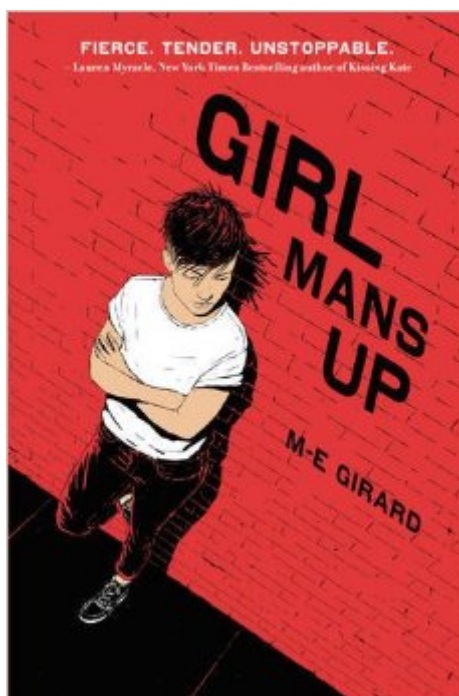


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Girl Mans Up



Synopsis

All Pen wants is to be the kind of girl she's always been. So why does everyone have a problem with it? They think the way she looks and acts means she's trying to be a boy—that she should quit trying to be something she's not. If she dresses like a girl, and does what her folks want, it will show respect. If she takes orders and does what her friend Colby wants, it will show her loyalty. But respect and loyalty, Pen discovers, are empty words. Old-world parents, disintegrating friendships, and strong feelings for other girls drive Pen to see the truth—that in order to be who she truly wants to be, she'll have to man up.

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Customer Reviews

This book was provided to me as an uncorrected digital review copy by the publisher, via Edelweiss. All Pen wants is to be the kind of girl she's always been. So why does everyone have a problem with it? They think the way she looks and acts means she's trying to be a boy—that she should quit trying to be something she's not. If she dresses like a girl, and does what her folks want, it will show respect. If she takes orders and does what her friend Colby wants, it will show her loyalty. But respect and loyalty, Pen discovers, are empty words. Old-world parents, disintegrating friendships, and strong feelings for other girls drive Pen to see the truth—that in order to be who she truly wants to be, she'll have to man up. Girl Mans Up is currently the most satisfying read of the year for me. I was happy with the depiction of Pen, a girl who doesn't really feel like a girl, but doesn't want to be a boy either. She digs girls,

but doesn't feel comfortable with the labels gay, lesbian, or queer. The thing about Pen is that she isn't interested in putting other people's questions about her gender or sexual preference to rest. She just wants to be allowed to be herself, without being treated like she's a freak. This rings very true to me, and I feel it will do the same with teenagers. Even those who aren't going through the same circumstances as Pen, will recognize the frustration of feeling that you have to fit into everyone else's expectations, and God help you if you don't. At the heart of it, this book is about acceptance: Acceptance of one self and of others, even if the only acceptance you can give others means accepting that they are toxic. I would recommend this book to any teenager who struggles with needing the approval of others. I also highly recommend this to parents of tweens and teens, because a little understanding can cover a lot of hurts.

This book is such an important addition to the YA LGBTQIA bookshelf. Pen is confident of herself, even though she doesn't fit the girly-girl mold. So when her traditional family pushes and pushes, she has to figure out how to proceed. Great relationships with friends, and family. Questions of who your friends really are, and a fantastic gamer girl protagonist who will make all the girls swoon. Read it!

Girl Mans Up, M-E Girard's astonishingly honest book, might just be one of the best things that happened to YA fiction in a very, very long time. There have been books about gay, lesbian and trans teens, but I don't think there are many, and certainly not this good, about genderqueer characters. Written with a light hand and breathtaking emotion, Girl Mans Up shows us how damaging traditional gender roles can be. Pen doesn't quite meet the expectations of her traditional family or the teachers of her catholic school. She is a girl, but she is only comfortable with her hair short, her clothes loose and doing things that are traditionally viewed as men's work. She doesn't feel like a boy in girl's skin, she is quite comfortable with who she is, but the people around her, her parents included, are making her life a lot harder than it needs to be. "Then I realized I don't have to be trans to still confuse people with the way I look. I had my hair then. Now, there's nothing left that makes me a girl, except for the fact that I am one". The best thing about Pen is that she is quite comfortable in her own skin. She has no doubts about her identity, gender or otherwise. Her problems come from the discrepancy between who she is and how the society sees her. She doesn't fit into any of the expected roles, therefore she needs to be cast out, changed or made to fit some stereotype, at

least. During the course of this book, Pen deals with everything from whispers and gossip to outright bullying. She finds very little true acceptance for who she is, but she does find it in her brother Johnny, her girlfriend Blake and several new friends. Pen's relationship with her older brother Johnny is a true thing of beauty. At one point, she calls him her friend, her brother, her parent, and he really is all those things. He is pure acceptance, the epitome of unconditional love with plenty of patience and a few flaws that merely make him more real. There is also a very healthy relationship between two girls that has a supporting role and changes things for Pen.

Blake's only dated boys before falling for Pen, but she is attracted to Pen exactly for who she is. Several friendships are born in this book and several others die in flames. All of them, as well as Pen's thoughts on them, come across as genuine, realistic slices of teenage existence. "I don't want to be her girlfriend, though. But there's this part of me that totally knows I could be her boyfriend. I don't want her to think of me as a boy, or a boy substitute, though. I want to be a boyfriend who is a girl. I have no idea how to explain that stuff to anyone, let alone a girl I like. I just wish it was already understood." This book should be required reading in every high school, not only because of Pen's gender identity and the society's acceptance, but also because of the healthy lesbian relationship, wonderful friendships, and the example of a non-traditional, supportive family.

This is a book that's going to change a lot of people's lives. Not an exaggeration. Pen is a high school student who is trying to figure out who she is. She knows she likes girls. She's got a group of friends where she's considered one of the guys. Her traditionalist Portuguese parents are always on her case about being respectful and acting like a girl. But for Pen, gender is a complicated thing. One night, while acting as a wing man to her best friend, Colby, Pen meets Blake, a girl who loves video games almost as much as Pen, and falls hard for her. The strongest part of this book is Pen's voice. Sometimes when reading a book the narrator breaks voice and says something that's a little out of character. Pen never breaks voice. There are so many important things talked about in the book, like traditional parents, toxic friends and relationships, and being your true self. Pen's story is going to change so many people's lives.

I received an advance copy of this book, and found it moving, powerful, and un-put-downable.. The story follows Pen, a Canadian teen who is comfortable in her own skin, but uncomfortable with the ways others seek to define her. We follow Pen as she starts a relationship with a kick-ass gamer girl, ends a dysfunctional friendship with a long-term male friend, and tries to navigate a difficult

relationship with her parents--conservative immigrants who long for a more traditional daughter. Author M-E Girard has written a compelling, truthful book, and it will resonate not only with gender-fluid teens but with any reader who loves interesting, honest, lovable characters. Highly recommend.

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