



Golden Boy

Abigail Tarttelin

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Max is the perfect son, the perfect friend and the perfect crush for the girls at his school. He's attractive, he's intelligent, he's athletic.

He's even nice to his little brother. Max is going to make his parents proud. But if his secret gets out, his perfect life will be blown apart. The consequences are unimaginable. But someone knows his secret, someone close to him. And that person must not be trusted because he could do great damage to Max. In fact he's already started.

Golden Boy Details

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From Reader Review Golden Boy for online ebook

Aj the Ravenous Reader says

I read this as a birthday gift for the smart and beautiful, Vane who is celebrating her birthday on September 19. Happy birthday, hun!<3 Don't forget to greet her!^^Originally, she unreasonably asked me to read books two to four of the Monstrumologist series before her birthday. (Girl is dreaming! Lol). Instead, I read this standalone which she recommended perhaps a little halfheartedly. Lol.

This is a story about a unique 15 year old named Max, a perfect golden boy who everyone adores but who has been keeping a secret. He is intersex. He has both male and female parts but he has never allowed his condition to affect him until one ill-fated night when a terrible, horrible thing happened to him. He was raped. :(:(:(:(:(

I read from Vane's review that this is a heavy, painful read and now I can prove for myself that she is absolutely right. Not far from the first pages of the book is the most awful graphic description of how Max was raped. Personally, I didn't think all those hideous details were necessary. :/

Like in my review on the book None of the Above by I.W. Gregorio, I mentioned how I appreciate books that tackle more relevant social issues like this. I said it then and I'll say it again, authors should write more stories like this and readers should read books like this.

I just wish this particular story weren't very heavy plot-wise. I felt like the author wanted to tackle so many serious social issues and at some point, it all felt too much to take. It made the messages all the more difficult to grasp because of the multiple POVs that made me feel detached from the characters. Emotionally, I couldn't closely connect with them except with the main character himself. Perhaps, if it was told through his POV throughout, I would have better appreciated the story.

I also felt like the novel was a lengthy read which I attribute to several dialogues and POVs which I didn't think were important to the story. Several lines were mentioned repetitively and some parts were a little unrealistic. It bothered me that Max and his parents seem to know very little about his condition when they all knew this when he was born (he had specialists!) which was opposite of that of Kristin of None of the Above's condition because she learned that she was intersex only when she was already 18 years old. She researched online and joined group discussions about intersex to understand herself better. Max could have done that.

But overall, it is still a very worthwhile, informative read. Max is such a strong willed character! Read the book if only to meet him. One strong point for this story is how it emphasizes that people's gender does not define them.

Again, HAPPY BIRTHDAY IN ADVANCE, Vane! More books to come!

Want the same birthday gift, my friends? Please comment by mentioning your birth date and the book you recommend. This is going to be so much fun!

Suzanne says

Why have I not heard of this book before now? Why isn't the entire reading community talking about this?

Abigail Tarttelin has written an amazing story of her Max, who is intersex - it is a topic that I have not really thought of much before now, not a lot of us would have I suspect. I feel like I am lost for words right now, I don't want to retell the story, this is one that must be read and understood by all that are lucky to come across this fabulous book.

Max's story comes to us from the people that are his most important. His parents; his brother Daniel (what a sweetheart); his General Practitioner, a lady I thought was just brilliant and full of compassion; and his friend Sylvie who was quirky, special and real. I loved all of these perspectives, the author has presented each of these real characters as someone I feel I got to know. I loved every character, they were developed beautifully and with care.

Each chapter was a voice, directly channelling their unique relationship to Max, they were short, which suited me very well as I kept searching for what Max was going to do next. I was impatient to learn more of his story and honestly had trouble putting it down.

I hate seeing people hurt, have an instinct to comfort and the importance of those suffering hardship owning enough self worth. These feelings happened as an almost physical response during my time with this book heightens my respect for this young author.

This wondrously talented author is so young, I feel like she knows so much. She must be wise beyond her years to tell a story like *Golden Boy*, entrusting me to understand this complex topic and get know the wonderful Max. I want to scream from the rooftop in support of him. This story made me love Max. I hope you love him too.

Kyle says

Not my normal read but still interesting.

