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## The Pinocchio Boy: A collection of queer creative written work

Lucas Olvera

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The Adventures of Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi (1826-1890)

# **The Pinocchio Boy**

## **A collection of queer creative written work**

Lucas Olvera  
Senior Capstone  
English Studies  
Creative Project  
Dr. Lee Ritscher  
School of Humanities and Communication  
Spring 2023

*The Part Where I Dedicate (my life)*

To my boyfriend:

Boyfriend seems too little of a word  
For a man who makes me feel like I can fly.  
I take your ears for granted  
And you get my heart in return.  
Your love is validation.  
Even when I'm told I don't need it.  
Sure, but I crave it.

To my best friend:

Whose name is greeted with sighs of adoration  
Who has seen every inch of me and never wavers  
Whose loyalty and love are not to be abused  
I am allowed to be  
Because of you.

To my sister:

Who is both champion and judge  
Who stands so gloriously above my hopes and dreams  
Whose hand reaches out  
And I shake from the effort to reach.  
I will cherish your legacies  
For all my life.

To my mother:

I love you  
I love you  
I love you.  
Even when all other words fail  
Even when all other words hurt  
I'll always love you  
Because you are me and I am you.  
Unlike any other.

To my father:

I wish you were here.

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## Senior Project Proposal

**Name:** Lucas Olvera

**Area of Study:** HCOM with a concentration in English Studies

### **Project Description:**

My project will be a series of short stories, short-form essays, and poems about my experiences as a Transgender and gay man. They will be structured in three parts with each part's collection varying in length. This is a small book that studies my life, my relationship with people, and my place in society.

### **Alignment with Common Theme:**

With the theme of hidden histories, I am driven to share my story and give voice to a demographic that I see constantly overlooked or ignored. I often feel my identity is shunned even in the close-knit communities of the marginalized. More voices for people like me are needed in this world.

### **Purpose:**

I want my collection to offer myself and an insight into what and who I am. I hope to enlighten both strangers and people in my life, to fully express myself in a way I've never done before. I can envision my story as informative but considering queer identities are such a personal experience I don't want my story to be a universal truth. It is simply my truth. That being said, finding similar stories to personal life experiences can be eye-opening. If my life can help someone figure out the start of their own journey, that would be an amazing result. Representation is an ever-expanding project.

### **Format Rationale:**

Art can help humanize and rationalize complex issues. I see my life and my identity as a complex issue that, through the power of the creative word, I can wholly evaluate and study my experiences. A story can be a powerful medium for change. Rage funneled through the lens of the written word can make it relatable to other people. When you read a book or poem, the author is offering up a work that you as the reader will establish an emotional connection with. The connection is yours, it's personal, and cannot be taken away. This is how art lasts, how the oral tradition lasts. The art of the story can guide a journey.

### **Capstone Title:**

The Pinocchio Boy

### **Working Summary:**

I have defined my identity and related it to a character that, as a child, I shared a deep connection with. I define the term Pinocchio Boy into three parts. I will use these defined sections as three connective collections of written work centered on my life. There will be a foreword as if a narrator is about to guide you on a journey and then an afterword much like the narrator providing the moral of a tale. Also, each section will progress chronologically through my life; the first section is early childhood, the middle is my journey through young adulthood to adulthood and the final section is the future I predict for myself (my end). The length of each section will vary as I am keeping myself open to the creative process. Some sections may feature more poetry or some may feature just creative nonfiction stories. I might stay true to my theme of three, and choose to pick only three creative works per section. This might contain the focus of the project and provide realistic goals.

### **Expectations:**

Each section needs to be a coverage of that era of my life (following key moments that shaped me) and to fully express the theme/definition of the Pinocchio Boy. The foreword must be a proper setup and guide to the collection and the afterword must be a proper goodbye. Each section must stay focused on giving my identity a voice and allow for insight to appear. I will have quotes from authors and poets who connect to my life, a series of research statistics that affect my life, and a list of media that represents (or doesn't represent) my life.

### **Specific Skills and Tools Required:**

I am a former creative writing major from San Jose State University and studied abroad at Roehampton University in London where I took a series of writing workshops and literature classes. I have had my literature analysis praised by professors here at CSUMB which gives me confidence in my understanding of the written word and how the process works. I have written my whole life for my friends and family. I have never pursued publishing but I understand the process. I have written a draft book proposal before for my former capstone at SJSU. I am fully confident in my creative writing skills and my openness to critique. I have worked as an informal editor for many creative friends and acquaintances, having a reputation for good feedback and an understanding of preserving the author's voice. I have also successfully written creative works in a collaborative effort under a short strict deadline and with a specific word count, a work that was then published online for free as part of a collection.

### **Next Steps:**

I need to start drafting a roadmap for the project, something that I can refer back to throughout the process to keep me on track for both vision and time. I can start with my foreword as the definition for the term and theme will be the basis of my outlines. I can also begin narrowing down what events or moments in my life are relevant or important.

**Timeline:**

My plan is to have each section as a rough draft done at certain dates (March 10th-April 14th). Each section should take about twelve days to complete. Then when the drafts are complete I will go back and begin my rewrites and peer reviews (April 14th-21st). After that, I will collect all my portfolio materials and reflection essay done by April 25th.

# *The Pinocchio Boy*

A collection of queer creative written work



# The Prologue

“I want to tell you this story without having to confess anything,

I want to tell you this story without having to be in it...”

– richard siken, *the torn-up road*

## *What makes a Pinocchio Boy?*

He has three major aspects to his existence:

Part One: You are not made through flesh.

You are made through blood, sweat, tears  
Just like a “real boy”  
But the hard work is yours to choose.

Part Two: You must recontextualize what humanity and morality mean.

You are forced to journey far and wide  
Be hurt,  
Over and over again,  
Terrorized.  
And together those that have terrorized and those that have survived  
Will try and tell you: “But the suffering is character, the suffering is growth”  
You will refuse this offering in disgust.

Part Three: You are an unknowing liar.

Through no fault of your own,  
You are a born liar.  
You say so much but only in hindsight are those words lies.  
You will learn to speak the truth.  
Pay attention to the truths that feel like lies.  
Pay attention to what is told to you to be a lie.  
Then reject and redirect.

And after all that work, He will be swallowed up and then spat out.

That is what a Pinocchio Boy is. That is what I see in me.

A puppet comes to life, and wishes to be a real boy. He journeys far and wide, all the while a voice whispers in his ear to steer his rights and wrongs. He confronts a monster. He is swallowed up. He dies and is reborn. He is embraced by his father and sees his wooden form turned to flesh.

I was born on July 20th, 1990. I was reborn in 2012. But I was not made into flesh yet. No magic was placed on me to reward my mental journey. This story is harder to tell than I expected. I want to scream, I want to live, I want to just wake up in my bed and look and feel like the person I see in my head.

But then there are days where I just exist and things go all right and I forget to scream and feel displaced. It's not contentment just absentmindedness.

I lived 21 years as a girl and 11 years as a vague shape of intentions and wants. The things I've gathered in my life—people, items, medicine, respect—make up a life I've always wanted. But this wanting is me settling because the real thing I want is to never have had this journey at all. I want to have opened my eyes on July 20th, 1990, and have started boyhood from day one. I want to have never needed to write this collection at all.

I mourn the loves I could have had.

I mourn the friends I might have met.

I mourn the feelings and experiences that only come with a childhood spent as one way.

But that's not what I had and so I've settled on the wants that come with settling for what can be. In 2012 I sobbed in a dark room and admitted to my boyhood, to what had already been inside, waiting not so patiently. I let it out in exhausted relieved tears. In 2012, I put a name to it. Lucas, Lucas, Lucas. In 2012, I knew I could never fall in love with a woman. That last part was the least surprising development. For everyone in my life too. Liking men in a strictly queer way seemed to be the most obvious detail about me.

2013, I waited. 2014, I waited. 2015, I held my first niece in my arms and saw a future for myself and I waited. 2016, I moved back home and waited. 2017, I waited. 2018, my mother survived a heart attack and my father developed a brain tumor all in one week. 2019, we lost my father and I saw nothing for myself. 2020, I fell in love with a friend and him with me and in the time that passed it no longer felt like waiting. 2021, I went back to school and waiting had to take a back seat and stop being so passive-aggressive. 2022, I got fucking good at school and got a prescription for the rest of my life. 2023, I traveled and celebrated the new year with the man I love, got back home and started testosterone.

Hello, my name is Lucas Olvera. I am trans. I am gay. And I waited so fucking long to get here. Swallowed up and reborn. Wood to flesh. Wood to flesh.

