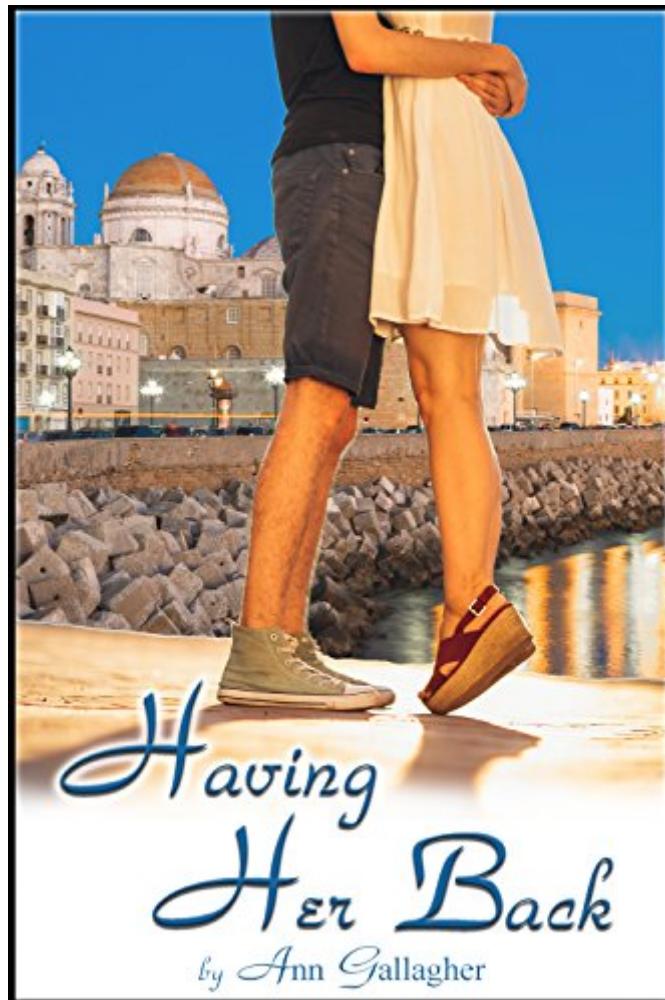


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Having Her Back



Synopsis

Trevor Larson is a Navy brat. He's used to moving every few years, and thanks to social media, he can stay in touch with the friends he leaves behind. But shortly after he leaves Okinawa, his best friend, Brad Gray, cuts off contact and disappears. Four years and two bases later, Brad resurfaces and announces his family is coming to Trevor's base in Spain. But a lot has changed in four years, and Trevor is stunned to find out Brad is now Shannon. Their reunion isn't quite what either of them had hoped for, but they quickly find their footing, both relieved to have each other back. Except nothing is ever all sunshine and roses. The military is a small world, and there's no keeping Shannon's transition a secret. Parents warn their kids away from her. She can't attend school on-base for fear of harassment or worse. And although her parents try to hide it, being ostracized by their only social circle while they're thousands of miles from home is taking a toll on them too. More and more, Shannon leans on Trevor. But she's also drawn to him, and he's drawn right back to her, feeling things he's never felt for anyone before. Trevor's scared, though. Not of dating a trans girl. Not of damaging his chaplain father's career or reputation. After finally getting his friend back, does he dare take things further and risk losing Shannon a second time?

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Customer Reviews

I feel I've been missing out, since the author, under her various pen names has written scores of books. I now feel like I have a mound of homework to catch up on. Yet this sweet & satisfying Y.A. romance was such a joyful introduction to her storytelling skill, I relish the task of catching up on the authors back catalog.

I just might be able to tell you how good this book is. I've read a lot of books, by a lot of disparate authors, and this book has definitely found a spot on my list of all time favorites. Yes, I am transgender, but that has little to do with how good this book is written, how fully the main characters are developed, how well the author sets each scene, and just how wonderfully she makes her point. Every chapter, every page, every sentence fits within the whole in an amazing way - and the whole is definitely more than the sum of its parts. This book should be required reading for all young adults, not to mention the families of any transgender children or teens. The conflict between religion and social morality is addressed in perhaps the best manner I have ever seen. There are too many people in this world who claim that gender dysphoria is a sickness that needs to be fixed or cured, and all together too many so-called Christians who try to use their religious beliefs to condemn transgender people. The author's character of the base chaplain addresses this issue fully and stands up for a transgender teen - using his own experiences in war and how he was changed by them to show the bigots that God loves all of us, and that if we truly love our children we love them without qualification. Buy this book, read it, and give it to your friends.

Trevor is a 16 y/o Navy brat on a base in Rota, Spain. He's grown up moving every few years when his dad, Pastor Larson, a Protestant chaplain, gets reassigned. Sometimes he meets up with friends he'd made in DOD schools at other bases, and that's the case in Rota. He's lived there a few years now, and a few of his better pals from the Okinawa base are now in Rota, but not his very best friend Brad. Brad shipped out from Okinawa and dropped off the face of the earth, it seemed, because he wouldn't respond to any of Trevor's emails, IMs or texts. It's been four years, and Trevor's stunned to get an email from Brad saying he's coming to Rota in a month, and he's changed. A lot. Trevor wonders if that's because Brad's gay and bad things happened when he moved

