



# Like Other Girls

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

St Agnes is an elite all-girls school in Ireland. One of the pupils is sixteen year old Lauren Carroll. We learn that Lauren's mother is also the principal of St Agnes, her daughter's head teacher. Lauren has a boyfriend Justin. But together with her long-time friend Stephanie, Lauren also attends an informal group of pupils for those who feel uncertain about their sexuality.

Lauren is a good singer and dancer. Yet in the school's production of the musical **The Boyfriend** she is given only a subordinate role ? much to her irritation. An upheaval in Lauren's personal life leads her to deceive her mother, break the law and seek solace in alcohol. The rest of the narrative deals with Lauren's attempt to cope with these difficulties.

Hennessy's book begins in a conventional ambience, some schoolgirls performing a school play. Yet the story soon morphs into a complex of very different and more challenging contexts. A significant question about parenthood is posed: as a conscientious and dedicated educationalist, Lauren's mother demonstrates awareness. But in relation to Lauren's personal problems she seems to prefer looking away. We know that faced with unpleasant evidence, parents may prefer to ignore what confronts them. But is this example of such behaviour too extreme to be credible? An even trickier situation arises when one of the female pupils decides she is transgender. When she chooses to present herself as a boy, would she not be asked to leave an all-girl school?

It is difficult to imagine a more difficult authorial task than constructing a school story that also confronts issues such as sexual identity, moral law, transgender issues and parental responsibility. Yet somehow Hennessy has succeeded. Secondary school librarians please take note.

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