# Part 1:

# The Childhood\*

\*You are not made through flesh

## *And Today I'm Going to be a Real Boy*

Awakened surprised every day,  
That I am not what I announced!  
How bizarre, I said it though!  
How did it not happen!

It happened in the movie but not for me!  
But magic is real, magic is real!

I giggle I laugh I follow.  
I am so cool, so mature, so awesome.  
I get to hang out with my brother and his friends.  
I swing my feet back and forth,  
The garage is cold and the conversation is boring.  
And I'm not involved in it anyway.  
But I'm so cool,  
I get to hang out with real boys.

Scandal on the playground,  
The girls won't hold my hands  
They screech and run when I try and kiss them  
It's funny, the ickiness is funny.  
There's one boy that plays with us  
And he won't try to chase and kiss.  
He wants to be Xena Warrior Princess,  
The girls complain and he's mad at us.  
I don't know why I'm lumped in with them  
I didn't say he couldn't be Xena.  
He won't play with us anymore,  
Teachers separate us.  
I think I miss him.  
I think I liked looking at him.

"It's a funny story,"  
My mother says.  
"I dreamt about you when you were in my belly,"  
A smile in her eyes, on her lips, like she's telling a joke.  
"Dark hair, dark eyes just like your father. Just like Mama and Papa,"  
She means my father's departed parents.  
"I saw you, I was so sure you were going to be a boy."

I like reading about love.  
I like seeing people in love.  
I think it might be nice to be in love.  
But the crushes I have are, well,  
Because of course we girls have crushes.  
It's just time for us to have them.  
But it's not really what I thought it would feel like.  
    It's not like when I read about it.  
    It's not magical.

I meet a girl,  
She has dark eyes and sharp teeth.  
She bites and scratches and is something unlike any friend I have had before.  
A feral hurt thing that loves fiercely and has too much free time.  
I sit in her minuscule room, pasted lovingly with men from every source that's ever moved her—  
Sephiroth and Vincent are big standouts—  
Dark moody rooms can be places of warmth. A hearth of new sights and interests.  
    She has another friend and I like them. A lot.  
I sit in their room. It's big, bright and cold. Their whole house is cold.  
The other people living here might as well be ghosts.  
These two friends take my hands and guide me away, away, away.  
I absorb the ways of life these two have survived.  
The other one shaves off their hair. All of it. It scares teachers and delights me.  
Their smile isn't sharp, like the first friend, but there's a curl of humor there.  
    It tugs at me. I... I don't remember what I felt. Just that I felt.  
Our paths cross years later, that one and me.  
We lay in bed, in the dark, in a hotel room full of friends.  
We whisper and stare.  
Their hair stayed short but everything else about him changed.  
    I think I loved him.

Cut to the other side of the country back in 2003,  
And a 14-year-old bitch, upturned nose, voice higher than the horse she sits on, spews:  
“Bisexual means liking men AND women”  
Bloodloss from the shot of realization, rushing to my head I am winded.  
    Never heard never seen never, 13 years old and I didn't know people could do that.  
I often in my dreams stand before myself in that hotel room,  
Thousands of miles away from home,  
And I see 13 me look up at 32 me, begging for anyone else to have been the one  
To tell me that something like this could exist.

I spread my hands out,

“Bruh, it’s so much worse than that. I’m so sorry.”

Dream shakes and shifts into the nightmare that becomes my life after that one definition.

I have more room to pace now that my sister moved out.

15 is freedom,

To fucking lose your mind, have the wheels burn rubber,

Friends into enemies

Friends lost, Friends found.

I know now that boys can kiss other boys.

So like

Wouldn’t it

Like

I mean

Wouldn’t it be like

Ya know.

But like I mean what if

What if I could like

I mean

Pace, Pace, Pace

Stop.

Stop moving. Stop. Collision.

Wouldn’t it be wild if I was a boy.

The air is released from my lungs, rung out of me by the pained wheeze I pass off as a laugh.

Thank god no one can hear my thoughts

Imagine if they had heard that.

How fucking embarrassing would that be. It’s not even possible.

Imagine. Wow. Thank god I came to my senses.

I crumple onto my bed and study the chunky curves of the white paint that styles my ceiling.

No memory hurts me more than this one.

## If U Liked Treasure Planet, Ur Probably Trans Now

Listen I don't make the rules of the universe and if being gay and trans has taught me anything it is that the dumbest things are universal experiences.

When I first started interacting with queer social media circa 2009, I started to see a pattern in which certain moments I thought were unique to myself from my childhood were really more like "oh shit, you too? Wild." kind of situations. The first post that brought this home for me was on a blogging site—sadly you have most likely heard of it, Tumblr, the hot place to be when you're a gay 20-something—and the post went something like this: "if u liked treasure planet ur trans now...if u liked jim ur gay too". The comments and reblogs went something like this: "I don't like how accurate this is..." "wtf don't call me out like this".

Listen, sure, there are trans guys out there that don't feel like this but for the average American-bred 90s and early 2000s queer, the media has had a profound effect on our outward identity and sense of community.

Now I could tell you about how fandom created queer spaces or how characters in media allowed us to project ideals of ourselves in vaguely safe environments of self-exploration. But I really just want to talk about what it is like to feel Gender Envy. In keeping in line with everything I have written up til now in this collection, I was not aware these moments in my life were Gender Envy until, well, maybe the last couple of years of self-reflection. Gender Envy for me translates to an outward need of Gender Expression. And for that, my need for Gender Expression falls into three categories: Personality, Physicality, and Fashion. I want to act like him/I relate to his behavior, I want to look like him, I want to be able to have his sense of style. So when I say a character gives me Gender Envy (subconsciously or knowingly) it is through one or more of these categories. And growing up I had a lot of Gender Envy.

*Pinocchio* was not Envy in the sense of the character but in the magical experience of making a bold statement and then having your dreams come true. But Mowgli? From *Jungle Book*? Oh boy did I want to be him as a child. Running half-naked in my backyard pretending my dog and cat were jungle animals caring for me. That's what I wanted to be as a child, a cute feral boy with talking animals...looking back of course. When you get to the preteens for me I had a few options of characters to wholly imprint on and fantasize about a would-be life. Preen hormones confused the equation though because being gay and trans has the obstacle of getting crushes on characters but not knowing it's because you are attracted to them or want to **Be** them. This would be the case for Double D from *Ed, Edd and Eddy*. His intellectual and soft effeminate demeanor meant to juxtapose the other two loud and bombastic personalities in the show were probably not meant to be queer coding on the part of the creators. But my small little gay brain felt the spark of acknowledgment. Call it gaydar if you want but I wasn't looking for gayness back then because I did not know I was gay until I was 21. I just saw a certain type of boy character and the crackle of yearning zinged through my body. So here I am at 32 and I look back at Edd's character design and the adventures that he went on with his two best guy friends and I go 'Huh'. Yup, that sure wasn't a crush, I wanted to be him.



Cartoons always had the most hold over me and in reflection, I believe because it was easier to project my subconscious fantasies on something already not real. The suspension of disbelief was already half done for me. Fashion statements were the closest thing to me relating to real-life men. Take for example my complete obsession with Baz Luhrmann's masterpiece *Romeo + Juliet* where the half-undone flowing colorful print shirts and beautifully detailed dress shoes caused a lifetime longing for me to stand on a beach half-naked in tight pants and open shirt spouting Shakespeare in the most heartwrenching voice. But fashion is where the projection of real-life figures stopped. Cartoons act as a form of escapism so it seems logical that they would be the major source of Envy for me. Take for example, the titular *Treasure Planet*. Jim Hawkins with his under-cut/ponytail and big sorrowful eyes, how could I not fall in love and also want so badly to look like him? As a fellow brunette with a love of cool jackets, his bad-boy appeal was definitely an ideal. God it really was the hair for us trans boys wasn't it? Why else do we all get an undercut as our first coming out haircut?

The closer we get to the end of my preteens, there became two new major influences in my life. I was given an old Mac computer that originally belonged to my dementia-addled Grandfather. I didn't have to share, it was all to myself. A bold gift to give to someone at 12 years old. The other new thing in my life was Caitlyn, a very intense girl I met in Middle School who lived such a foreign life to me. She was the child of an unhappy divorce, she lived in a more expensive side of town, she wore make-up from 'Longs' and cool clothes from someplace called 'Hot Topic'. She also got to watch and rent whatever she wanted whenever she wanted. So Caitlyn was the one that grabbed me by the arm with her sharp pointy nails covered in black nail polish, pulled me in close and said "Do you watch Yu Yu Hakusho?"

