

**Reviewer Username:** Anonymous

**School:** El Dorado High

**Grade:** Sophomore

**Book Title:** *If He Had Been with Me*

**Book Author:** Laura Nowlin

**Rate 1-5 (1-lowest to 5-highest):** 4

*If He Had Been With Me* by Laura Nowlin is a poignant young adult novel that explores the profound bond between two childhood friends, Autumn and Finny. As they navigate the ups and downs of adolescence, their relationship is put to the test by family struggles, romantic entanglements, and the unpredictable challenges of growing up. The story delicately balances heartwarming moments of connection with the heavy realities of life, leaving readers deeply invested in Autumn and Finn's journey. With its relatable characters and emotionally resonant themes, this book offers a bittersweet exploration of the power of friendship, the pain of loss, and the profound impact a single person can have on our lives.

I was captivated by the raw, honest portrayal of the complex relationship between the two protagonists, Autumn and Finny. Nowlin did an exceptional job capturing the nuances of their deep bond, from the tender moments to the gut-wrenching emotional turmoil. What I admired was the author's refusal to shy away from darker themes, like grief, regret, and the fragility of life. However, I felt the pacing occasionally dragged, particularly in the middle sections. My favorite character was Finny due to the incredible depth of his portrayal. His quiet strength, fierce loyalty, and profound sensitivity made him a complex, multifaceted protagonist that felt achingly real, and his emotional journey was arguably the heart of the novel.

I would absolutely recommend this book. Nowlin's masterful character development and ability to keep readers on their toes with plot twists really sets this book apart. Readers who appreciate nuanced, character driven narratives and aren't afraid of stories that pack an emotional punch would likely be drawn to this book. Fans of *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven may also enjoy this novel as both books place

a strong emphasis on developing rich, complex protagonists and exploring the intricacies of their relationships.