form Okinawa. Trevor's determined to be good friend to Brad, no matter what. Shannon is a transgender girl, who used to be Brad. It's been a hard four years but she's transitioned well, and feels good in her body for the first time, perhaps, ever. She's had a lot of backlash in her personal life, though her parents completely support her, even if they all suspect her transition may have caused her dad not to make his promotion that past two years. Still, she's being homeschooled, and trying to keep a low profile; unlikely in the small circle of families that make up overseas bases. Trevor is stunned when he meets Shannon, and pretty angry she didn't trust him enough to divulge her big secret before they met in person—or at any time in the past four years. His reaction isn't excellent, but Shannon interprets his swift departure as a rejection of her new self, and that's a stumbling block. Trevor does make it up to Shannon, and Shannon fits into their group of Okinawa friends without too much issue. There are some quakes in the personnel, however, and Shannon's the center of some anti-trans sentiment that's sweeping the base, including members of Pastor Larson's congregation. It's upsetting for all, but Trevor's more confused about his changing feelings for Shannon. They shared a deep friendship as kids, and now when he thinks back, he doesn't see Brad in those memories, he sees Shannon, and he's not sure what to do with his growing attraction to her. What if they break up and become enemies, as some of his buddies have with their exes? This book is told from Trevor's and Shannon's point-of-views and that's really interesting. I liked how culturally-competent the characters' inner thoughts, actions and dialogue are. These are kids who have fought hard to maintain friendships, and they aren't willing to toss Shannon aside because of her transition. In fact, all of Trevor's pals accept her wholeheartedly into their group, and their girlfriends invite Shannon on shopping trips and makeovers. The kids also stand up for Shannon when she's accosted in public or put-down in conversations they overhear. Trevor's mistakes with Shannon come from his own insecurity, and aren't related to her transition. The intimacy that develops between Trevor and Shannon is cautious and tender. Trevor just got his best friend back—he doesn't want to mess things up by being a bad boyfriend. He's never even dated a girl before; realistically he's sure he'll mess up and they'll stop speaking again. Shannon's never dated and she is insecure about her body, and how a partner would view her body. It leads to some discord between them, that has a good resolution in the end. This is a YA read, so expect YA-levels of steam, and nothing more. That said, there are some unique experiences here due to Shannon's physiology and that provokes some valid and frank

discussion. I liked how sensitively that was handled, and the introspection both Trevor and Shannon demonstrate is valuable for people who have concerns about trans-persons and their relationships. Shannon didn't expect to find a partner who could love her as she is, and has a reasonable fear of fetishization, though she doesn't think Trevor sees her as a fetish. She's also nervous that he'll be unhappy with her physical state, and that's an anxiety-triggering situation. Trevor's more afraid of being a bad partner, given his lack of experience. It was really endearing and felt realistic. The military aspect of this story likewise felt well-informed, and I could absolutely see all the sights in Rota and nearby, just as Shannon did. Yet another locale to put on my travel bucket-list. Readers who enjoy teen romance, or transgender stories, will really enjoy this one. I know I did.

So, yeah, these two were just a barrel full of cute. Like puppies. Like puppies with crushes on other puppies and who haven't quite mastered the art of puppy-flirting. They were freaking adorable, is all I'm saying. I'm not a huge reader of YA stories. Mostly because all the emo-cliches that tend to permeate the less well written of the genre get on my nerves like no ones business. But I try to review as many trans-centric stories as I can for the blog, and I am a HUGE fan of this author and her military-themed stories. So I gave it a chance. And to no ones shock, Ann Gallagher gives good story. My biggest pet peeve with YA is that for some reason most of the time the teens in these stories don't act like any human being I have ever met. They are usually one-toned, and carbon-copies of each other. Here, they actually feel like humans. With multiple layers—not all of them great, but at least real—and no one is ever just a cliche to be used as a placeholder in the story. Trevor, while later fully supportive of Shannon, does not have the greatest first reaction. It may not be for the reasons that Shannon thinks, but Trevor is not automatically spouting acceptance and Kumbiyahs. I like that he messes up. And I like that later on he has doubts about things, but is always willing to figure out what is the right road to take. Shannon is also a nice mix of insecurity and strength. Honestly I have no idea how I would have handled knowing I was trans at such a young age (let alone coming out), but if it is anything like doing it a decade later, it is not always pretty. I liked that this story didn't ignore the bad parts of being trans in this society, but also didn't make her nothing but those bad parts. The support she has from her friends and family really helped it not feel hopeless. This book wasn't nearly the angst-fest I thought it was going to be, actually. Yeah there are some real jerks in this book, but it never becomes about that. At least not just that. It was much more focused on Trevor and Shannon as a couple of teens falling for each other. And their situation might be a

little more tricky than your average teenagers, but a lot of it was familiar. Plus, omg, they were just so adorable when they trying to figure out how to flirt and do all the teenage-dating stuff. When they held hands for the first time I think I just about died of the cutes. They made reading this story so easy. I also appreciated the take on Christianity in this book. It doesn't skew one way or the other on the spectrum, but it does a pretty decent job of showing both the light and dark side of religion. And Trevor's dad was a pretty dang awesome character. I'm usually a bit leery when reading about religion (especially one I know personally) because it tends to fall into cliche if the author is not careful, but here it came across as very real. I know people who are both as kind as Trevor's dad, and hateful as some of the congregants. The book doesn't leave you in doubt as to what side is in the right, but it also doesn't deny that the other side exists as well. This book ended up being a really great read. The story and characters were all handled really well, and I found reading about trans girl to be a nice break from my normal trend of focusing on the more trans-male characters. I also wouldn't mind in the least if we were to get a sequel about Trevor and Shannon. I'd love to see how their relationship progresses past these first few steps. All in all, I highly recommend this. Not only for fans of YA, but for everyone who is looking for a good story about falling in love for the first time.

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