So Max Walker is what most people would call the perfect teen boy. The perfect son, perfect athlete, perfect friend, perfect boyfriend, perfect date, and perfect big brother. But under it all Max has a secret. A secret no one wants to talk about. A secret that his family has hidden all his life. Max is intersex. But when his oldest and closest friend betrays him in the worst way possible, Max's perfect life begins to unravel.

The story is definitely an emotional roller-coaster so be ready for that. It's definitely a bit of a depressing story but is very much an eye opening one as well. The story is told from the point of the different characters involved. So each chapter will bounce from one character to another so remember to keep track of whose point of view you are dealing with.

The writing is simple and straight forward. There is some graphic language and also sexual content so this book is not for young teens. There is a fairly graphic description of a rape though it is not a violent rape it

may still be disturbing to some.

The intersex content is not my usual interest but I found the book well written and definitely worth the read.

Vanessa J. says

4.5 out of 5 stars

Max is what people call a “golden boy”: He has perfect grades, he's good-looking, all girls have a crush with him, he's everyone's favorite, etc. He's also an intersex. But that's no problem – not even to him. That is, until he's sexually assaulted and he starts to question himself and people around him.

This book evokes so many feelings, but joy is not one of them. In general, it's depressing and painful to read, but I also got really, *really* angry at some points. This is highlighted by the fact that the book is narrated in multiple 1st person POVs, so you could be inside the characters' minds, and the thoughts of some of them were not comfortable to read.

Something I didn't like quite a lot was the writing. I felt it was a little too... flat at some points – not with Max, though, because his narration is perfect. An example of this would be Max's little brother: He didn't feel like a 10-year-old; more like a robotic kid.

But I let that pass because it was a powerful read. It addressed themes like identity, sexuality, etc., and at least for me, they were addressed correctly, though I don't know if my opinion should be trusted on this, since this is the first book I read about an intersexual character.

I also liked some of the explanations given. You see, I... I didn't know intersexuality existed until a few (very few) years ago. My parents hid all things not “straight” (and the book does touch this theme – man/ woman; black/white; good/bad, etc.) from me, and at my school they were not talked about (not because they avoided them, though; they were just not talked about).

This damn thing prevented me from reading some books, agreeing with certain things, talking about certain other things, etc. My mind got out of control once I entered college (last year), because there were more liberties and I could let myself be influenced by people (not on purpose).

In summary, my knowledge about intersexuality was limited to almost none, so of course I was grateful for the explanations. Besides, it was necessary to keep the plot moving. I should still do more research on some themes, though.

Overall, it was a great read. I'm glad I finally got around reading this. I recommend it to everyone, just have in mind that it's not an easy book to swallow.

...

WARNING!!!! BIG GODDAMN SPOILERS. I wanted to say some things, but they're HUGE spoilers, so careful if you haven't read this book.

Let's start with the aggressor. All things in his behaviour were wrong. First, when he enters Max's room and starts telling him to show him his genitals. Max is clearly not comfortable, yet what does he do? He forces him to have sex with him.

And what worsened the situation? That not only did he RAPE him, but he also HUMILIATED him. Telling Max that what he was doing didn't apply as being gay because Max was not even a boy – that he was *less* than a boy – ... what is god's name was *that*?

rages a lot

Also, Max's mother. **Hated. The. Woman.** She says she does things for Max' own good, but she doesn't even let him make his own decisions... and the baby... AAAHHHH!!! I just can't with that.

And when she got notice of Max's pregnancy... when she said she was disappointed... when she started to get a little angry because she thought Max was gay... at the ending when she still felt icky about the possibility of Max being bisexual... whenever she didn't trust her son... her favoritism... completely ignore Danny... blame her husband for everything...

I think it's pretty obvious for you that I **despised** her if you read these things I posted:

I know there are some people who think like that in real life, and that made it even more sad... especially because I feel powerless as to solve the situation – I mean, really? What can I do to stop it? Also, random fact about me: **I was raised into thinking just like her.** I feel ashamed of that now. Gladly, I got over that. I just wonder what made me realise the truth.

(...) it's no use asking why questions of sexuality and gender give people the creeps, and it's no use blaming it on society and saying it should change, because nothing is going to change about high school.... nothing is going to change about my high school and make it okay for people to know the truth about me.

That quote made me feel really small, for example.

Most of the things that happened in this book are really common. The problem is that they're not talked about, and I wish they were so people would not react like they did to Max's situation. Part of the problem is also something Max said in the book, but I couldn't find the quote, so I can't write it here.

