

## *Melissa (previously published as GEORGE)*

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### **RED FLAGS:**

Materials designed for Pre k and Elementary students are age inappropriate and hyper sexualize children, and gender ideology propaganda.

### *Chapter I: Secrets*


**HOW TO HAVE PERFECT SKIN, TWELVE FRESH SUMMER HAIRCUTS, HOW TO TELL A HOTTIE YOU LIKE HIM, and WILD WINTER WARDROBES.** *George was only a few years younger than the girls smiling at her from the glossy pages. She thought of them as her friends.* [7](#)

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*“That’s it.” Scott grinned, oblivious to George’s panic. “That’s my little bro! Growing up and looking at dirty magazines.” “Oh,” George said out loud. She knew what dirty magazines were. She almost laughed. The girls in the magazines she was looking at wore a lot more clothes than that, even the ones at the beach. George relaxed, at least a little.* [10](#)


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### Chapter III: Acting is Just Pretend

 Mom, what if I'm a girl? George had seen an interview on television a few months ago with a beautiful woman named Tina. She had golden-brown skin, thick hair with blond highlights, and long, sparkling fingernails. The interviewer said that Tina had been born a boy, then asked her whether she'd had the surgery. The woman replied that she was a transgender woman and that what she had between her legs was nobody's business but hers and her boyfriend's.


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 So George knew it could be done. A boy could become a girl. She had since read on the Internet that you could take girl hormones that would change your body, and you could get a bunch of different surgeries if you wanted them and had the money. This was called transitioning. You could even start before you were eighteen with pills called androgen blockers that stopped the boy hormones already inside you from turning your body into a man's. But for that, you needed your parents' permission.

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 George knew that Mom was trying to help. But George didn't have a normal problem. She wasn't scared of snakes. She hadn't failed a math test. She was a girl, and no one knew it.

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## Chapter VIII: Some Jerk

 Kelly took a deep breath. “And I’m sorry I ignored you last week.” She scratched her neck. “And you know what? If you think you’re a girl ...” George braced for Kelly’s next words. “Then I think you’re a girl too!” Kelly leaped onto her best friend and gave her a hug so big they both nearly toppled over


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 “So you’re, like, transgender or something?” Kelly whispered as best she could in her excitement. “I was reading on the Internet, and there are lots of people like you. Did you know you can take hormones so that your body, you know, doesn’t go all manlike?” “Yeah, I know.” George had been reading websites about transitioning since Scott had taught her how to clear the web browser history on Mom’s computer. “But you need your parents’ permission.” “Your mom’s pretty cool,” Kelly said, her eyebrows lifted. “Maybe she’d be okay with it.”


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 t. “But that’s not fair!” Kelly was indignant. “You didn’t steal them! What right does she have to take them from you?” “Sometimes transgender people don’t get rights.” George had read on the Internet about transgender people being treated unfairly. “That’s awful.” “I know.” After an awkward silence, Kelly showed George some pictures she’d taken that weekend at the park. Many of them were close-ups of leaves, and some of them were quite striking. The ways the light hit different parts of the leaves made them look three-dimensiona


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 As the principal spoke, George's eyes scanned the wall behind her. List upon list of phone numbers and email addresses were taped up to the lower half, interspersed with handwritten notes held up with thumbtacks pressed directly into the wall. Dozens of signs hung above, telling kids to eat right, not to take drugs, to do their homework, and not to be a bully. A sign in the far corner showed a large rainbow flag flying on a black background. Below the flag, the sign said **SUPPORT SAFE SPACES FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH.**

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 Reading the word transgender sent a shiver down George's spine. She wondered where she could find a safe space like that, and if there would be other girls like her there. Maybe they could talk about makeup together. Maybe they could even try some on.

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## Chapter IX: Dinner at Arnie's

 "George, I'm going to be honest. I worry about you. There are a lot of kids like Jeff out there, and plenty who are worse." Mom blew a puff of air up at her bangs. "I mean, being gay is one thing. Kids are coming out much earlier than when I was young. It won't be easy, but we'll deal with it. But being that kind of gay?" Mom shook her head. "That's something else entirely." "I'm not any kind of gay." At least, George didn't think she was gay. She didn't know who she liked, really, boys or girls.

