

A LETTER FROM the AUTHOR ...

Hi, I'm Meredith Russo, and I'm a real, actual trans woman. I'm not *just* that, of course; I'm a lifelong resident of Chattanooga, Tennessee, a gigantic nerd, a social justice warrior, and a mother of two. I'm an Aries, my favorite colour is red, my favorite food is sushi, and my favorite movie is *The Thing*.

But I *am* trans, and considering how few trans writers get a chance to publish novels about trans characters, it might be worth dwelling on that. I've had a lot of people ask if and to what extent my experience as a trans woman inspired *If I Was Your Girl*, and that's a hard question to answer for a few reasons. On the one hand, yes, having dealt with mental illness, gender dysphoria, coming out, hormone replacement therapy, transitioning, and passing anxiety, how could these parts of my experience *not* come through in a story about a trans girl?

On the other hand, as I mention in my author's note, my path to womanhood has been vastly different from Amanda's. I didn't know from a young age, I wasn't willing to admit it to myself until I was twenty-one, and put off transitioning until I was twenty-six. I'm not tall and thin and, though I've reached a point where I feel comfortable inside my body, I don't always have the easiest time passing. And, finally, I never had someone like Virginia to take my hand and induct me into womanhood.

Which brings me to my main point, and something I *definitely* share with Amanda: I desperately needed mentors and role models when I was young, and I had none. Had little Meredith not seen joke after joke on television writing off boys who want to be girls as freaks, had she seen girls like her living out in the world as adults, happy and successful, had she had access to books about people like her *by* people like her, my life might have been radically different. I didn't write *If I Was Your Girl* to be realistic, because it's not, and I didn't write it to educate cis readers, though I'm ecstatic if my work has opened your eyes; I wrote it because it's the story I needed when I was fourteen, confused, and hungry for someone to tell me things were going to be okay.

I wrote *If I Was Your Girl* because I want young people to know that, though it might be hard and complicated, a trans life can be filled to bursting with success, friendship, and love.

Meredith Russo

@Mer_Squared