

**GOOD
BOYS**

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Published by Tin House Books, Portland, Oregon

Distributed by W. W. Norton & Company

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fernandes, Megan, author.

Title: Good boys / Megan Fernandes.

Description: Portland, Oregon : Tin House Books, [2020]

Identifiers: LCCN 2019031495 | ISBN 9781947793408 (paperback) |
ISBN 9781947793491 (ebook)

Classification: LCC PS3606.E7328 A6 2020 | DDC 811/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019031495>

First U.S. Edition 2020

Printed in the USA

Interior design by Jakob Vala

www.tinhouse.com

GOOD BOYS

POEMS

MEGAN FERNANDES



TIN HOUSE BOOKS / Portland, Oregon

*For my sisters:
Micaela & Mia & Judith*

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I

IN WHICH I BECOME A MYTHOLOGY AND ALSO, EXECUTED

Sometimes I could see my parents
spiraling in the Americas,

in the opera rooms and dives,
in the bodega where the VCR

played Bollywood in Northeast Philly
near where my dad worked.

In January, I will visit India
and fail there too, because

I am childless
or because I am in America

where they gun down
babies

or because
I took too long

to come back. Somedays
I close my eyes and imagine

a body of land
without relatives, like Iceland

and her flagrant
light, flaring in dance

with those magnetic poles—
a green current whistling

across my eyelids.
I always arrive a little broken

to those scenes,
bundled, like a seer

peering into a bucket
and I want to throw myself

in and come out
dainty, come out graceful.

Grace is a word that stings.
Because if you don't have it,

you are not a lady.

And if you are not a lady,
then what are you.

Chucked meat.
Beast girl on speed.

My parents hardly ever let me go
on sleepovers

to any girl's house
unless she was an immigrant.

I had a Greek friend.
And Chinese.

We had curfews and got slapped
hard for mouthing off.

We grew into dragons
and ate too many pills in college

groveling on a floor
that could barely pass

for a forest
like a centaur that has been shot

and pulled along
by rope—

the weight of the horse's body,
offending everyone.

INDIGO

We have called the goat Oona, and she is bleeding out a kid. The river like felt eels, graveyards like cities. My niece and I sit and watch Oona miscarry, the drop of soft head, her gaze transfixed on an astral plane, pleading. This is the countryside in France. These animals. Night bunnies. Pepped chickens with their snapping eggs. Oona is in the starlight among them. The thistle casts her face in blue, and Indigo asks: Does this happen to humans, too? Four streets, one called Rue du Midi, where I would push my niece in a stroller past a war memorial with eighteen names. Yes, it happens to humans, too. The kid is born on thistle spikes. Oona licks his face. When we walk home, Indigo is charging into black. I strain to hear her feet. I don't tell her about the phone call, how we held our breath across the Atlantic. She would be an Iris or an Indigo my sister told me. If she would be at all.

AMSTERDAM

Sometimes the mythologies of a city are true
like when I see a blond man bob for red apples
selling records side by side with a black cat wound
in a cushion, deep in dream. Josh says he does not want
to go see Anne Frank, that that kind of tourism
depresses him, the one where the demonstration of grief
is like a voyeuristic tug at suffering
that is not yours to possess. *How do you eat a meal after that.*
He seems sad today. *How do you stay alive.*
When he was young, he visited Auschwitz and told
me not to go because it had a gift shop and that
made him angry and nobody knows how to grieve
in public, how to make public space for loss
unless you can make money off of it but really
there is something else to his anger, the child
abandoned, the residue of a young girl's life turned
into a petting zoo—this he cannot take.

I have become like my mother where I don't
need sleep in a new city anymore; immune
to time shifts, I just wander and buy fruit
and almonds and a good loaf
of bread and today, some fresh juice, skipping museums
though I want to go back to see Anne Frank's

house this time, because this time,
I am a woman and last time, I was a girl
and when you are a girl, all you see is another girl
and when you are a woman, all you see is history
careering towards a girl whom you cannot protect.

In my Amsterdam apartment, I find a ceramic plate
with its rim edge folded in five places and a violet petal
has been painted at its compression. In it, I pour
some olive oil and a little bit of salt and sit
on the white couch overlooking
the neon-green blooms gathering on a branch
outside the large window directly facing an apartment
of a bookish couple, the kind who forget
they have bodies and think they are better
than those who are bodily
which is most everyone else.

But the girl in the couple is lying
and misses the small animal inside her
crying for breakfast.

What she needs is food, not Yeats.

What she needs is your fingers.

The apartment has tulips and pink Depression glass
and cacti of all heights like skyscrapers.

I am thinking of Harlem in Amsterdam.
Sometimes I go there to hide.
I go there to eat at a bistro owned by a lady
named Fay. In Harlem, there is Fay
and she is older with light eyes and her whole
family owns this place and her grandson works
behind the bar and he's just seventeen and a soccer
player and this week got into Dartmouth and I ask
if she thinks he'll be happy, being a black
kid at Dartmouth, but Fay is Queen Fay
and knows better than to answer questions
about race at dinnertime especially in front
of all these nice people.

In Amsterdam, the cold sunlight of April
grows the dandelions in the gutter and when
you get to 263 to see Anne Frank's house
(only from the outside) the building is not as tall
as you remember and you wonder what the ceilings
were like for a young girl and you imagine
her face, I imagine her face and think
maybe something bad happened to Josh
when he was a kid and you see her
face in the window, her face lit up in story,
her face in love and in fear, and you are in Amsterdam
when the American president bombs Syria.

You say American president as if you are not
an American and as if he is not your president.
You promised that he would not make his way
into any poem, but here he is bombing
Syria and here he is in your poem
and here is her face spreading all over
Europe and here is your face, Anne,
spreading all over Europe and here is
your face, your face, your face.

DIOR

When she picked up the *NY Times*,
mother made a comment:

Good for you.

Mother was a mean bear.

When sister was nine, mother pulled her hair
to the ground because she couldn't spell a word right.

Sister was like a stunk fish
when her face, bangs-first, hit the floor.

My god, that woman
could make a weapon

out of anything:

Tylenol bottles. Cheerios box.

A few strands of black
in the thick of her paw.

FABRIC IN TRIBECA

We are buying curtains to cover up my life.
We are buying patterns to cover up my lethargia.
My sadness is very adult. You can bring it to places
in public and it will not make a scene.
You will not be embarrassed by it.
It will not act out, but only wander, slightly undisciplined.
Look at the red inverted-enteric shapes spit across the silk,
endlessly unfolding into our arms. Six dollars for the uneven pieces.
This should do the trick, the leftover cloth
that promises to distort the incoming winter
light into something bearable.
Who buys fabric in January?
Who makes curtains to give their sadness a perimeter?

The clerks speak Yiddish and look at us like pregnant dolls,
and we are all here deciphering one another
in the drowsy New York afternoon.
Judith says we need to go. She needs to get to Mikvah by five.
Twenty dollars to be cleansed.
The monthly baptism for women who bleed, for women who carry.
Even now, inside her, the baby is stirring to the ring of our voices,
the underwater radio where everyone sounds as if they are choking.

I think she'll be a tomboy and extend her childhood across
the universe, a little gender deviant for the stars.

All that matters is if you're Jewish, the owner says, and I smile
and press the paisley linen to my face.

We need to go, Judith repeats. *I need to be clean.*

I look at my treasures, neatly folded, and wonder
if I am talented enough to do anything
worthwhile with these hands.