Ask most 2000s teens and they'll tell you a lot about the Saturday morning cartoons they watched growing up. Anime wasn't exactly new to us, we had been watching the Pokemons, the Digimons, the Dragon Ball Zs, the Sailor Moons, etc. But those were watered down, licensed dubs repackaged and in some cases reanimated to cater to younger demographics. No, what Caitlyn offered me was the unfiltered stuff, the original Japanese versions, unedited, uncensored, and much more adult. Looking back that just means she had shows meant for 16-25-year-olds instead of anything graphically explicit (we'll get to that later in my life story). To a 13-year-old though, watching a teen boy die by getting hit a car in order to rescue a child and then make a deal with the underworld to return to his body only for that deal to give him magical demon-hunting powers...and he and his buddies are usually shirtless in every fight? Damn did it not make me feel like an adult. There suddenly became shows I wanted to hide from my parents knowing they wouldn't approve due to the level of absurdity my mother would find insipid (she never did come to like anime) but I wanted to see pretty boys fight monsters. Every time I went to Caitlyn's house she had something new for me to read—manga—or watch, she even got me into more narrative-driven video games from Japan. That also happened to feature hunky dreamboats doing cool flips and such.

She knowingly unleashed a whole new host of male characters in my life that weren't constrained by the Disney-driven American cartoon aesthetic. I could swoon over them because

that's what these characters were made for and I had an ally who wanted to swoon over them too. Now add the fact that I have my own computer. I found there are whole forums full of people who want to talk about cute anime boys. I used to "flirt" with some guy on a forum because his username was the name of an anime character I had a crush on. We got internet married on that forum. That's just something you did in 2003, don't worry. But here I am amongst others who so desperately want to be the characters they obsess over. I began to have certain characters I call 'mine' --later generations of queer kids call them 'kins' because if a phenomenon grows to a certain point it becomes labeled--but this is where a different track started building for me. One of my new anime loving friends never questioned. All the characters I claimed were boys. A part of me wants to put a disclaimer saying "yes girls can like boy characters and see themselves in them without being trans because all media is lacking in female characters that are real characters blah blah" this ain't about those girls. This is about me looking at a cute feminine anime boy and feeling deep in my gut that he was just like me, long before I could put a term or label on it, long before I knew that it meant something about me was different. A lot of those girly boy characters tended to have a stoic masculine boy sidekick who was always with them and cared for them. Pretty sure that said something about me too.

There isn't really a specific example because there have been so many anime boys I related to or claimed in my last couple of years of Middle School. This started the trend with my friends where they could look at a cast of characters and know instantly which one would be my favorite. Nowadays my current friends just look for the gayest character and point that one out, but my friends of the past were just as oblivious as I was. I want to point out that *Treasure Planet* released in 2002, high octane fantasy adventure with a young pretty guy slotted in well with my current tastes of the time. So when I read that post about trans boys imprinting on that particular movie, well it definitely applies to me. It's universal because--to get deep for a second here--the world we lived in and the world I grew up in doesn't have a place for Trans kids. We are lost in space just like poor Mr. Arrow after his safety line was cut by Scroop in the box-office flop *Treasure Planet*. Continuing the metaphor, we are all searching for that lost treasure that will solve all our problems, and we are unified in that search. I truly believe I am capable of achieving the level of Gender Expression that would fulfill me, the treasure is real. Little me latched on to a dream not knowing what the journey would bring, finding that he wasn't alone in his pursuit. That's pretty damn magical, the universal experience of treasure hunting for acknowledgment.

## Oh, My Cousin from Out of Town

“So I should just sit there?”

“Yeah right there is great.”

Shannah was one of the bigger plot twists in my life.

“Where do we start?”

“Ok so, I don’t think I remember this as well but then-”

“That’s why I’m here.”

“That’s why you’re here.”

Shannah and I have known each other since first grade. It was more like a violent awareness of each other. We were not friends, we did not socialize and yet we both had the same best friend, Emma. Having a best friend in elementary school is a huge deal, this is your platonic soul mate, the one person that knows you better than anyone. It’s Best Friends Forever, they sell matching jewelry, it is serious stuff. You don’t *share* bffs.

“Ok so I just talk about it, the event and all that?”

“Yep!”

Imagine my surprise when my very own bff who I had known since Kindergarten, tells me she can’t come over because Shannah is with her. They went to Emma’s grandma’s house to swim. I wasn’t allowed to go that far for a playdate. They had sleepovers. I was told I wasn’t ready for sleepovers. The bitter acid that churned inside me whenever Emma would tell me that Shannah was going over to her place after school so she couldn’t stay and play.

“We weren’t in High School yet...I know that for sure but Emma was gone already.”

“So circa 2002-03?”

My birthdays were always a big deal, my mom threw a great themed party. I had the terrible fate of having a middle-of-the-summer birthday in which most of my friends were gone traveling so the parties were small. My mother would bust out the snow cone machine just for me to cover the silence that was my missing friends. But Emma didn’t travel, her mom never took her when she did, so without fail she would be there partying and eating cake with me. The *Mulan* party though was a failure. Well the party itself was great, I still have classmates from back then that remember it. I was very into the movie that summer, I even named my pet bird Mulan. I would sing loudly in the car ‘Reflection’ and stare longingly in mirrors just like the iconic cross-dressing hero, Mulan. You know, Mulan, who cut all her hair off, dressed as a man, got

long-lasting male friendships, and a really hot boyfriend who was into her before he even knew she was a woman. Yeah, eight-year-old me just had to have a *Mulan* themed party. It was necessary. And Shannah ruined it for me.

“God who was there with us?”

“You, Caitlyn? I think Jasper? Those were my usual suspects. Anjie! Anjie had to be there. It was a big group so possibly Ari and April too. We didn’t have Sarah yet, though I might have gone to her play by this point?”

“Jasper?”

“Yeah, you know... Shaved off his hair? Obsessed with Hiei from *Yu Yu*?”

“Oh my god, I forgot! Damn, so many of you ended up trans.”

“We gravitate towards each other it’s true.”

Emma was late to the party. It was looking to be a no-show altogether. And I was inconsolable. She hadn’t called and no one was picking up at her house. My mom combed through the yellow book to find Emma’s grandma’s landline. Grandma picks up. Emma had forgotten it was my birthday. She was at her grandma’s swimming with Shannah. Looking back I can’t imagine the problem-solving my mom and her grandma had to do. Because I was so upset that my own bff, who hadn’t wanted to go see *Mulan* with me earlier in the year, wasn’t here to celebrate with me. Now she was going to be late, and Shannah was coming with her. My mom scrambled to put together an extra goody bag for this interloper. The burning fury from that day still flickers from time to time.

“Fuck, it started with the hat right?”

“The like, corduroy brown page boy hat.”

“Like something from the old-timey days.”

“Like *Newsies*.”

“Mhm, like that. I’ve never seen it, is it good?”

“No clue, it falls a little too modern Broadway for my tastes. But I should give it a chance, it’s very gay culture I’m told.”

“Now I’m really surprised you haven’t seen it.”

“There are only so many hours of the day for me to consume things.”

“Uh huh, says the guy who rewatches *Speed Racer* twice a month.”

“Twice every Other month. Big talk from Ms. ‘It’s October time to watch all of *Over the Garden Wall* again’.”

“That’s just having good fucking taste.”

“Fair enough.”

Six years of that shit. Emma, incapable of balancing our friendships, leaving one side too empty for too long and then switching sides. Rinse, repeat. Then she fucking left us. The fault is not on

her for that, her mother—who even back then I knew was the lowest kind of worthless parent—basically kidnapped her and they all moved in with some boyfriend in Maine. MAINE. She saw a moose in a snowy abandoned field during her first week there. The first month was filled with back-and-forth emails and dreams and plans for escape. She wanted to come home. I didn't see Emma in person for four years, we had nothing in common, she only reached out because my phone number hadn't changed. We never did go to Middle School with Emma. She switched to homeschooling after fifth grade. My first class of sixth grade I was sat next to Shannah.

“So Jasper had the jacket, like the big bulky one, and we gave you that.”

“Yeah, yeah, because like just because my hair was short and I had a hat. That wouldn't have changed much.”

“Yeah but with the jacket, it covered like down to your thighs. Like not convincing but-”

“Dumb kids being dumb.”

“Hah. Exactly! So someone said you looked boyish. And you got like super excited.”

“I really don't remember large parts of this. It feels like, sometimes, when I try to reach for the memories or events people have told me where I did try to do trans things I just can't grab it. Like my mind gets foggier the harder I try to think of it.”

“Do you think it's a like defense mechanism thing? Like some kind of 'oh I couldn't be so brain's gonna block it out'?”