I just know that, had I read this book two years ago, I would have hated it. My mind changed a lot over the course of 2014.

sigh

That was long. Don't worry, now – I won't take more of your time. The rant ends here. Sorry if it's too much rambling and too little sense.

??Jülie ? says

What a moving and heartfelt story!

Max Walker is truly a golden boy.

A gorgeous blonde haired, blue eyed teen who is the envy of his peers and the one all the young girls dream about going out with.

He is great at school and is the captain of the football team.

And as well as all that, he is a beautiful soul who shares a close and loving relationship with his parents and his brother.

But Max has a big secret, he was born intersex and until now everything has been ok with him. He has long since come to terms with his condition and is comfortable with his chosen gender as being male, being very popular with his peers and with the girls he enjoys (almost) all the trappings of a happy teenage life.

Now, as he reaches puberty along with his peers, he starts to notice different changes in himself.

Then, out of the blue something terrible happens to Max which leaves him struggling to come to terms with, he needs to talk to someone but doesn't know how to, or even who to...

This was a very intense and heartrending story to read, and yet there was also much positivity to be gleaned from its entirety, you come away with a sense of awareness of so many things at once...a lot of food for thought.

Its effects left me speechless for some time afterwards, and remains with me still.

Thank goodness Max is so fortunate in being born into such a loving and broad minded family who supported him throughout his life and through his decisions, enabling him with the strength of character to make the big decisions.

What a wonderful story which carefully brings to light not just this rare condition, but also some of the myriad trials and possible hurdles that intersex people might have to negotiate during the course of their lives.

Much can be learned from reading this story, not the least of which is respect.

Respect, and a measure of forbearance for the people we interact with on a daily basis, appearances are never true indicators of what is within and we should *always* be mindful of how we treat and support one another.

(Many thanks to my Aussie GR friend Suzanne for gifting me this beautiful story.)

Most highly recommended reading 5★s

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

This is one of those times where I'm incredibly glad that I'm a book blogger. You see, were I not blogging, I

would not have the reader friends I do, and I would miss out on books like *Golden Boy*. I never would have picked this up in the store, because the cover is weird and doesn't really convey the subject matter. Thankfully, a couple days after I got an email with *Golden Boy* as one of the audiobooks available for review, my dear friend Jenni of Alluring Reads told me that she felt certain I would love this book. Jenni was right.

This cover is a strange one, and, once I knew what the book was about, I can see what they're doing, subtly calling out the gender issues with the two bikes, one intended for males and one for females. Why moving a bar from straight to slanted suddenly makes a bike girly or changes it in any practical way, I can't say. Still, I do think it's a shame there's nothing on the cover to speak to the subject matter, because I seek out books about different sorts of sexuality/gender and would have missed this.

Golden Boy tells the story of Max, a handsome boy who seems perfect in every respect, popular, athletic and intelligent. Max has a secret, though: he's not actually a boy. Nor is he a girl. Max is intersex, the new politically correct term that replaced hermaphrodite. Because Max has both a penis and a vagina, he's avoided serious relationships, though he has developed a reputation because he makes out with a lot of different girls. His being intersex didn't really impact his life.

Until it did. At a family party, Hunter, Max's best friend growing up, rapes Max. The scene is rather graphic and intensely emotional. Max has always felt like a boy, and not really questioned that. With this incident, Max has to truly face that he's not a regular boy, and, in the fallout, so does his family. What follows is an honest, beautiful, heart-wrenching look at Max's journey to become comfortable with who he is and to decide who he wants to be as an adult.

The subject matter in *Golden Boy* is quite dark and unflinching at times. The discussion of the issues of being intersex is frank and honest. However, Tarttelin makes the brilliant storytelling move of including more than just Max's perspective, which cuts on the melodrama. She does six separate perspectives: Max, his family (mother, father, little brother), his girlfriend Sylvie, and his doctor Archie (a woman). Since I listened to the audiobook, I can't say how individual they felt in print, but in the audiobook they were all brilliantly performed, with a narrator for each perspective.