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*“Did you tell her you were gay?” Scott twisted his fork into a pile of mashed potatoes. “You know I’m okay with that, right? Before Dad left, he made me promise to take care of you. He said you were like that.” “I’m not gay,” George said. Why did everyone think she was gay? “Whatever. I don’t care. My friend Matt is gay. It’s no big deal. ”But it was a big deal. “I told her I think I’m a girl.” “Oh.” That was all Scott said at first. “Oh.”*

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*“That’s more than just being gay. No wonder she’s freaking out.” “I know. ”Scott put down his fork. “So do you?” “Do I what?” “Think you’re a girl?” “Yes.” George was surprised at how easy that question was to answer. “Oh.” Scott ripped a hunk off a roll with his teeth and chewed thoughtfully.*

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*So I figured you were gay. But I didn’t think you were like that.” Scott popped a corn fritter into his mouth. “So, like, do you want to”—he made a gesture with two fingers like a pair of scissors—“go all the way? ”George squeezed her legs together. “Maybe someday,” she said. “Weird. But it kinda makes sense. No offense, but you don’t make a very good boy.”*

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## Chapter XI: Invitations



*Jeff snickered again. “I heard you were in our class play, Charlotte.” “He was, and he was great!” said Kelly. “Oh, shut*

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*up. I'm talking to George here. He's more of a girl than you'll ever be."*

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*"Trying to be a boy is really hard." Mom blinked a few times, and when she opened her eyes again, a teardrop fell down her cheek. "I'm sorry, Gee. I'm so sorry." She pulled George toward her and hugged her tight. "You really do feel like a girl, don't you?" "Yeah, I do. Remember that time I was little, when you found me wearing your skirt as a dress?" "Yes." "And remember how I wanted to be a ballerina and it drove Scott crazy because he said I couldn't because I was a boy?"*

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*George knew that seeing a therapist was the first step secret girls like her took when they wanted everyone to see who they were. "And then maybe I could grow my hair out and be a girl?"*

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## FAQ (AOTAWTS)

*What I can say is that I didn't grow up with any positive representations of transgender people in books or other media. The first time I encountered the word genderqueer (meaning "neither a boy nor a girl"), I was nineteen, and I took that word and I consumed it—ate it and became it, because it was already me. I can only imagine how my life would be if I had seen someone more like me in a book or three when I was younger. As many of us do, I wrote the book I wanted to read as a kid*


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 *Melissa is a transgender girl. If you are talking with someone who doesn't know what that means, you can say that she is a girl who the world sees as a boy, or a girl who was assigned male at birth. You can also say that she is a girl, but she's the only one who knows it. Notice that all of these say first that she is a girl. Also note that transgender (or trans) is an adjective, not a noun. That means you always need a noun after it, like transgender woman.*


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 *Q:Are you a lot like Melissa? A: Actually, I'm not that much like Melissa. Melissa is a binary trans girl, which means that she is a girl even though she was assigned male at birth, and she will grow up to be a woman. I'm genderqueer, or nonbinary, so I'm neither a girl nor a boy. Also, Melissa is growing up with access to the Internet and information about being transgender. When I was a kid, the only time I heard about anyone being transgender was when it was a joke or an insult. But both Melissa and I cried at the end of Charlotte's Web, and we both love playing Toad in Mario Kart.*

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 *Q:What's your goal for Melissa? A:Melissa's success has already far surpassed anything I could have imagined. When I started writing Melissa's story, I hoped I might be able to convince a small, queer publisher to take it on. More likely, I thought that I would be distributing hand-stapled photocopies to local LGBTQIAP+ organizations. To think that my story is available in bookstores and, better yet, libraries throughout the country is astounding. To learn that children and whole classes are reading Melissa's story is astonishing. To know that it's being translated into thirteen languages is mind-blowing.*

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*Q:I think I might be transgender (or gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.). What should I do? A: First of all, be proud that you're figuring out who you are. And remember that you don't need all the answers today, and the answers can change. If you can access the Internet, you can read up on as well as connect with other LGBTQIAP+ people. You might be able to find a youth group in your area, or an online community. Check the shelves of your local library. There might be some great books there, and if there are, you might talk more directly with your librarian. Librarians love to connect people with the right resources (it's literally their job!), and they often know about local groups.*

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*Other things you can do:• Read up on transgender issues on your own, and when you have questions, seek out answers without asking a trans person in your life to be your information resource.• Don't ask invasive questions about a trans person's body or surgery. They may choose to share, and if they do, thank them for trusting you with the information.• Don't compliment people on how well they "pass" or give unrequested advice. Everyone's way of being trans is different, and saying someone "doesn't even look trans" doesn't usually feel like a compliment.• Don't just say the "right things" around your trans friends. Raise issues even and especially when everyone in the room is cisgender.• Don't share private information about people. If someone wants to share that they are transgender, that is their choice, not yours.• A major and regular concern for trans people is safe, public restroom usage. Let your friend know that you're w*

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