“Who knows. I've had a shit memory since. Since.”

“...College?”

“Since 2012 probably.”

“I'm sorry, Lucas.”

“Nothing for you to be sorry for. It's just weird that. The most pivotal moment in my life had to share the spotlight with a medical condition and well, the other thing.”

“At least you got to be gay? Dream come true?”

“D'aww you're right. PTSD cured.”

“God I fucking wish, I'd be gay in a heartbeat.”

“Do your parents still think we're gay lovers?”

“I'm pretty fucking sure they think we broke up.”

“Ah man, we broke up? Babe I can change!”

“I dated one too many gay guys, I'm so sorry Lucas.”

“Darn.”

“We are so fucking off-topic.”

It started slow. We didn't have that one class and then suddenly friendship bloomed. No, it started with me being the only one to have at least some continuing interaction with Emma. I had a computer, Shannah didn't, other than the school computers. So Emma would email me the most. But then keeping up with the emails got tiring, I think on both ends. By then I had met Caitlyn who was busy blowing my mind over Pokemon games and eating Pocky. Emma wrote to me less and I just didn't have anything to share so we quietly slipped away from each other. But that point of contact I did have, I would share with Shannah. I think back to how brave she was to make the first move, to approach me and ask if I had talked to Emma. I would share—tentatively like she was a snake ready to strike at the first sign of weakness—what Emma would tell me about her life in Maine. It wasn't much and our conversation would have to substitute her boring new life with our exciting ones. The way Carmel Middle works is that three different city schools feed into it so you get the Tularcitos low middle-class hicks and chicks, the snobby prodigy River losers, and then whatever the hell the Captain Cooper feral creatures were. If the school expected for us to mass mingle it didn't really work, the kids largely stuck with their own kind. I was a sorta odd man out all along though as I fell under a different social economic demographic than most of my friends growing up. Also, I did music, so, forced cohabitation. I met a lot of the River school kids and we got along. Caitlyn and Jasper were River kids but they were like me, not quite what was expected of their group. Maybe that's why we hit it off, why they got along with the rest of us. We were all artsy, nerdy, and turns out pretty fucking queer. Not that we knew or cared at the time. But while the rest of the Valley friends lived further into the Valley, Shannah rode my bus and lived down the street. We started sitting together. We started talking about things not related to Emma. Turns out we both had way older siblings whose hobbies and interests greatly influenced our upbringing. We were big fans of '80s films, *Labyrinth* specifically. We started not going home right away once the bus dropped us off. We would scrounge up pocket change and buy ourselves candy and slushies. Then we would walk over to our old elementary school—that was still completely free access to the public because the early 2000s were just like that—and sit on the swings. She would play music on her iPod and we stopped talking about Emma altogether.

“So Anjie says: ‘We can say you’re my cousin from out of town.’ or something like that.”

“Of course Anjie instigated, very her.”

“And you got so fucking hyped, like you got in character.”

“I was still taking theater classes back then, you know, very classically trained.”

“Shut the fuck up oh my god!”

“What were we calling me? Cuz?”

“Cousin Lucas?”

“Nah I didn't start using Lucas until high school.”

“Cousin...”

“Cousin...Charls?”

“COUSIN CHARLS!”

“YEAH COUSIN CHARLS!”

“It was definitely not fucking Charls.”

“Sadly. Imagine. Oh shit maybe that’s why I like that part in the book so much.”

“You like it because it’s fucking funny.”

“Fair.”

“You were cousin something, whatever not important. All I super remember was going to like Claires and Borders and just talking super loudly like: ‘HEY COUSIN SO AND SO, LOOK AT THIS. COUSIN SO AND SO YOU SHOULD BUY THIS MAN THING FOR YOUR MANLY INTERESTS.’”

“I’m getting secondhand embarrassment from my own life experiences.”

“It gets fucking worse, oh my god.”

And just like that, Shannah was a staple in my life. We crossed into Carmel High together, met Sarah, and the group that would one day be the Fab Four started forming. Erik was there too but I don’t want to think about him anymore. The last conversation I had with him was a year ago. He meant it to hurt. It was the most direct form of transphobia I had experienced from someone close to me. So we don’t talk about Erik. Now it is just the trio. Over the course of our friendship, we have all suffered major family losses, events that leave stained bruises on our beings. When Shannah lost her brother, I gave her a necklace based on a dream she had of a dragonfly. She still wears it occasionally. When I lost my dad, she listened and laughed when I made jokes about coping with loss by buying large boxes of Captain Crunch. That night at Target, the first time I spent out with anyone after losing my dad. She and Sarah and Me, the only ones we knew at the time that had lost anyone that wasn’t a grandparent. We sat in the parking lot and I cried, then I laughed, then I cried again.

“We bumped into someone from school.”

“God no.”

“Yup! And we all tried to pass you off as this cousin.”

“Please, no fuck this is painful.”

“I wanna say it was like, someone vaguely popular too.”

“Of fucking course it was. Also don’t you love how the popular girls in middle were just assholes, but then the popular girls in high school were super nice? Fuck a bunch were just the same girls too!”

“Middle was a fucking hellscape. You’re distracting me. I wanna tell you about how you tried to deepen your voice too.”

“Welp, sorry Shannah, now I have to kill you. It’s been a good run.”

“You’re not fucking strong enough to murder me.”

“Like mentally or physically?”

“BOTH!”

“I KNOW THAT! LET ME DREAM!”  
“ABOUT MURDER?”  
“YES!”  
“LET ME FUCKING TELL YOU HOW LAME WE WERE!”  
“OKAY!”  
“Cool so.”

Emma eventually made it back to California. She’s married and has a good job teaching computer skills to kids. She has a cute cat. Shannah is the one that gives me the updates since I’m not on Facebook but they both are. It’s weird, we say. If she hadn’t left, we say. We wouldn’t be best friends, we say. Shannah has long since transcended beyond just ‘Friend’, she’s the kind of person in my life that can go radio silent, for months at a time, and then we pick up where we left off. I love her, she loves me and we both love Sarah. Shannah just turned 33. We hadn’t managed to text one another since Halloween. But when she pulled into the driveway, in mid-April, she leapt out of the car and drew me into her arms. We held onto one another muttering ‘sorry I’m so bad at texting back’ to each other, a formality at this point. She smirks as we climb into the car, she’s the only person I know in actual real life that smirks. Imagine, we say.

“We shopped a bit more, I think we even tried to convince one of our parents too?”  
“This is gross, I am so lame holy shit.”  
“Nah, it’s funny. God we were so fucking blind.”  
“Yeah between this and me pretending to be a guy on forums? Embarrassed on my behalf.”  
“That’s just fucking life though like we all didn’t know because we hadn’t heard of it before.”  
“Yeah. I’m glad you reminded me of this, though honestly. It like, I don’t know, makes me feel better.”  
“Yeah?”  
“Sometimes I’m scared I’m making this all up.”  
“Well I have fucking eyewitness accounts that you aren’t. You’ve always been like this.”  
“I wish I knew earlier.”  
“I get it but it’s not what happened so no point getting hung up on it.”  
“I guess, but I still think about it.”  
“Well at the end of the day, you didn’t really change. That’s got to be validating.”  
“Sometimes.”  
“Hey.”  
“Hm?”



“I fucking love you, you gay dork.”

“I love you too, asshole.”

The what if's of my life sicken me sometimes. They plague me at night. But this one sticks out as an outlier. If Emma hadn't left. Would I have been in that Target parking lot surrounded by sound and support? Would I be less loved in my current life? Would there be someone there who knew me from the start to say 'yeah, of course that's who you are'?

# Part 2:

# The Young Adult\*

\*You must recontextualize humanity and morality

## **So You Borrow A Manga From A Friend—**

Summer of 2003, I am on the cusp of 13. I feel shaken by change but anxious about the future. Doors had been opened to me that hadn't allowed me to peak beforehand. My last year in Middle I heard the word bisexual and it stuck in my gut. Over and over the word haunted. I am not sure who put the idea in my head not to tell my parents but soon I played into the inherent nature of not exposing this side of me to my family. I was divided into loyalties now, my friends versus my family and I wasn't happy. I became less happy each year for a long time after that. But it was just little bits and the large contributor to that is edited out of my story now. I'm behind the wheel, I'm taking us on this vacation. And the next stop is Caitlyn's room, summer 2003.

Boy howdy do I not want to tell this story to strangers.