In some books with multiple perspectives, characters are added for no discernible reason at all, not adding anything to the narrative, or particular perspectives are incredibly boring, to be suffered through while the reader waits impatiently for the main character to return. Not so with *Golden Boy*. Each perspective brought something to the table, even Max's father's, which only appears twice. Max is so confused and lost and depressed that it's wonderful to see him from an outside perspective. Daniel, for instance, hero-worships his brother. Sylvie thinks he's hot. Neither of them know, of course, but we get a true look at the golden boy. Then there's his parents, who love him and do the best they can, but, through their perspectives, the reader really gets a sense of how uncomfortable they are with his intersexuality now that it's known he's actually of age for sex.

Archie's point of view adds a whole other dimension. As a doctor, when Max comes in, he really lights a fire in her when she realizes how little she knows about being intersex. Her medical schooling included almost nothing on the subject. She begins to really research, because she very much wants to help Max, who comes to her office the day after his rape for a morning after pill. Archie's perspective really drives home how little attention the medical community is paying to such gender issues and how much they push to "normalize" with surgery.

Since there's a lot I would spoil if I went any more into the plot, I'm going to speak in general terms. The

way Tarttelin wrapped everything up is incredibly touching and what convinced me this book deserved the full five stars. Some of the choices Tarttelin made surprised me, but they were just right. I'll leave it at that.

If you're going to read this book, which I really think you should, the audiobook is an excellent choice. With six talented narrators giving voice to the six perspectives, there's a strong sense of voice. The narrators for Max and Sylvie are particularly compelling. I've listened to quite a few full cast narrations, but this one is I think the best I've read so far.

LGBT (I know this doesn't cover everything, but the term QUILTBAG looks a bit silly - I intend this as all-encompassing) issues have not been covered nearly enough in fiction and I love Golden Boy merely for existing. However, Golden Boy is not just wonderful for covering a tricky, sensitive topic, but for doing so with heart, honesty and compassion. Abigail Tarttelin, welcome to my auto-read list.

Debbie "DJ" says

WARNING, WARNING, Do not start this book if you have anything you need to do during the day, or need to sleep at night. This book literally rocked my world. It is brilliant.

This is a story of an intersex child named Max. Nothing has been done to change Max since Max was a baby, so Max grows up identifying as a male, but is really both male and female. (That may seem some awkward wording, but it just shows how entrenched we are at labeling anyone a he or a she right from the beginning.) So, this situation is kept secret by Max's parents, and even Max knows Max is different, but has little information about this condition. Max knows kissing is as far as Max will go, but seems content just being Max. (Do you see how hard it is not to use an identifying he or she.") When Max reaches the age of sixteen, a compelling event takes place that changes everything. All the secrets that have been kept, all the questions that Max has never asked come boiling to the surface, and nothing can ever be the same again.

At times this book had me in tears. The hardships and humiliation our society puts on others through deeming some not "normal." All the tragedies that could be prevented if we just accepted people as they are. All the secrets that kill our soul. For what? All to appease those who are fearful of anyone who is different? Who decides what "normal" is anyway.

This is an intense read, and I adore any author who is able to put such a poignant story together. Really, drop everything, and read this book.

Raeleen Lemay says

MY FEELINGS.

Jaidee says

1.5 "thirty nine children playing violins very loudly for the very first time" stars.

1. Suzanne so sorry that this book did not work for me the way it did for you.
2. Two thumbs up for the education provided around intersexuality. I hope with time that this group will be represented more in all areas of life with dignity and respect.
3. However, I hated this as a novel. The book was like a three ring circus. Histrionic, overly affective and completely unbelievable. The voices of the characters were not at all authentic to me and all seemed to be simply variations of Karen's voice rather than individual voices. The exception was Archie's voice that could have easily been lifted up off of wikipedia.

I started by feeling mixed about this book but by the end I was skimming as I found it unbearable. I just wanted it to be over!

However out of those 39 young violinists one is bound to be at least pretty good. So perhaps this will be the case in Ms. Tarttelin's future novels. I, however, will not be there to find out.

Elyse says

Phenomenal!!!! I highly recommend this go to the TOP of people's "want-to-read" list.

Here's one small quote... Then I won't say anything more, other than this is an engaging page turning unforgettable important book.

"If we don't listen to him, if we take away his right to his own choices, his own body, then he ceases to be an autonomous being and becomes a thing."

Nina says

This book broke me.

