

Under 25 winner 2018 OutStanding LGBTIQA+ Short Story Competition

M/F/X by Threse Vargas

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

It took a minute. There was a bemused stare before an equally bemused reply.

“A... girl? Why else would I be here? This is an all-girls school.”

“We don’t believe you.”

“Okay.”

Straightforward. Succinct. Brief. That is, until the teacher took notice. The students involved were held back. The teacher leaned forward and asked the same question.

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

This time, a more confident answer. “A girl.”

“Then lift up your skirt.”

Years later, someone new asked the question.

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

A tug at the short tuft of hair in a short haircut. That same bemused stare. That same bemused reply. Instead of talking, there was the demonstrative tug at the school uniform skirt as a response. The one who asked the question nodded and turned to their friend.

“I told you she was a girl!”

She... Girl... He... Boy...

Those were words and yet...

How pivotal could a single syllable be? There was no grasp, no attachment, no connection to any of these words. Was there something wrong? Was it normal to feel nothing at words that mean everything?

From that point on, whenever that same question came up, different answers were confidently given out.

In IT class:

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

“Depends.”

“Alright, that definitely means girl.”

Assumptions. A male-dominated field. No girls allowed. But they are not talking to a girl.

On the internet:

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

“I’m a boy.”

“Let me tell you about all the girls I wish I fucked.”

Pictures of breasts, pouty lips, and spread legs. Dimly lit screens and sticky right hands. Let’s pretend this never happened.

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

“I’m a girl.

“Let me tell you about all the ways I would fuck you.”

Fake calls, hidden faces, muted microphones. Faint pants are heard on the other side but are they real? I wish I could see you again- BLOCKED.

At a strange man’s apartment:

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

“I’m a boy.”

“Let me see under your shirt.”

“Not yet. Kiss me first.”

He was gentle and took his time, but the pleasure came at different paces. When he saw under the shirt, his touches became softer, more hesitant, almost betrayed. How could something so spunky feel so plush? So vulnerable? So... feminine?

Feminine... Masculine...

Something was awakening, something... big...

A short, rambunctious boy used to haunt my dreams. He called himself Gerard and sat beside me after performing with his band. “Are you a boy or a girl?”

“B-” The sound cut off, the letter bounced from my lips onto the floor, useless. I stared back at him, jaw slack.

This was it, the awakening.

“Neither.” The obligation of picking a side fizzled out of existence. It was replaced with relief, with freedom, with satisfaction. Gerard nodded and placed an arm around my shoulder.

“You don’t have to pick a side. You can make a side of your own.”

And that’s what I did when I woke up.

It takes time to build a side. It may look like other sides, but it is my side nonetheless. I wouldn’t choose any other for the world.

There are many others like me, making our own sides in this big wide world, but we all have something to say...

We will rise up. We will take up space. We will make ourselves known. We are nothing like you’ve ever seen before.

And we will be glorious.