but that she would be able to feel things, beautiful things, inside of it.</p> <p>He kissed the nape of my neck and I unbuttoned his shirt and slid it down his arms. His body was so lean and strong and real, not the body of a model or a</p>

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	<p>movie star or even really an athlete, but a body with muscles built from long, tiring labor. I lifted my sweater over my head and I wasn't afraid. I wasn't afraid. We stared at each other for a moment and came to a silent decision. I stood and wiggled out of my skirt while he sat forward and shucked his pants. We looked at each other again, and my breath caught in my chest.</p> <p>I bit my lip and unclasped my bra and let it fall to the floor. His eyes were so wide I could see my reflection in them, and the girl in those mirrors was smiling and she was beautiful. He took me by the arms and pulled me back down. I giggled and ran my fingers down his stomach as he crawled on top of me.</p> <p>He kissed me again and I wrapped my arms around him. His fingers ran down my side, tickling me, and it took every ounce of willpower not to giggle and squirm, and from there they passed over my hip bone and down farther still. I didn't stop him but I breathed in sharply and stiffened. His eyes snapped open and he raised himself off me, his eyes wide with concern.</p> <p>"Is this your first time?" he asked. When I looked away, he touched my cheek, turning my gaze back to his. "Of course it's your first time. You said I was your first kiss. Sorry."</p>
256	<p>I knew the feeling, of course, since that was how I'd felt every day I'd had to wear boy's clothes.</p>
263	<p>"Well, that's over tonight. Callie's had two abortions!"</p> <p>...Bee started looking around the gym rapidfire. "Fucking the science teacher! Drug dealer!"</p> <p>Her finger landed on Chloe, who glanced up and scowled when she heard her name. "Dyke!" Bee cried.</p> <p>...Bee pointed at herself and yelled, "Queer! Slut!"</p> <p>And then she pointed at me.</p> <p>"But I saved the best for last, y'all," she said. "Look at our homecoming queen. Ain't she sweet? Ain't she beautiful? She's livin' the dream, right? I bet a lot of you guys've thought about her in the shower. Smart, pretty, but not pushy or intimidating...she's everything this fucked-up place wants a girl to be." The chaperone was mounting the steps. I couldn't stop shaking. Grant held me close and in that moment I love him so much. "But guys, guess what: She's a he!"</p>
265	<p>"It's not true, right?" Grant said, letting go of my arm. "It's just a prank you two came up with when y'all were stoned?"</p> <p>..."You're a boy? I remember what I fucking said, but how can you be a boy?"</p> <p>..."I was born a boy."</p> <p>..."What?" Grant said, his voice rising. "What does that mean? Do you...do you have a penis?"</p>
266	<p>"Does this make me gay?"</p>
269	<p>"Ain't you Grant's little boyfriend? And since I'm Grant's friend, that makes us bros."</p> <p>"I'm not his boyfriend," I said,...</p>
270	<p>"Well, what were you then?" he said. "Cause you're not a girl."</p> <p>..."I mean, sure, technically, no, you sure as hell ain't a girl, but you look like one at least."</p>