I think it might be the best thing I've read in the last couple years, and I'm not good at choosing favourites. Still, a book that makes me sob my heart out - silently, in the middle of the night - is not something I encounter everyday. An emotional impact this powerful is something to commend, and it's not the only exceptional thing about this novel.

I tricked myself a little bit when I started this book. Both covers are colourful and simply nice-looking, so even though I knew what the book was about I let myself think I was in for a pleasant ride through teenage-problems-ville with a sprinkle of gender identity issues. I was not prepared for what I was about to read, but I was too curious to resist.

Boy, was I wrong.

This novel is full of pain. It starts out with a rape (not a spoiler) and then, in between moments of apparent tranquility, the blows just keep coming, and the pressure builds up until you find yourself trying to choke back sobs at 1 AM, reading on your phone so as not to wake up people. I don't think that's just me.

The characters are unbelievably *real*, starting with Max.

He really is a perfect golden boy, but that's not because he's athletic and attractive and smart; it's because he has a big heart, a sweet disposition and an ability to live with what people would see as an issue as if it were nothing. He's remarkably well-adjusted and kind, and it's no surprise everyone loves him. He could never be the character who's too perfect to love, because you can see inside his mind and get to know him, and you find yourself loving him just like that, naturally. It's refreshing and heartwarming like nothing I've read before.

That's not to say he doesn't have flaws, but they all have reasons to exist - that, weirdly, don't feel like excuses.

As for the secondary characters, they're almost as much protagonists as Max. Daniel, the little brother I'd love to have, though I'd probably throttle him twice a day if I actually did have him as a brother; Sylvie, the kooky, sexy wonder of a girl who's not weird enough to be annoying, like many YA characters are these days, but enough to be pleasantly eccentric and open-minded; Steve, who discovers family again; and Karen. Karen, the mother of this little lopsided family, a woman I understood, sympathised with, blamed, hated and not quite forgave.

There's probably a specific reason I could relate to Max and his family so much. I know what it's like to be poked and prodded by doctors and have to make decisions. The problems I have or have had are nothing like Max's - they're of a whole different nature and will be much less impactful on my future, hopefully - but I know what it's like to feel alienated and like you have no one to talk to, and I know how this impacts family relationships.

What I did realise last night is that, hell, there's nothing to angst about. It sounds simplistic and like a bit of a weird conclusion to come to after reading such a book, but that's what this novel gave me: there's nothing to worry about. Life is a horrid bitch, and it's going to try to beat you down and make things as difficult as possible, but you can get past and over it. There's always something on the other side of the hill.

It's a novel with a big heart that taught me a few interesting facts about intersex people in England on top of telling an amazing story in the best possible way; it's a series of snapshots of relationships falling apart and being knitted back together from several diametrically different points of view; it's a love story, or several love stories.

I have a hardcore book hangover and am running on five hours of sleep and a cup of coffee. This review might not be the best I've written, but it's all raw emotion. So whether we know each other or we're complete strangers, trust me on this one and give this book a shot.

Carol says

"If you love someone, you love them. It doesn't matter where they came from or if they're a boy or a girl, or if you fight, or if they're weird, or if they find it difficult to communicate with you; you just fucking love them."

Max is an intersex child. (previously called hermaphrodite) His story is not an easy read. It begins in a rather shocking manner and continues in a sometimes disturbing and often unsettling direction.

When I first started reading **GOLDEN BOY**, I wasn't quite sure where the author would take us with such a challenging and unusual subject matter, but as I read along, I soon found myself engrossed with the characters and **could not stop reading** until I knew more about Max, his rare condition of intersex and how his story would end.

Join Max's tumultuous world where he battles inner-demons and makes tough choices for a *very special*, emotionally taxing and thought provoking journey. Whew! What a learning experience! (view spoiler) Look forward to more from Abigail Tarttelin.

Petra X says

Top fiction. I had to cut down the GR description of it because it gave too much away. If you think you might read this book, only read really short reviews, try and avoid knowing anything about it Everything you know will take away from the interest and surprise. There is nothing in this review that will take away from the surprises and I hope only increase the interest in it.

This would make a really fantastic film. Intersex fascinates everyone and the book is extremely visual. I don't want to say more except that it will have you rooting for something you have never even dreamed of but could happen, be happening in your neighbourhood. The book is very well-written, the characterisation above the level you would expect in a YA book and very challenging in a very good way.