Caitlyn's dark room was a cozy atmosphere of edgy emo-girl things and cute anime boys smiling down at us from every angle. I had brought my Pokemon Crystal (the game she bought me because she found out I had no idea what Pokemon was, I have since owned every game that came out after Crystal so thanks for that too) because I was very bad at the game and couldn't beat the Elite 4. She graciously offered to do the work for me and I was left to sit and wait. And waited, Jesus, I must have been terrible at the game because she was taking forever. I asked her for some manga to read while I waited. She paused and reached under her bed and tossed me one. The manga was...unique looking. First off it had a dust cover, no other manga I had read up until that point had one and the book overall was larger, wider too. There was a rating on it like any other manga, M for mature themes, well most of the manga I read did. I read Shonen up until now, action-packed fights and half-dressed girl characters, I'd seen it all. The cover of this manga featured two teen boys painted in soft hues and warm lines. I began to read.

When I got halfway through chapter two and the boys started having sex I slammed the book shut and asked for something else.

We didn't talk about it. I blocked it out. Good God I tried so hard not to think about it. But I did think about it. I thought about it a lot. The shock came from the act of sex, not the sex act. I had never seen sex portrayed. I wasn't allowed to watch 'R' movies or anything that had gratuitous sex and violence. Hell, I wasn't allowed to watch TV during the week because I had homework to do. I knew what sex was obviously and that it was a desirable thing for most. The forums and websites I visited had people flirting and chatting about sexual things. Reading and seeing are different. Reading all that without a visual context leaves nothing for your imagination. Now my imagination had one solid image and those static pages fluttered about in my mind. I knew my mother would freak out if she knew what I saw. I figured it had to be some kind of porn. Maybe Caitlyn didn't know, hadn't read it yet? I was too afraid to ask.

Bisexual. Gay Porn. There was a lot to think about so I ignored it with all my might. The thing is, while I might have been a bit young to read something like that, the problem lay in no one telling me if what I was looking at was right or wrong. My moral compass was spinning around the volcano of possibilities bubbling underneath me. True north seemed like my mother's do's and don't's. So I stuck to that. I lacked acknowledgment for what I had witnessed and thus deemed it wrong. No one ever did outright tell me it was ok or right or fine. I stumbled over my own feelings towards it out of nervous curiosity. Because I never stopped thinking about it. About those two boys.

I look at the title I chose for this segment and really that wasn't the origin. Because I rejected that manga at first and it would take months before anything became of it.

The months it took getting to know Sarah.

In those months it felt like I knew her my whole life. We slotted into each other's lives so easily that from this point on, Caitlyn faded into the background and I learned what it was to share in learning something new instead of outright being taught. I appreciate everything Caitlyn brought into my life but there was never even ground between us. I was Student, she was Teacher. I do adore teachers though. The last thing Caitlyn ever facilitated for me was Sarah.

I met Sarah once before high school. Caitlyn invited me to a play her friend was in, I swear my memories say it was *Joseph and the Technicolored Dream Coat* but that may very well be my knowledge of Sarah's religious upbringing projecting. I had no opinion one way or another about this girl Caitlyn introduced me to, I was largely there so she wouldn't have to go to the play alone. I stood to the side and let them chat afterward, then we went home. I remember she was in costume but none of her features stood out. No, I didn't meet the true icon with a scarf until high school orientation.

While Carmel High was mostly made up of the trifecta Carmel Middle, a few other private schools fed into Carmel High. Caitlyn and Jasper were excited, they had friends who were homeschooled or went to Catholic school that would be joining us. They bustled and squawked about people I didn't know and I sat nervously hoping to see the one home school friend I knew was joining Carmel High (she didn't stay long in the end). Caitlyn, ever the manager and curator of my life (in a good way), steered my stiff bones over to a quiet bench under a large tree that looked over the gym. There she sat me next to someone.

"This is Sarah. From the play. She likes anime. Ok be good."

Sarah and I looked at one another. I was a short-haired scrawny thing with bellbottoms and an unfashionable brightly colored flower-patterned T-shirt with ruffled sleeves. Sarah was all earth tones and grey with a large scarf, hoodie, and cool girl skirt over jeans flare of 2004. Her smile was kind from the start. She was kind from the start. My base nature fights against accepting kindness, hers fights harder to give kindness. She asks:

"Do you like Naruto?"

And I fucking Loved Naruto. Our individual favorite characters matched up well. A pattern for the rest of our lives. Yes life, I will never not have Sarah in my life. She sticks to my bones and warms my heart during the coldest seasons. She knows me from every angle and every mistake. She quietly and calmly helped me pack and clean my San Jose apartment, holding me each time I broke down and she will be there in the stands ready to watch me graduate. But first, she was there on the frontlines when I fell into a world of queer obsession.

Sarah introduced the concept of shipping to me. ‘Shipping’, to explain for the majority of cishet older readers of this work, is the art of taking two characters from a piece of media and thinking ‘wow I hope they kiss’ and imagining what their relationship would be like. This art form quickly took over my life, I couldn’t eat, breathe, or sleep without imagining my favorite characters being in love. There are whole legions of fans that practice this art. Internet forums were birthed by *Star Trek* fans searching for fellow Spirk (Kirk/Spock) lovers. You may think I’m exaggerating but I am not, shipping has existed for decades and before the internet, fans would start chain letter fanzines of creative work depicting acts of love and devotion between their favorite characters. The internet just helped reach more corners. Now ‘pairings’ in shipping can be very specific, as in there are some pairs more popular than others, and easier to find like-minded communities centered around them. But if you don’t follow the pack you can have a trickier time finding your people. Sometimes the cosmic universe rewards the gays though, because as it turns out, all of Sarah’s favorite characters and all my favorite characters were often shipped together. Over the years, again and again, our tastes aligned.

So back in 2004, our first year of High School and Sarah tells me her favorite male character from Naruto would look cute with my favorite male character. I blink. She’s not wrong. These two characters have a satisfying sassy dynamic. And apparently, boys do date other boys, that’s what bisexual implies. I do the math. I am not good at math. I decide I need more data before I can solve this equation.

My gaggle of friends sits on a grassy hill at school, enjoying the warm California winter. I remember it like this: I turned to Caitlyn when the others were some ways away. I ask her if she still has that manga I read over the summer. She raises an eyebrow at me. Clarify, she demands, you read a lot. I squirm not sure how to phrase what I remember of the manga, I don’t think I remember the plot, but I remember the onomatopoeia of sex noises. The one with the two guys in high school, one likes the other but the other doesn’t know, and then he says he’s been having dreams about the first gu-

“Oh. You’re talking about *Desire*, yeah, what about it?”

“...can I borrow it? I didn’t finish it.”

“Yeah, sure.”

She brings it the next day in broad daylight. Tosses it to me like it’s not about to change my whole world. I push it to the back of my backpack, safe and away. I don’t tell anyone else

about it. Sarah comes up to me later and asks about it because she heard that Caitlyn lent it to me. Sarah is always genuine, Sarah is always safe. We decide to read it together at school because I'm scared to take it home where my mom might find it. Because of the sex. We have a wonderful time side-by-side reading and surviving the first session of sex the two boys go through. By the time we get to the second time the boys have sex we are sucked into the drama of unrequited love and misunderstood feelings. We are emotional by the end. We decide to keep it a little longer to reread it. A week later Caitlyn demands for it back, rolls her eyes, and tells us she's got more like it.

She calls it Yaoi.

We quickly no longer need Caitlyn as a distributor, we have a name, we have the data, and we can begin collecting on our own. By junior year, we have become the Masters of unwrapping manga stealthy in Borders (because all Yaoi was wrapped in plastic back then) because we need to study the goods before committing hard saved money (we didn't have jobs back then I am not sure how we spent hundreds of dollars on this hobby). We have learned the difference between Shonen-Ai and Yaoi, we favor the mature ones. Sarah and I have the benefit of having lockers on top of one another, her bottom locker becomes our shared school work space. Mine on top becomes the Yaoi library locker. Our pipeline was, over the weekend we buy as much new Yaoi as we could afford, Sarah would take it home and then Monday we place it in the locker so that we both had free access to it. I couldn't bring all this home with me, I just couldn't face the idea of my family finding out I read it, so it stayed in this one locker at school. Then we figured some of our other friends wanted to borrow them but we had so, so, so many. In order to keep track of who had what we placed a pencil and pad of paper, write your name, the date, and what book you were borrowing. Over the next two years, we only lost one, which we quickly replaced as it was a big favorite of ours.

We had to have something close to 30 to 40 books in there. It got to the point where Sarah had to take some home. Yet it was not enough for us. Sarah and I were voracious readers, when we weren't reading manga we spent hours on the internet reading fanfiction because it was the only other gay work we had easy access to. Back in the early 2000's, manga and anime were still niche interests. Not much was being brought over to the States, Yaoi even less so because of the lack of a major demographic. So sometimes it would be weeks before we could find a new book.

