

## from “The Boys”

It was a clear, starry night. We lay on the lawn outside the greenhouse, resting our heads on each other’s stomachs. Momo had taken off her safari hat, her hair rippled over my tiger-chest. The flowers around us had opened up, their soft interiors glowing in the darkness. She looked at us through the doorway, her face was open and smooth and it made me think of butterflies, how their pointy proboscises pierced sacs of nectar, how they sucked it in. I propped myself up on my elbow and raised my glass of tea with a practiced gesture.

“Would it please the gentlemen to add some true drops to the brew?”

I moved Momo’s head off my stomach. She looked up with surprise when I wrapped my coat around me, walked up to the flower and started inspecting the teeming vessels in the center of its head. They were like small blisters protected by petals, straining and aching and filled with something that had to get out.

Bella, in her unwieldy gorilla costume, stood up. She had been in high spirits the whole night, alternating between her gorilla howl and howling laughter, and now she was so hoarse and tired that she swayed as she made her way to the greenhouse.

“Oh yes! New life will course through our bodies, and the stars will take our secrets to the grave!”

Then Momo giggled. She couldn’t help it with Bella striding so comically across the flagstones. The pants of the gorilla costume had hitched themselves up, revealing the tube socks she was wearing. But Bella gave her a stern look and Momo got hold of herself and said:

“Let us make a pact, gentlemen. Let us brew a Magical Potion and drink together. Let us never speak of our drink to any mortal, whatever may come!”

And as she spoke, she raised her glass of tea to the heavens, and we raised ours as well. Bella skipped forward toward me and carefully pulled the flower’s head down.

“Yes, I swear, I swear!”

We swore our oaths and I pierced one of the small blisters with the claw of my index finger. Thick nectar seeped out.

One drop for each glass.

We toasted. Then we gulped the tea down because suddenly it tasted irresistibly sweet and spicy.

And when we looked up from our glasses, when we looked at each other’s faces, a deep silence fell over us.

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Without saying a word, we walked through the garden, into Bella’s bedroom. We stood in front of the mirrored doors of her wardrobe and undressed. Gingerly, we peeled our garments off in slow motion. We let them fall, gazing tenderly at our reflection, tenderly down at our bodies. We could

barely breathe, looking at what was in the mirror, our eyes did all the talking, as if they were asking it: “Is it true, what we’re seeing, is this really happening, or will we wake up and vomit and remember everything as if it had been a dream?”

The three of us stood there, naked, in the bedroom of the terraced house with smoky mirrored doors. Our breasts were gone and the roundness of our hips had straightened out, the tendons and muscles of our shoulders and arms were different, visible under our skin. Our throats and necks were wider, and in the middle of our throats were Adam’s apples as large as ripe plums. I swallowed and felt how it sat in my throat, a heavy, bobbing float. Our stomachs had hollowed, the fat under our skin was gone, and we didn’t have a slit between our legs anymore. The hair was still there, sparse and so delicate that it hurt when stroked against the grain, and beneath that little bush, between our thighs, we each had a penis. Soft skin covered the glans and under it hung a wrinkled sack of skin with two oval stones inside.

Momo was the first to open her mouth, her voice was rougher than usual and broke with a screech at the last syllable.

“My God.”

She grabbed it and it filled with a rush of blood. I watched how her balls contracted and she opened her eyes wide.

“It’s like, like . . .”

I wrapped my hand around my own and felt a faint tickle in my stomach.

“Like a baby bird.”

When I spoke, my voice scratched my throat, as if I had swallowed a strand of hair. We stood holding our new lives in our hands. We looked at our new bodies, we flexed and stretched our new limbs and we felt something fresh in our blood. We gazed at our boy-bodies, reached out our hands, touched the surface of the mirror and our eyes lit up, flashing like lightning in the glass.

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I ran down the street through the night. My legs were made of power and speed and strength. I felt the soles of my feet hit the asphalt and every step felt like the bounce of a trampoline, a leap into the air, the breathtaking feeling of being able to fly. Like being born again, as if my body had lost all memory of the past, and had stepped onto an invisible, unknown path.

I ran and Bella and Momo ran behind me. They laughed and shouted, and I recognized their voices, even though they didn’t sound like themselves. Momo caught up with me. Her boy-face barely resembled her but I could still tell it was her. It was in the eyes, perhaps, or in her facial expressions, or how her smile split her face as she ran past me. She pranced and stretched her arms into the air, as if the whole world suddenly was there to do her bidding.

We arrived in the center of town. The neon lights glittered before us. We walked three-wide. We didn't talk, we didn't need to talk. I felt the wonder pounding inside me, I listened to Momo drinking in the air and scents, I watched Bella flex her muscles.

We came across boys. Our eyes met theirs for a fraction of a second and then they sort of just looked past us, past our eyes. It was strange. No slick, slippery looks, no desire, no grinning mouths, nothing that crept under our skin and sunk its teeth in. Just a glassy, distant look that neither looked at nor looked away.

We came across girls and we didn't know what to do with their glances. We instinctively looked down at the ground and I thought that this reality we were walking around in was madness, that what had happened to us was impossible, that it absolutely couldn't have happened, and yet it had. It wasn't a dream, it wasn't a game. Strangers looked at us and their gazes were different. Our new bodies were reflected in them. It was so unbelievable, the dizzying thought took hold of me and left me reeling. I had to lean on Momo's shoulder in order to steady myself, and Momo put his arm around me. An arm around my waist, my arm around his neck and our bodies, that feeling, Momo's body hard and boy-soft against mine—another hole in reality opened up, so like an abyss that I immediately let go of him and laughed it off. It was a nervous laugh that unleashed a rollicking energy into the air.

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