One thing I have to write is that one of the women in the book is very sexually experienced and this is presented as a Very Good Thing and not slutty at all. I did enjoy reading that.

I don't like getting recommendations so I don't give them (except in work) but I would like to recommend this book to just about everyone who likes reading a good story with just a bit of romance, because it is YA after all. This book is up there with Beauty Queens.

Mayra Sigwalt says

Eu sei que daqui a pouco vou falar desse livro no meu resumo do mês, mas acho que aqui consigo elaborar um pouco mais sobre essa leitura.

Acho que meu erro principal ao pegar esse livro pra ler, foi falta de informação. O que eu sabia: Temos 1 personagem intersexual (YAY!), todas as pessoas falando "esse livro é muito bom!" e "olha que capa colorida, deve ser um livro feliz!" (HA HA).

O que todas as pessoas que me recomendaram esse livro esqueceram de mencionar, é que ele precisa de um TRIGGER WARNING. Logo no começo do livro tem uma cena de estupro de 8 páginas. Se vc não se importa com isso, é apenas bem desconfortável. Se isso é um trigger pra vc, você vai passar mal e ficar sem dormir. O que foi o meu caso. Eu não sei se isso é uma responsabilidade da editora, mas nós que falamos sobre livros, temos que avisar. Talvez eu não lesse o livro (o que seria uma pena), ou talvez eu lesse em outro momento, ou talvez eu estivesse mais preparada para lidar com o que estava por vir. Mas ninguém me preparou pra isso. E isso claro, teve um impacto na minha leitura.

Eu não acho que a autora usou esse acontecimento gratuitamente. É uma cena bem descrita, que mostra bem o sentimento de impotência de uma pessoa que passa por isso. A forma como o personagem vai lidar com isso também é muito respeitosa e verdadeira. É muito angustiante, mas infelizmente bem real.

O que fez esse livro ser muito bom pra mim, é a importância dele e como ele dá um nó na sua cabeça. Mesmo que você seja desconstruído e não acredite em gênero, o automático puxa você pra colocar tudo em cada casinha. Então foi um exercício maravilhoso e muito doido se questionar sobre isso. Porque a maior desculpa para rejeitar as identidades LGBTQ+ é a questão biológica. Mas e se você nasceu com o potencial

genético pra ser os dois? O que realmente define o que você é? Ser capaz de carregar um filho te define como mulher?

A dinâmica familiar do Max também é muito interessante e a autora mostra que a limitação do outro (que foi criado a vida inteira em um quadradinho) não faz necessariamente dele um vilão. A mãe do Max, por amor à ele e por querer protegê-lo, falha em de fato entendê-lo. Porque a sociedade não está pronta e ele vai sofrer menos se se encaixar, né? Apesar desse pensamento ser desesperador pra mim e a gente sabe o quanto ficar no armário pode ser nocivo, estar na cabeça da personagem me fez ver melhor essa lógica.

Minha única questão em relação à qualidade da história é o personagem do Daniel, irmão do Max. Daniel é uma criança peculiar. Ele tem acessos de raiva e parece não saber se comunicar bem com os professores e amigos da escola. Ele por vezes é agressivo e mal educado, mas a maior parte do tempo parece viver em um mundo particular. O meu problema é ter que ler o ponto de vista do Daniel e nunca entender porque ele é assim. Ele é só um garoto mimado? Ele tem algum tipo de autismo? Talvez, mas eu não sou a pessoa responsável por diagnosticar. Não é algo que eu acho justo inferir. E não é falado em nenhum momento, nem mesmo depois nas notas da autora.

É provável que a autora não tivesse a intenção de trabalhar mais uma questão complicada no livro, mas na minha opinião, se você não vai desenvolver isso, melhor não colocar então. Sem uma justificativa clara pro comportamento dele, só parecia uma criança insuportável.

Resumindo, essa é uma leitura muito importante e necessária, no entanto, não se engane pela capa. Esse é um livro muito pesado. Tanto que tive que ir intercalando outras leituras. Uma capa como a de *A Little Life* teria sido mais honesta. hahaha

Bianca says

3.5 stars

This was still beckoning me on the library shelf, so I ended up checking it out despite its very small font. I managed to finish it in two days, which is quite the accomplishment given how wordy it is.

I'm just going to write down some thoughts before I hit the pillow.