We began filling the void with the books assigned to us in class. *The Outsiders?* Gay. *The Great Gatsby?* Gay. *And Then There Were None?* Gay. *A Tale of Two Cities?* Gay. *To Kill a Mockingbird?* I was certainly gay for Atticus Finch (and the reason I am deeply attracted to single fathers to this day). *A Separate Piece?* That's just Gay Sabotage. Every whisper we had between us about these stories followed the line of "That's really gay though". We'd march to the library, throw the book in the bin and line up to march back to class, giggling to each other.

Our friend April found it first. There on the display of new reads was the book *The Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sanchez. A fluffy little YA novel about three gay/bi boys in high school trying to navigate life and their relationships. When describing this book I can't say the words "nothing special" because in truth, every queer book especially those written by queer individuals IS special. Special in the idea that it made it so far out into the world, it is so brave for surviving the publishing process and for getting to share the shelf of a high school library alongside important classics like *Speak*. Every queer book, no matter the genre or subject, is a story of resistance and survival. I didn't know that back then when my friends and I first got our hands on Mr. Sanchez's book. We just hungered for more gay than what we could scrounge up. Reading the book humbled me in a way I couldn't comprehend that young. This portrayed the act of being gay as, well, potentially dangerous in an unkind world. A thing commonly left out of yaoi, but then again most of the boys in those stories claimed to not even Be gay. I was consumed by this story and these characters from *The Rainbow Boys* series and yes luckily there were two more books for me to pour over. After I was done reading the series I didn't have an outlet for this...thing I was looking for in literature. I kept reading the yaoi and it was fine, I would read fanfiction and it was fine but nothing really filled that little space that opened inside my heart after reading Mr. Sanchez's novels and seeing characters act and call themselves gay.

I was too scared to ask the librarian if there were other things like this. I didn't think to look online. A part of me held back from putting in the work to pursue gay literature, a part of me was holding back. Like the feeling I had in my bedroom where I talked myself out of believing I wasn't the gender I was born as, a feeling of ridiculousness, of embarrassment. Of exposure. Even if it takes you years to discover the right words to describe yourself, a part of you knows something is off, something makes you vulnerable to your peers. It can drive you crazy not knowing what it is, I imagine. Luckily I was pretty much an idiot for years. Or maybe naive, as Sarah would gently suggest nowadays. It wouldn't be until college when I would say the words out loud that shifted the ground below me and crumbled my naive foundation.

I told someone that my love for these gay stories came from a place of self-fulfillment, that I dreamed of taking part in these relationships and often saw myself in one-half of the romantic couples. This someone was a straight girl I shared a close relationship with, someone I had trusted at the time, and she didn't do anything wrong here but her response scared me.

"No, I don't think that's normal? I just find the relationships hot. Wait you would *want* to be a gay guy?"

Shortly after that conversation, I would finally choose to read my first gay novel series since *The Rainbow Boys*. It was a thriller mystery, more adult, more romantic. My roommate was gone for the weekend, I spent three days to myself reading all five books in the series. I found the thing I was looking for. It was realization, it was acknowledgement, it was someone saying "being an adult gay man in a cruel world is possible to survive". 2012, I sobbed in a dark room

and typed out a message to all 5 of my closest friends: “I’m trans. I’m a guy and I think I’m gay.”

Aribeth: “No shit, ‘Lucas’.”

Sarah: “Love, I’m so happy for you. It makes so much sense. I’m here for you, call me in the morning. Please get lots of rest!!”

Shannah: “LOL. What a text to wake up to, congrats.”

Erik: “I don’t know what that really means but I support you!”

Melanie: “Well. You do watch and read a lot of gay porn so not really a surprise.”

I feel the tingle of solidarity with every gay man I find in a book. I am reliving that spark that flared inside me that one weekend. I have always loved reading but now I’m reaching for more. *Desire* being the title of the first piece of gay literature I encountered is too on the nose. I almost wish I was making that part up. Sometimes the universe slots together perfectly like lego pieces. A book called *Desire* unlocked a desire. That’s actually rather nice. I believe that laid out my path, each book, each gay character a stepping stone. So when I reach the edge of this path, I will choose to place my own. So I borrowed a manga from a friend and now I plan on spending the rest of my life dedicated to queer literature.



## ***Generation Y2K***

You grow up in the age of rapid techno change  
Y2K haunts your steps.  
You log in and the adults are scared.  
They beg for you to hide yourself  
Monsters lurk in those lines of code and forum posts.  
So obviously I need a pen name.  
I remember a story told as a joke.

    “I would have named you Lucas”  
That seems like a solid name to hide behind.  
No one will know it’s me.

    No one will ever know it’s me.  
        No one will truly know it’s me.

Your new and fancy friends with sparkly icons and animated banners of sad anime boys,  
Ask a lot of questions.  
Your prison boyfriends as your mother and sister call them.  
It’s fun to answer them, make up things.  
Because you don’t want to get in trouble if they do end up being pervert stalkers,  
So what to say, what to say.

    “Where are you from?”  
    “Cali.” It’s a big state, safe answer.  
    “How old are you?”  
    “15”...you press delete three times and send... “19”  
    “Kewl, a real actual cali girl in the wild!”  
    “I’m actually a boy! xD ” Smart, throw them off your trail.  
    “Really?”  
    “Yeah.” why would I lie about that? was I not convincing?  
    “You don’t type like a guy :/”  
    Shoot...say something quick... “I’m gay~”  
    “Oh, lol, okies x) ”

Nailed it. The internet is easy.

No one has ever called you by a username.  
Come to think of it.  
    You have always been Lucas.  
Nothing else really stuck the way your name did.

Sarah was always Strawberry,  
She made friends with Pear,  
Every friendship born online you used their username,  
    But you have always been Lucas.  
The first boy who chose you,  
By your voice and jokes and nothing else,  
It annoyed people in the offline world that you called him Nighters.  
    But you have always been Lucas,  
To him.  
Bug, Egg, Badjer, Swoffs, Crypt, Pseu-  
But to all of them,  
                                You have always been Lucas.

So why,  
When I mistakenly wrote it on my study abroad forms,  
Instead of my birth name,  
Did it hurt enough to cry?

There was a time when I would have rather died than be exposed as trans online.  
Digital blogs and chatting apps were the only place I could live,  
Freely as a gay man.  
Amazed that no one second guessed my manhood,  
If they did,  
Fall back on my effeminate nature,  
The type of gay most people can comprehend.  
Walking proof of stereotypes,  
    I like being cute~  
    I like using :3  
    I like putting the little paw :3c  
    Watch me give him mischievous eyes >:3c  
If it started as pastel shield to protect my boyhood (>w0)/  
Then it ended with full plate sparkly armor (//UwU//)  
I would rather be a walking, typing stereotype  
Than transgender. Let me live.

Video games are filled with toxic, disgusting people. Don't acknowledge, Don't engage.  
    >Sup bro that game was sick!  
    >totally~ ur super good!  
    >thanks bro so are you. Damn I can't believe it's this late.  
    >East coast?

>Toronto yea, what about you bro?  
>West coast, cali!  
>Damn, cali girls are so fine, lucky  
>Ah,,,I wouldn't know,,,I'm gay  
>OH DAMN BRO ME TOO  
>???  
>Professional lesbian  
>AHAHAHA holy shit! How the fuck did we find each other??  
>Fucking FATE bro B)  
>For reals~ oh hey can u stay up for another game? My friend Strawberry just got on  
>Yes sir. Send them an invite

We both understood these rules. We never spoke to anyone else in a game.

So why me? Why you?

Rei, you are the reason I believe in fate.

There's a spot on the top floor of a tall tower in Toronto,

With all three of our game handles lovingly scrawled in Sharpie.

“Why were you hanging out in the girls locker room in high school?”

The rest of us laugh blocking out the audio from the stream,

Because, man, what a jokster, he makes funny jokes. it's a good bit.

“What. Why are you laughing? What did I say?”

Laugh tappers off.

Everyone is confused now. Show is paused with an audible CLICK.

Oh.

OH.

“Max. I'm trans...”

“...Oh...wait really?”

Yes really. We repeat this conversation,

Three years of being in love,

“How did you not know?”

“I had no reason to think you were anything other than what was presented, Chandler's gay guy friend.”

I find out from others,

They all thought that.

A high voice and girlish nature did not a trans make,

I suppose.

Those that did wonder

Or even guess...

