



Girls Lost

Jessica Schiefauer

Saskia Vogel, Translator

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Self-identity, status, and gender are at the core of *Girls Lost*, Jessica Schiefauer's bold and compelling story in which three teenage girls who are social outcasts transcend boundaries by temporarily transforming into boys.

Kim, the inquisitive narrator, is lanky and afflicted with eczema; Momo, a clever artist, is spurned as a bohemian outsider; and Bella, a botanist who nurtures exotic plants in her greenhouse, is overweight and shy. At school, the girls are harassed and even violated; as friends, they create a private world that is inventive and playful.

Their transformation comes from a mysterious flower in Bella's greenhouse. Sipping its nectar, the girls become boys until the next morning. They move through the nighttime world with newfound ease. But this freedom has a dark side, too, and the girls face a sinister domain of gangs and aggression.

Momo and Bella shed their male identities like discarded costumes. Kim, however, is intoxicated by the power of her male form and is infatuated with Tony, a gang leader. Kim drinks the nectar night after night, distancing her girlfriends, as Tony draws her deeper into a world of crime and danger.

The story's tension is palpable, even as its magical realism and lyrical prose conjure a timeless, fairy-tale quality: the enchanting flower "rose like a queen under the glass roof" and her head "was sturdy and held high and seemed to be looking up at the night sky."

Girls Lost is captivating as its three leads explore the universal challenges of teenage angst, conflicts between perception and reality, and the power of another's gaze to free or entrap you.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2020)

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