

I Loved You First

by Reena Jacobs

Self-published

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A lovely young adult coming-of-age story.

Alexandra (Alex) and Seth have known each other since first grade. While she knows he is gay, Alex really likes him. She wishes she could change his orientation, but it has become very apparent that he cannot change.

Now they are in college, also together, and Alex is still his sidekick. Seth uses her as his beard while simultaneously flirting with other coeds and playing super-jock so no one guesses he is gay. Still, he is attracted to guys, and one football player in particular. He risks being found out, although he tries to cover up his interest. Meanwhile, Alex is jealous of Seth's girlfriends – even while she knows he is gay.

The fear of rejection on Seth's part is almost universal when a closeted gay person is trying to make their way in an unwelcoming society. It seems apparent in the early part of the story that Seth doesn't quite realize what he is doing to Alex when he uses her as his "beard," even though he uses other women deliberately for the same purpose. Meanwhile, Alex's misplaced affection for him prevents her from knowing herself and truly growing up. The relationship between her fear of losing Seth as a friend and Seth's fear of losing his friends and family holds them both back.

This is really Alex's story of accepting the changes in her relationship with Seth and her realization that she needs a life of her own. It is well done; the reader may not feel comfortable with Alex in the beginning, but her growth toward maturity makes her more likeable – and real – as the story progresses.

Ms. Jacobs weaves the scenery into the prose and dialog so smoothly I can almost see and experience the environment. It probably helps that I did have a fraternity in my college experience. I also really like the use of popular songs to enhance the expression of Alex's feelings.