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270	fuckin'
271	<p>"Like hell you wanna be left alone. If you wanted to be left alone you'd've stayed a boy."</p> <p>...I smelled something sour and sterile wafting off him and realized he had been drinking.</p>
272	<p>I reached into my bag again, my fingers curled around my phone, when the punch came. Something thudded against the side of my skull as the dark around me turned red and all the night sounds of the road were replaced by a ringing in my right ear. I stumbled like a drunk away from the road until I scraped my bare shoulder against a tree and clung to it. Parker was on me before I could fully grasp what had happened, his face inches from mine and his forearm braced against my throat, cutting off just enough of my oxygen that I started to gag and see stars.</p> <p>..."You coulda had this the easy way. Now, let's see how close you are to the real thing."</p> <p>The sensation of his huge hands pulling up the hem of my dress brought me just far enough from my stupor to act. I let out a screaming croak and clawed at his face as I drove my knee into his crotch as hard as I could.</p>
273	<p>"Found you!" Parker yelled. I tried to stand but he was bursting through the darkness in seconds, pouncing on me and pushing me down into the mud with a horrible, irresistible strength. I heard something rip as the left strap of my dress fell loose. I kicked and slapped at him but my feet couldn't get to him and he quickly pinned my wrists down by my head. He had just kicked my knees apart when I heard a metallic click from behind him.</p>
278	<p>"I mean, I'm trying to picture what you must've been like before you became Amanda, and I can't even think of a way the Amanda I know could ever pull off being a boy."</p>
287	<p>Then I opened the pill bottle, removed three small white pills, and put them in my mouth. They tasted powdery and bitter. I swallowed them with a sip of water and kept reading.</p> <p>... I swallowed three more pills. I wouldn't be a friendless victim anymore.</p> <p>...I swallowed three more pills. No more caring that Dad didn't care about me.</p> <p>...I swallowed three more pills. My limbs felt heavy and strange. No more future with no love, no kisses, no closeness.</p> <p>...I swallowed three more pills. It was difficult to focus. No more possibility of shaming Mom with the knowledge of the kind of life I actually wanted.</p> <p>...I swallowed three more pills. I was very sleepy. Everything felt okay though. I knew everything would be okay. The bottom of the page said something about acne and body odor but the words danced whenever I tried to move my eyes over them. I closed the book and set it aside. I took the remaining pills and the glass of water and moved to the bathroom. I removed my clothes and sat down in the tub because I didn't want to leave a mess. Leaving a mess would have been rude. I realized that I forgot to write a note but it was too late for that now, and soon nothing would matter at all. My eyes slid shut.</p> <p>Everything was going to be okay.</p>
293	<p>"She killed herself about a month ago, just after I got back. Didn't leave a note."</p>

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304	"I have, um, gender identity disorder. I'm...I'm transgender." I tore absentmindedly at the paper seat cover and took a deep breath. "I need to start hormones."
306	"Not to be crude, but you are going to grow breasts," Dr. Howard continued. "They'll shrink if you ever change your mind and go off the hormones, but they'll never completely go away unless you get reconstructive surgery." I nodded. "And more importantly, you're going to be sterile within a few weeks of starting the spironolactone. It might be reversible if you stop the hormones within your first year, but after that point the effect is almost completely permanent."
307	It was going to be hard. I was going to have to pretend to be a boy for a little while longer.
310	"And if I ever do or say anything homophobic or transphobic, y'all just let me know, okay?..." ..."You and Chloe with your super-secret queer girls club-"
313	"Mysongyny saves the day?" I said.
321	To my cigender readers- which is to say, to those of you who are not trans:... ...I have, in some ways, cleaved to stereotypes and even bent rules to make Amanda's trans-ness as unchallenging to normative assumptions as possible. ...She had a surgery that her family should not have been able to afford, and she started hormones through legitimate channels before she probably could have in the real world. I did this because I wanted you to have no possible barrier to understanding Amanda as a teenage girl with a different medical history from most other girls. Amanda's life and identity would be just as valid if she didn't figure herself out until later in life, or if she were a tomboy, or if she were bisexual or a lesbian or asexual, or if she had trouble passing, or if she either could not or chose not to get "bottom" surgery. Grant's attraction to her in any of these scenarios would have been no less heterosexual, nor would Bee's have been any less homosexual. It is easy to get hung up on these points if you haven't lived our lives though, so I wanted to set those aside. I hope that, having gotten to know Amanda, you will not apply the details of her experience as dogma other trans people must adhere to but rather as inspiration to pursue an ever broader understanding of our lives and identities, as well as your own understanding of gender and sex. To my trans readers:...
323	It's okay to be trans and also gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or anything else. It's okay to be trans and not pass (and you can still be legitimately beautiful without passing), and it's okay to be trans and pass and go completely stealth. It's okay to be a trans man. It's okay to be genderqueer, or to change identities more than once in your life, or to feel you have no gender at all. It's okay to be trans and never pursue any of the medical aspects of transitioning, and it's also okay to be trans and alter your body in whatever ways you want.
326	...Flatiron Books for seeing the value of a story about a trans girl written by a trans woman, and for listening to my suggestion that we keep trans people involved at every available step. And, speaking of further trans involvement, I also want to

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	thank the absolutely gorgeous cover model Kira Conley for her participation and belief in this project.

Profanity	Count
Ass	12
Bitch	4
Dick	2
Dyke	1
Fag/Faggot	6
Fuck	13
Shit	28
Tit	1