Well,

Posting a picture of Donkey Kong waving the Trans Flag in the discord server,  
Kind of an obvious sign in hindsight.

Louder antics,

Cuter emojis,

Comfortable, Comfortable, COMFORTABLE.

Loved, supported, and teased.

They all know,

They all know,

They all know.

Like letting out a held in puff of breath

Relaxing, thankful.

I type: "It's relevant to my interests."

They respond: "Your GAY interests?"

Keysmash and screenshot. Another quote for the collection.

Post it to the channel for posterity.

I keep it there, to remember every moment we created,

Thousands of miles of space erased with lines of code.

You grow up in the age of rapid techno change

Y2K haunts your steps.

You log in and you are home.

# Part 3:

# The Adulthood\*

\*You are an unknowing liar

## Date Night

“Hey, Boo!”

“Howdy, Babe”

“You look lovely, Babe. How have you been?”

“Thanks. Fucking exhausted, as usual.”

“Speaking of usual, where we headed?”

“Um, not sure, you have a craving?”

“Whatever you want, Babe.”

“Where do you... How far do you want to drive?”

“Whatever you want, Babe.”

“Let's grab the usual and bring it back?”

“Do you mind if we swing by Target first?”

“In that case, the other usual?”

“Wait, which usual did you mean?”

“Mickey D's.”

“Oh! I thought you meant Wendy's!”

“We can do Wendy's, I won't complain!  
Just didn't know if you wanted to travel that far.”

“I'm good, I wanna go get cards anyway.  
Audiobook or music?”

“Okie dokie. I wanna get back to the psychic detective.”

“...”

“It's fun hearing your little mad sounds.”

“I completely side with this dude though!  
His ex sucks!”

“Oh, I bet you'll change your mind by the end.”

“Meh, doubt it. This dude is dead to me.”

“You said that for the last book.”

“OK, wait, no, that was different.  
He ended up a sweetheart.”

“Well, people change.”

“Do they?”

“...”

“You alright, Babe? Everything going ok?”

“I think I disappointed my mom.”

“Oh, Babe, what happened?”

“I just feel... I just feel like a failure, again.”

“You are not a failure, Hun.”

“Hah, sure, logically but everything.  
I do seems to just make things worse. I just feel... Oh.”

“Oh, what do you want?”

“Number 10, spicy, medium with a coke. Please and Thank You.”

“Frosty?”

“Not this time.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yea?”

“What if it's too spicy and you die again?”

“Oh my god, I am haunted.  
No, I'll be fine. I mean you almost died too,  
I have never seen you laugh that hard.”

“That was the exhaustion taking over-Hi!...  
Yes, can I get a number 10?.. Medium... Spicy...  
Coke... Yes and also can I get a large Dave's triple  
also with a Coke?... And can I get a side of ranch?...  
Yes... That's all... Thank you!”

“What was I gonna say?”

“Something happened with your Mom?”

“Oh God, right. It just feels like everything  
I do is not enough. Like even if I do what I can do,  
and everything works, it's not good enough  
because it wasn't done the right way.”

“Mhm, I feel that. One sec, Babe.”

“Sure. Wait, shit I'm paying.”

“Are you sure? I don't mind.”

“You drove us all the way over here,  
I can at least pay for dinner.”

“I don't mind, plus I just filled up so no sweat.”

“Yeah well, too bad, take this—card.”

“Ok... Thank you, Babe.”

“Anything for you, Boo.”

“...Hi! No, that's it... Thank you!”

“Thanks!”

“...”

“Did something specific happen, or just in general?”

“I don't know, in general,  
school especially-oh they forgot your ranch.”

“Damn.”

“Do you want me to go in and get you some?”

“No, that's ok, it's not a big deal. And that's bullshit,  
Babe, you're killing it at school.”

“Yeah, but it drives her crazy that  
I don't do things like she would.”

“But aren't you getting all A's?”

“Yeah, for the first time in my life.  
One of those A's was a fluke.  
I so didn't fucking deserve it.”

“No! Come on, Hun, you work so hard!”

“Sometimes, but like, I straight up didn't do one of the like,  
main assignments. Point-wise, I should have gotten a  
mid-B at best. I just... didn't feel like doing it  
because I was having Valentine's date night  
with The Boy.”

“Well that's understandable—”

“Eugh. I feel guilty, like a fraud that used a  
professor's kindness against them.”

“Why do you think you got an A then?”

“Because that was the same class I wrote  
a kickass essay that she wanted to keep—”

“See! -”

“OW!”

“You got to believe in your work, Babe,  
you keep making amazing projects and essays!  
I'm sure your mom can see that.”

“No, well she does, it just feels like...  
Because I didn't do it her way, the like over the top  
overachiever way it feels like it doesn't count. I feel lazy.”

“Babe. You work, so fucking hard,  
you got into the Grad program,  
you are achieving your goals.”

“I know! I know, it doesn't...  
I mean I know it's not logical but I feel like  
I don't deserve this. Any of this.  
Not School, not Max, not my family's attention,



“You will always have me, Lucas.”

not you.”

## ***It's Been—***

### 1 Week:

I have my sister do it for me.  
I'm too scared to take the first stab,  
But I benefit from her nursing career.  
She glances at the 10-minute instructional video that I studied for 30 minutes.  
She gleefully holds the device up, studying the small vial visible within.  
Placing my hands in the correct position,  
I squeeze my pudge, 2 inches from my belly button,  
She angles the juice at 90 degrees and plunges into my squishy tender flesh.  
I flinch but really it doesn't hurt as much as a needle should.  
We count to ten, she pulls the injector away and wipes down my quivering belly.  
Her daughters scream for her from the other room and she smiles at me,  
Her first baby,  
Done.

### 2 Weeks:

I think about my boobs,  
These puppies' days are numbered,  
A joke I say to myself to combat the creeping nausea of surgery.  
I can't even look at chest scars without lightheaded queasy retribution.  
When you fear surgery but ache for change it makes you doubt everything.  
I begin to worry about Max.  
Oh I try and talk myself out of it,  
He's just a boyfriend, he hasn't promised me a future,  
So why should I factor in his feelings? Especially about my body?  
I have the unfortunate disposition of being in love with him.  
I want him to stay, I worry about bothering him, about asking him.  
If he'll miss these, if it will change the way he touches me.  
I want to type out my thoughts but then he sends an unprompted text, as if he sensed me yearning for him:

*“is it wrong that i want to be there when u get top surgery only so i can sit under a blanket with balloons on my chest so that when you wake up and say, ‘Wheres Max’ the doctors say, ‘Who do you think took all your booba?’”*

Before I can type back, he adds:

*“I mean aside from being there as support”*

3 Weeks:

The horniness is real,  
I wrote in my journal.  
I don't know if I'm even doing these shots right.  
Maybe the hyper sexualization is just in my head.  
Maybe it's just nerves.  
Maybe I'm doing this wrong.  
Maybe nothing is happening.  
Maybe I messed up.

4 Weeks:

I squeeze and sense that my chest is more squishy than I remember.  
Redistribution of my weight perhaps, my sister and I conclude.  
The doctor said I would gain fat,  
But I feel thinner,  
And tired, so very, very tired.

5 Weeks:

Cough, my voice is hoarse.  
I feel a pressure every time I speak.  
Does leg hair get lighter on T?  
Google isn't helpful.  
Upside, my sister tells me I'm stabbing myself just fine.  
I need sleep, please, I need to sleep.

6 Weeks:

The pain started Monday, suddenly.  
Bent over, huffing and trying not to panic, steady my breaths,  
The wave of nausea scares me because I know it's from pain.  
I curl up, hide deep in the covers and cry because my stomach won't stop hurting.  
Thursday morning, I place my coffee cup down softly.  
The pain is gone. I hadn't even noticed.  
The dying gasp of estrogen scrapping the walls screaming trying to leave one last scar.  
One last cramp to end all cramps.  
Hysterical laughter of freedom.

7 Weeks:

The lighting in the guest bathroom might be playing tricks,  
But is that hair on my chinny, chin, chin?  
Cough, Cough. Fuck my hoarseness is getting annoying.

I wish I would stop getting so tired after every injection...  
I look down,  
Has it always looked like that?  
God I'm tired.

8 Weeks:

Am I going crazy?  
How does no one hear it?  
They make this face if I ask, very patient and tolerant,  
Like "that's adorable you think that"  
But I hear it, I hear it in the way I have to strain to speak up.  
I have to repeat myself over and over,  
People say they can't hear me, that I'm mumbling but  
Each time I push the sounds out I want to faint.  
Why the fuck is this voice thing the hardest part so far?