Golden Boy was quite gripping, I kept reading and turning the page to find out what happens next. *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides was the only other book I read about an intersex/hermaphrodite person. This was quite different and it had a more YA feel about it.

The protagonist of this novel is Max, 15 going on 16. He's the "golden boy" both literally and figuratively - he's a football (soccer) captain, top student; he's also a very amiable person, always smiling, always kind. Oh, and not only he's like an angel, he also looks angelic, with beautiful blond hair (and doesn't everyone go on and on about that hair, as if they'd never seen blonde hair!), green eyes and full lips.

Something horrible happens to Max and that turns the happy-go-lucky teenager's life upside down. His family suffers as well.

As gripping as the story was for the most part, there were some things that didn't agree with me. The writing was pedestrian and the expositions were way too long. At times, it was repetitive and there was too much padding.

The voices were problematic as well, as there wasn't enough distinction between characters.

Also, I found some aspects implausible, unbelievable, ie (view spoiler)

Daniel, Max's ten year old brother, sounded way too mature at times. Even the teenagers didn't sound like contemporary teenagers.

I didn't quite feel the chemistry between Max and Sylvie, his love interest.

Also, there was a little too much melodrama for my liking.

Despite the NHS (National Health Service) being mentioned and the fact that it was set around the Cambridge area, one could be forgiven for thinking this was an American novel, the language and most things distinctly British were pretty much missing. I'm curious to see if British readers felt the same.

Despite my gripes, I'm glad I read this novel. For sure, we need more diversity in literature. I learnt a bit more about intersex people. While the execution and the editing could have been better, it's an engaging debut novel, well worth reading.

Debbie says

Omg this is the best book I've read in ages! A real page-turner! Can't believe the author is just 25! She is such a rising star.

I am recommending it to everyone. Like "We Need to Talk About Kevin" (by Lionel Shriver), there is no way I will ever forget this story.

The intersex (previously called hermaphrodite) hero is incredibly well drawn and sympathetic. The story is bizarre, thoughtful, intense, well-written, and fast-moving. I couldn't put it down. There is a disturbing scene in the beginning but it's not done sensationally and no one dies or is maimed. Still, that scene had me up most of the night. Just a warning in case you want something soothing to read before lights out. You won't find it here, but the reward of a super fantastic story makes staying up all night so worth it!

An excellent read. Highly highly recommend it.

karen says

max is an intersex teenager who identifies as male. when he becomes the victim of a sexual assault, the consequences are both physically and emotionally devastating and wayyy too much for a sixteen-year-old to deal with, especially one who has until then led such a charmed life.

despite having to carry this secret his whole life, max was remarkably well-adjusted before the attack. he is an accomplished athlete and student, his home life is fairly stable, despite two overachieving parents and what appears to be an autistic younger brother, and the girls... max is very pretty. and teenage girls love pretty boys. and max certainly takes advantage of the mutual appreciation of prettiness. however, because he has to keep his secret, it doesn't go further than making out and some quickly-curtailed groping. he gets the

reputation of being something of a lothario, even though he remains a virgin. people draw their own conclusions, and he's okay with that.

max doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about his future, or about what makes him different, until he is forced to do so in the wake of his rape. and then that's all he does.

and it is heartbreaking.

this is not a YA book, but i think that strong teen readers could appreciate it. there is a lot of specific medical information in it, which drags the narrative a bit for a reader accustomed to the quickfire YA pacing, but since there is so little (that i know of) in the way of intersex lit, it's probably something that could stand a little more exposure. i personally loved all the genetic information; i hadn't really considered all the possible variations of intersexuality, and i found it fascinating.

dana says in her review that this has been compared to Annabel, and i second her in declaring that it is not a similar read. at all. it is also nothing like Middlesex, and that is the end of the list of "intersex books i have read." they are all fine books (dana would disagree), but the intersex element is the only thing they have in common.

this one is very much a story of consequences, and the effects a rape has on a family, especially in a situation like this, where the complications are so much more severe. and, dear lord, the attack scene made me cringe so bad. rape scenes are bad enough, but considering the mechanics of this one, and the anatomical difficulties... horrible.

and it's worse because of the guilt max feels afterward, like maybe he was leading the attacker on, unknowingly. having been treated like a boy his whole life, and identifying as a boy, he never had to learn the perils of teenage girl-sexuality*. with his numerous make-out partners, he was never the initiator, and he let things happen without having to exert any effort. and the attack was similar. like many victims, he froze and afterwards, he blamed himself and it's just freaking gutting.

