

Charlie Craggs

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Charlie Craggs is an award-winning trans activist...and now author, apparently. She is the founder of Nail Transphobia and has been travelling all over the UK nailing transphobia since 2013 and has just gone global, taking her campaign stateside in 2017. She uses the proceeds from her campaign to run free self-defence classes for trans and non-binary femmes. Charlie topped the *Observer's* New Radicals list of social innovators in Britain, was awarded a Marie Claire Future Shaper Award in 2017 and has been called one of the most influential and inspirational LGBTQ people in the UK by both *The Guardian* and the *Independent*. She has starred in campaigns for Selfridges, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and Stonewall, and has written and spoken about trans issues on the news (BBC, ITV and Sky), for numerous publications (*Vogue*, *Dazed and Confused* and *The Guardian*) and at the Houses of Parliament.

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To my trans sisters,

So this is the last letter in the book. I mean naturally I was gonna leave myself to last and be the Beyoncé (even though I'm definitely a Michelle compared to all the incredible women in this book).

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No, but seriously though, I wanted to be last so I could think very carefully about the message I leave you with as you finish this book. Initially, I thought practical transition tips would be most useful to you; like advice about presenting and passing as female – styling advice, make-up tips, how to cover a 5 o'clock shadow, etc. – the physical side of transition – but then I realized, as useful as they might be, this is what we get caught up in so often and what our entire transitions and lives often become centred around. When what really matters is what lies behind the clothes, behind the makeup...behind the 5 o'clock shadow (the struggle is real). So this is what I want to talk about and what I want you to take away from this book.

Now I'm pretty early on in transition, so I've still got a lot to learn myself. I *still* make massive fashion faux pas on the regular, *still* wear way too much make-up some days and look like a RuPaul's Drag Race contestant popping down the corner shop, and I *still* have to shave my damn face every morning even after over a year of laser – I told you, the struggle is real, sis. In fact, thinking about it, as I finish this book, I'm starting to wonder why I ever felt qualified to write it in the first place...but something I *have* learned in my few years since accepting myself as trans is the importance of just that: *accepting myself*.

I've known I was transgender since I was about four. It wasn't until I was 21 that I *accepted* I was transgender though. This is because I didn't want to *be* transgender. I didn't think life would be worth living with how hard it would inevitably be, but it got to the point where I was so unhappy living a lie and so dysphoric in my male body, that it wasn't worth living that way either. I truly hated myself. Then one summer night, as I stood in my bathroom contemplating suicide, I looked at myself in the mirror, staring into my eyes. They were sad, broken, dead...but they were also

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girl's eyes, and for the first time in my life I truly saw myself and I finally accepted myself as transgender.

As soon as I stopped fighting who I was and accepted myself, everything changed. Not physically – I had to wait almost two years to get onto hormones, thanks to our healthcare system here in the UK, but without even poppin' a single 'mone, without any surgery or laser, without even presenting as female, my perception of myself and my relationship with myself totally changed because I finally *accepted* myself. Accepting myself didn't mean I started to like the things I previously hated about myself but it meant I loved myself unconditionally, regardless of the things I didn't like. This both changed and saved my life.

Loving and accepting yourself doesn't mean you can't change the things you don't like about yourself. Surgery is a necessary part of many trans people's journeys to becoming comfortable in their body, my journey included. I've just had facial feminisation surgery (FFS) and though I'm happy with the results – it will help ease my dysphoria and make navigating the world a hell of a lot easier – I want to point out that all that's changed after FFS is my face. Nothing else has changed. I still make questionable sartorial choices, still wear way too much make-up, and still have to shave my damn face every day (TWICE SOMETIMES). My point is that after FFS you might love your face, but this doesn't mean you'll love *yourself* if you didn't already before surgery, and really that's much more important and should be your priority. Your beauty will fade (yes, girl, even after facial feminisation), but self-love and self-acceptance are forever. So don't just make things like laser hair-removal and saving for your surgery priorities; make loving and accepting yourself a priority. Make it your first priority, your main priority. There's no excuse; unlike hormones and

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surgery, there's no waiting list or price tag, so start today. Start now. Put this damn book down, look in the mirror and say, 'I love myself' and keep saying it every day until you start to mean it and believe it.

It is vital that we do love ourselves as trans women, because so many other people don't. In fact they *hate* us. Trans women, especially trans women of colour, are being slain. Literally. And when we're not being murdered, we are being assaulted verbally and physically in the streets, we are being mocked in the media, we are being rejected by our families and friends, we are being fired from our jobs, we are being put in men's prisons, we are having our education stolen from us, we are having our rights taken from us. You don't *need* to hate yourself; there are enough people doing that for you already, sis. In a world that hates us, learning to love yourself as a trans person is a revolutionary act.

When I began presenting as female, my life got so much harder in so many ways. The amount of transphobia I faced on a daily basis was debilitating and I was scared to leave the house most days. But although my life got so much harder, I was happier than I'd ever been because I was finally being true to myself and, more importantly, I finally loved and accepted myself. If you truly love and accept yourself, it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about you, says about you, or does to you. If you've got yourself and I mean *truly* got yourself, that's all you need, sis. This is the most valuable lesson that I have learned and the lesson I want you to take away from this book.

So this book ends here, and your journey begins. It will be the journey of a lifetime, full of ups and downs. You will experience the lowest of lows but you will also experience happiness like you've never imagined, true happiness that only comes with

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living your truth. It will be a long journey, and there will be days when you feel a million miles from where and who you want to be, but on those days, remind yourself of the million miles you have already walked to be where and who you are now.

You're on your way and we're all right behind you.

I love you, sis,

Charlie xx