

## BOYHOOD

It was August 2016 and a heat wave attacked New York City reaching a temperature of 116 degrees. I lived on G Block in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The block was officially named by my Dominican neighbor, A Money, who lived across the street from me. Outside my bedroom window, children screamed and jumped in the open fire hydrants that blasted gallons of water at a pressure that could drop someone to the ground. The bass from A Money's car was always blaring Reggaeton and it shook the headboard of my cheap IKEA bed frame, rattling my already rattled brain.

I laid in bed with my shirt off, my breasts exposed right in front of me. They were smacking me in the face, an inescapable vision that made my stomach sick. On the outside, I was identifying as a butch lesbian, but on the inside that identity made me cringe. I didn't feel proud to be a lesbian at all, but I also didn't know what I was. Maybe I was just an alien.

My cat, Kooka, jumped onto the foot of the bed with a squirming cockroach hanging out of her mouth. I had a bad cockroach infestation coming out of the boiler room that summer in my basement apartment that used to be a drug den for the homeless. Before I knew it, Kooka dropped the roach onto my bare chest. It crawled up one of my boobs and up towards my neck. I jumped up screaming and Kooka sprinted away. I didn't mind the cockroach itself, but the way its little legs tickled my breast made me want to rip off my skin.



Despite being born in an anatomical female body, the first thing I remember about myself was that I was at heart, a boy. My identity was crystal clear to me and I felt confident in it. I would practice peeing standing up over the toilet like I had a dick, I had crushes on all of my

babysitters, and I only dressed in boy clothes and played with boy toys. I spent most of my time alone playing pretend in the basement. The soft royal blue carpet felt more like my bed than the one upstairs. It was my safe space.

I pretended that I was Maximus Goof, Goofy's son in "The Goofy Movie". I studied the film every day, sometimes multiple times a day, because Maximus Goof was my education to the secrets of Boyhood. Everything about him was what I wanted to be. A Popstar who skateboarded with a red baseball hat flipped backwards. Maximus was a smooth flirt and I had a crush on his girlfriend, Roxanne, who was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen even though she was a dog.

I had an early love for insects and I wanted to be a bug researcher and doctor when I grew up. The cicada's with their red eyes appeared in dozens one summer. I caught the live ones and fed them waffles in a fishtank. Each morning I went out scavenging for the exoskeletons they left behind on the bark of the trees and my wooden clubhouse. I loved the daddy long leg spiders that took over my grandmother's garage and backyard. I would pick them up by their legs and let them sit on my shoulders. I didn't mind the tickle of them crawling wherever they wanted on my body.

I kept a grasshopper in a small, shallow bucket that I called my infirmary. The grasshopper's name was One Leg, because he had one leg. He was instructed to stay at my facility until death because of his disability. I tried to make his stay as comfortable and bright as I could, so I made him a beach in a separate bucket. Half of the container was sand for him to sit on and bask in the sun, and the other half was filled with tap water for the ocean. He had a little boat made out of a milk cap that I took him sailing on.

Sometimes I saw glowing characters appear around me after everyone else had gone to bed. I left the door to my bedroom open every night so that I could keep an eye on the wizard

who stood by the hallway closet. The wizard was 6 feet tall and had a pointy Fantasia witch hat that sat on top of his head that must have made him 8 feet tall. There was a light yellow aura that surrounded him and his gray beard almost reached the floor. The wiry hair dripping from his chin sat gently on top of the faded yellow stars of his velvet navy robe. I was both intrigued and scared. I wondered why he never moved and what he was guarding. But I refused to talk to him. All we ever did was stare at each other until my family moved houses.

There was another ghost that appeared above my sleeping head one night and illuminated itself onto my wooden headboard. He was a wiggly little PacMan ghost with the same yellow aura as the wizard.

“BOO!” he exclaimed, waking me up in fright.

“Who are you?” I said.

In a nonchalant manner, the PacMan Ghost responded, “Don’t worry about it, I’m not going to hurt you. I just wanted to stop by and say hi.” I never saw him again.

My relationship with my father was the one I turned to for parental connection as a child. I loved spending time with him because most of our time was spent outside and our activities changed with the four seasons. The Winter was for snowball fights and building igloos. The Spring was for flying kites on windy days. The Summer was for swimming at the local community swimming pool or fighting the rough waves on our beach trips in South Carolina. Autumn was for yard work in our sports sweaters.

Autumn was my favorite season. The leaves died into magical oranges, reds, yellows from our two enormous oak trees that must have been centuries old I believed. We used rakes and leaf blowers every Saturday to clean up that week’s leaf droppings. At the end of our job, he

let me jump and swim inside of the mounds of leaves. I stayed hidden inside of the leaves for long periods of time, smelling the natural cycle of death and finding comfort in it.

The first time I “passed”, I was seven years old. An elderly man with droopy veins and skin walked out of the Post Office after I had received a new haircut from my little sister. She had done a hack job on me in the basement after I showed her Nick Carter from the Backstreet Boys picture for style inspiration.

“That’s a beautiful boy you have right there ma’am,” he said in a twangy southern accent.

My mother nodded along and smiled. I was beaming inside and it made my heart feel warm. On our way home, I stared into the back cushion of the seat in front of me thinking how I couldn’t wait until I was in 6th grade so I could kiss girls and go to dances. I watched the sunset out the car window, giving the Appalachian Mountains a golden glow. I felt at peace.