the story is told in a multi-narrative format, where voice and perspective are given to max, both of his parents, his brother, one of his doctors, and a girl who may be the best thing to ever happened to max. but it's everything - it's the struggles of parents between trying to protect their children but still allowing them autonomy, and the many mistakes that can occur along that path. it's about love and fear and self-perception. it's about the narrowing of options and the fear of being left behind. it's about secrets being kept and the sense that everyone knows these secrets but you.

and it's just powerful stuff, all around. i definitely recommend it for anyone interested in gender and identity, or just a story about an unusual situation and the way it crashes through a family and what is left at the end.

*and, because i know how goodreads works, i know that two years from now, someone i don't know will come on here and say "you are stupid and insensitive!! boys get raped, too!" and i know that. but it is less common. and girls learn early how to detect and deflect male interest, if need be. and i'm not just talking about sexual predators, but just general guarding of the castle. we know our effect and we learn how to protect ourselves from unwanted attention. it's not foolproof, sometimes it's good to have a more weaponry deterrent, but it's a survival skill. and we have it. and boys generally don't have to develop it to the same extent, so max's "was i leading him on??" worries are more poignant for that.

come to my blog!

Karen says

Thank you Elyse for this recommendation...

I really could not put this book down for long..it's about an intersex boy named Max and struggles he's going through, one especially terrible, kept me up all night reading because I had to know what happened to him, the story is told from a few different peoples POV.

Nancy says

Cross-posted at Outlaw Reviews and at Shelf Inflicted

I feel like a big old meany for not liking this book as much as my friends did.

It is wordy and repetitive, the multiple viewpoints drove me nuts, and the characters lacked substance and authenticity. Though I really admire Max's parents' decision not to make their child undergo surgery to correct his intersex condition, I could strangle them for being so secretive about it and allowing Max to grow up and navigate the difficult world of adolescence without any discussion or guidance about sex, relationships, pregnancy, or gender identity. The thing is, when parents don't talk about this stuff with their kids, they will learn from their friends, or the media, and likely pick up all kinds of incorrect information. What I didn't understand about Max, particularly in this age of information, was why he showed very little curiosity, didn't access the internet, or read books. And how does he manage to be the perfect son, the perfect brother, the perfect student, and the perfect boyfriend without any "issues"?

Yet, he is not. Very early on, a childhood friend sexually assaults 16-year-old Max. It is the consequences of that disturbing incident and the fact that his father is running for political office and doesn't need any negative publicity that make things very complicated for Max.

"I am a normal guy. I am a normal guy who would never have a problem like this. Like what? Like nothing. It doesn't exist. I am a normal sixteen-year-old. I listen to music. I wear my iPod. I laugh with my friends. I dream about kissing Sylvie Clark. I kiss Sylvie Clark. I am a brother. I am not a sister. I am not an everything. I am not a nothing. I have no big choices to make. I am a teenager, and my biggest job is to be normal. I can't look at myself in the mirror anymore, or at any reflection of mine in glass. And I don't know why."

What I did like about this book, in comparison to Annabel, is that it tackles the issues of gender identity with more sensitivity and compassion. I just wish that the author's research about intersexuality was presented throughout the novel organically and not solely through the voice of Max's doctor, which made it feel like forced teaching moments.

As I mentioned earlier, there were problems with characterization. The story was narrated by Max, as well as

his parents, his younger brother, Daniel, his girlfriend, Sylvie, and his doctor. Max's parents were caricatures rather than real people. His brother was way too clever for his 10 years and had more sophisticated vocabulary than anyone else. And Sylvie, who was quite an interesting character and very supportive of Max, didn't get nearly enough page time.

This book made me think and made me feel, but the prose lacked the grace and elegance of Annabel. I'm still waiting for the perfect book about intersexuality.

Whitney Atkinson says

This is one of my new favorite books of all time. I am astounded by it, and I started crying as soon as I began typing this review. This topic is so important and I learned so much throughout this book, and it was told in such a gripping and tragic way that I was nearly sobbing throughout the last half of this book. It deals with seriously tragic and infuriating topics, so trigger warning for rape. this is an unforgettable read and I recommend it to anyone who breathes!
