

growing from the ground up

by iztopher

Ean and Iya become Ean and Iya.

For heyhowdyhello. For the ficlet prompt "Ean and Iya coming out to each other".

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Ean and Iya had been inseparable for longer than they had been Ean and Iya.

Perhaps, under different circumstances, with different people, they would say, *I had always been Ean*, *I had always been Iya*, and in all the ways that it mattered, it would have been true. But Ean and Iya built themselves together. They were the first to know one another's dreams, the first to speak each other's names.

"Do you ever wish you were the other gender?" she asked one day.

"Of course! Who doesn't?"

When eventually-Ean said he wished his mother would cut his hair shorter, eventually-Iya had stolen her mother's sewing scissors and hacked off his pigtails with them. She didn't regret the scolding for a second (although she did internalize that sewing scissors were for fabric only). And in return, when eventually-Ean gained weight and grew out of his skirts, he snuck them away to his best friend who had always marveled at how they twirled.

"I wish boys could wear skirts," she had complained, although her voice was more soft than indignant.

"You're doing it right now!"

"You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I do. Although I don't get what you see in them." He laughed. "They're the only thing you think is fun that I don't."

When they walked together around town, sometimes, the older elves behind them would talk. Only kind, warm things; Elfwood was too small a town for

anything else. They would say, *look at the boy and girl over there, holding hands, how sweet*, and when one of them would reply by gripping their interlocked fingers tighter in nerves, it wasn't embarrassment.

"How do they know which is which, anyways?" He asked once he was confident they were out of earshot.

"They don't," she replied. "They're guessing." Her tone was warm. "I guess we are, too."

His heart skipped a beat. "What do you mean?"

"Well, we can't read their minds. For all we know, they think you're the boy and I'm the girl."

They shared everything, so that not-yet-Ean had a boyhood and not-yet-Iya had a girlhood, or at least pieces of one to cherish and nurture, long before either of them realized that was what they needed. Maybe it was how they learned they needed it to begin with. They saw in each other what they wanted to be, and found in each other someone who would help them get there, without reservation.

"Do you ever wish we could run away and start off fresh?"

She had never been so reckless. "I mean, sure. But I didn't think I'd hear that from you."

"Wouldn't you want to introduce yourself over from the beginning? Be exactly who you wanted to be?" She wrung her hands nervously.

"Maybe we can do that anyways."

She looked down. "It'd be nice, though," she said, "if no one ever knew you differently."

By the time it came for the two to properly introduce themselves, it wasn't really a surprise to either of them. If would-become-Ean was a boy, it made sense that would-become-Iya was a girl. Being the elf boy and girl walking together holding hands had always felt natural, after all, if not always how they expected.

They laid down together in the grass of the woods, close enough to the giant beehive to hear the white noise of buzzing behind them, but far enough to not fear being stung. The woods had always been the most comfortable place for sharing secrets. They were by themselves, not over-aware of the drifting voices from their home hallway or windows, but not alone,

surrounded by the whispers of the trees and breeze. Would-become-Ean was always the braver of the two, even before he came into himself, so he spoke first.

"I keep thinking about what you said," he said, "about running away."

Her eyes were wide. "Oh, no," she said, "I could never actually-"

"Wait, hear me out. I don't want to run away. But I don't want to... stay here, like this, my entire life. I want to start over, as someone else. Or a better version of myself, I think."

She reached her hand out to his and interlocking their fingers. She could have said, *I can't imagine anyone better than you*, and she would have meant it with her whole heart, but the feeling was too familiar for her to correct. "Who would that be?"

"Mostly the same, I think," he said, "but... I've wished I was a boy my whole life. Nobody's ever given me the option, so I never thought I could. But what if I just... told my mom why I like short hair, and told the town I wanted a new name? What if I just was one?"

She squeezed his hand tighter than she intended on reflex. *Could it be that simple? That easy?* She realized that she'd briefly stopped breathing, and she'd waited much longer to reply than he deserved. "You could be," she said.

He sat up from the grass and smiled wider than she'd ever seen him before. "I will," he said, and he puffed his chest out a little bit as he did, and would-become-Iya would have laughed if she wasn't afraid he'd take it the wrong way. "Everything anyone has ever done, *somebody* had to do it first. This one may as well be me."

She sat up, too, to meet his eyes. "You're going to do a great job at being a boy," she said, and then felt so awkward she considered crushing herself back down in the grass. "I'd know. I've been terrible at it my whole life."

"I've never thought you were terrible at anything. Don't be so hard on yourself." He frowned. "What about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You were the one who wanted to run away and start fresh. What would you do?"

She looked down at her hands. "I..." There was blood on her thumb. She

didn't even realize she'd been digging her nails into her skin.

Everything anyone has ever done, somebody had to do it first.

"I would be a girl," she said, finally.

He smiled at her again, although she was too nauseous to meet his gaze.

"Okay, I amend my statement," he said. "You've done a terrible job at being a boy. Being a girl will suit you much better."

With anyone else, she may have asked, *do you really mean it?*, but she could never doubt him, so instead she matched his smile and asked him, "when do we start?" There was no question about the fact that they were doing it together. That much was only natural.

"I think we started a long time ago. Unofficially, anyways."

"When do we tell other people?"

"Well, we need better names, first of all. Would you find mine?"

She was dumbfounded. The idea that someone would ask her to do such a thing seemed impossible, much less the best friend she'd long admired for his easygoing confidence. Children in Elfwood were named by their parents, or one of the Elders. Never by someone as inexperienced and uncertain as her. "You trust me with it," she said, awed. It was him, so it wasn't a question.

"More than anyone," he said.

She nodded and looked him over, and swore to herself that whoever she was about to become today, it would be someone worthy of this honor. "Then I want you to decide mine," she said.

"Count of ten?" he suggested.

Oh, dear . She swallowed down her nerves. "No, I can't think that fast."

He laughed. "We each decide, then reveal it on the count of three?"

"I like that."

They sat in near silence together, breathing in the fresh air, the distant scent of honey. Their knees almost touched, until he knocked his against hers more deliberately and made her giggle in spite of herself. By the time their nerves were centered and their minds were made up, they met each other's eyes and nodded before they spoke together.

"Three. Two. One."

Their voices stayed in unison for a syllable longer, the *ee* sound, as he said, "Iya", and she said, "Ean", and they both looked at each other and laughed on reflex.

"I like it," Ean said, leaning back on his elbows. It felt right to hear, although maybe that was just because it was coming from her voice. "Ean," he repeated, and decided it felt right to say, too.

"I like mine, too," Iya said. *It's beautiful*, she thought, and she couldn't help but wonder if that was how he saw her. "Iya. They match."

"As they should."

Iya felt more like herself than she could ever remember, with a new name and the unspoken promise from the boy who gave it to her. "You're right," she said.

Ean stood up, and reached out his hand to hers. She took it and let him pull her up. "We don't have to tell everyone else right away, but when we're ready, we should do it together."

She nodded. "I don't know if I'll ever feel ready," she admitted, "but I want to do it anyways. Maybe not *right* now, but... soon."

His smile was as encouraging as it was charmingly lopsided. "That's the spirit, Iya."

Her chest buzzed at the sound of her name. "I couldn't get there without you, Ean."

And so, hand-in-hand, Ean and Iya walked into Elfwood for the first time together.

Notes:

Oak (who gave me the prompt) shared a headcanon a while back that Ean and Iya named each other, so I decided to write that into the fic! My personal headcanon is probably still that they each picked their name and made sure they matched, but I wanted to tailor the prompt accordingly and explore this option <3

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