9 Weeks:

"It might be psychological."  
Says my psychiatrist,  
"Your body might be trying to work against your vocal chords to try and make you sound  
like how you used to sound."  
"Huh."  
I force out,  
"That's the most logical sounding thing I've heard so far."  
For someone who talks as much as me,  
Being exhausted for just speaking at a normal voice level is torture.

10 Weeks:

I'm a day late.  
The guilt is suffocating as I apply the injection.  
Monday, not Sunday. Stupid, Stupid, Stupid.  
How do you forget something so important?  
Being emotional isn't helping the snap, crackle, pop of my non dulcet tones.  
At least people hear it now.  
The cis boys tell me it stays like that for a while.  
If I ever meet a pre-T trans boy I'm warning him about this shit.  
Because I was prepared for everything but the voice.  
My cis doctor mentioned voice change in passing,  
It wasn't supposed to be a major plot point.  
Yet here I am. Hating how I sound, squeaking and unintelligible.

11 Weeks:

I ask if the hair around my lips and under my chin are ugly,  
We're naked, post shower, grooming and drip drying,  
He hesitates not because he actually thinks it is but to evaluate his words,  
It's the first time we've bumped up against the reality of transition.  
He asks me if I want to use his razor to shave.  
I hesitate not because I think I am being forced but because razors are sharp,  
And I'm often scared.  
He offers it up, gently, and as I hold it my hand tremors worsen.  
He walks me through it, gently, offers me his aftershave.  
I decline as I use my lotion, because I like the smell of him but not for me.  
He kisses my cheek.  
I realize hours later, in a dark movie theater, that my upper lip has stubble.  
My tongue can't help but poke at it, over and over and over-

12 Weeks:

I've had it with this voice.  
I miss Max.  
I wish all my professors didn't assign presentations where I have to talk,  
All of them.  
You can't get a doctor's note for sounding annoying.  
Everyone says I sound fine.  
I don't feel fine.

13 Weeks:

Stubble is growing in, I'm in no rush to shave.  
Four months without menstruation has done wonders for my time management.  
Less time spent worrying, preventing or mopping up blood  
Really helps get your life in order.  
My brother greets me with a smile,  
Tells me I sound deeper, says it with pride.  
I'll take it as a win.

# The Epilogue

I am inside the crashing car

And then I am through the windshield.

I hit the ground running and never look back.

– ‘The Car Crash’ MICHAEL DUMONTIER AND NEIL FARBER

And so the Blue Fairy leans down and kisses the puppet's forehead. He shines, alive and Alive. With a hand of flesh he touches his father's tearstained cheek, traces the smile on his lips. New feelings, new sensations, new him. But he hasn't really changed, he just became real. To everyone else around him. The scene fades, they hold each other tight, Good night, Good night.

2022, I walked into a routine appointment with my endocrinologist to discuss my current medical condition. She asked me how I was, then paused. She asked if the name I added to my online medical profile was the one I wished to be using. I had forgotten writing 'Lucas'. I struggled to answer, she asked me some questions, softly and with care. She was the first medical professional I had come out to. Then I told her everything. How long I had been out, how stagnant my journey had become, the fears and hopes I had for transitioning. She listened, then she asked me if I wanted to see an endocrinologist specialized in Transgender care. Shaken I nod, she hesitated before putting the referral in and informed me that I wouldn't be seeing her anymore, just him. That goodbye was hard. I imagine it was hard for Pinocchio to say goodbye to the Blue Fairy, that kind heart that helped make his dreams come true.

It takes months for the new patient appointment to take place, spring is in full effect. I struggle balancing school work and the impending meeting of this new doctor. We meet, he smiles and a pang of "oh" zings through me. He's something, I know it in my bones, I won't try to guess but he's one of us. I vomit out my life story, I mean he did ask. When he checks the time we've gone over time by a half-hour. He types out the order onto his computer, turns and waits for me to decide. Do I want to start Testosterone? Shaking inside and out I say yes...but not to gel (slow and unsafe around children), and no to needles (I'm queasy at the thought), but yes to the "epi-T's" as I call them. Little epipens full of boy juice—my friends refuse to let me call them that. I get the first package, open it and quickly close it. I leave it on my desk. I text my sister. What do I do, what do I do. We decide I wait. I haven't even told my mother. I offhand mention to my friends and boyfriend I have T. They ask if I've started, I'm embarrassed to tell them I'm scared.

Winter of 2022 I stop waiting, my follow up appointment is around the corner and I haven't touched the four boxes of T in my room. I hold my mother's hands, we cry as I ask her to come with me and meet him, she's scared and confused by so much. The appointment shakes me it feels unreal, like a movie, I am so tired after. My mother is worried that she upset me with her questions, she didn't. She thanks me for bringing her, that it meant a lot to her. I cry the whole car ride home.

Christmas has come and gone. I get on a plane to Seattle. I touch down in SEATAC and dive into my boyfriend's arms. He holds me tight. It's 2 am and I won't let him sleep, my mind running through everything I want to say. "I'm going to start when I get back." "Ok." He smiles in the dark and kisses me. Then he begs me to go to bed for both our sakes. Super Bowl Sunday, I take my first shot.

2023 will end with me in grad school, in a new city, in a new state of mind and my wooden form taking on the flesh I crave. My cricket, My Fairy, My Father, My Journey. Wood to Flesh, Wood to Flesh.



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## Reflective Essay

My goal with *The Pinocchio Boy* is to bring to life my experiences and evaluate the moments that led me to where I am now. I am particular about non-fiction as a genre, it isn't my first choice to read or write. I have narrowed down this issue to the notion that more often than not, non-fiction biopics are there to have profound insight into life and the sufferings they have overcome. I have had my share of suffering, and my share of trauma that did deeply affect who I became. This trauma follows me like a shadow and I am tired of it. My intent was to observe my life, even my regrets and mistakes, through humor and love. So many LGBTQIA+ people are forced to be defined by their trauma because it is the easiest way for the hegemony of our society to consume our narratives. If we are in pain, they can sympathize, because who would choose to live like we do? This is a misunderstanding of the queer experience. We are not trauma, we are not pain, we are multifaceted individuals who so often have their anger and triumphs overlooked. I made a promise to myself a few years ago, that I would try and be the kind of person that can put love and kindness out in the world. It is not an easy task, I have been hurt, and my instinct is to lash out. So I consider this collection of work a sort of apology to myself, a kindness and gentleness I hope to soothe my soul.

I have tried several different techniques of writing in this collection, even my poems differ in style from each other. I wanted to push the boundaries of what I was comfortable with as a way for me to reach the truth at the core of my words. I enjoy writing dialogue and inhabiting characters, so using those moments to characterize the important people in my life was a way for me to contextualize those interactions. I can reflect back on the relationships I've had through embodying these individuals. For my poems, I tend to favor internal monologues over descriptive metaphors. Because these are stories of my life and mindset I wanted to show the

stream of consciousness that comes from rationalizing my memories. The original intent was to have more creative essays in this collection but as I began writing I navigated into memoir territory. I believe this strengthened the collection because the point of the collection is not to be a blueprint for all Gay and Transgender men, just me. But I also wanted to reflect on the most poignant moments in my life in which I felt kindred with the literature I read. These stories were not written with me in mind but I felt connected and shaped by them, if my collection can exist as something of that vein to other trans or gay men then that would be wonderful. My word choices are specific, the slang, terms, and coarse language are meant to evoke a certain emotion I might have felt in the original memories I explore. I also wanted there to be a conversational tone to certain aspects, as if inviting the reader to sit and hear my story in my authentic voice and not a voice I created to seem more educated or elegant. There is a habit with memoirs to make yourself the ‘main character’, but that is disingenuous to how lives are actually lived. We are all parts of each other’s lives, there are no main characters. I don’t want to tell you an epic saga I want to share a wild hijinx of the normal and mundane variety. The terms I choose to define or leave vague are done with a purpose, to keep the flow of the narrative present in the conversation. My poems take different shapes, I am interested in playing with lineation to create focus on the inner thoughts or feelings that most affected me. So the structure and line breaks help guide to these moments. I also like a bit of cheeky humor. I like to make myself laugh in order to keep focus on where my narrative is going. This technique will lead me to slip in little jokes or references that I hope to give off the feel of amusement they bring me, even if the reader doesn’t fully understand the joke itself. For example, the poem *It’s Been*– is actually a reference to a song that is often used humorlessly around the internet. By adding levity to a serious topic

such as undergoing Hormone Replacement Therapy, I can gently guide myself and the reader through the journey.

There are drastic tonal shifts between the poem segments and the memoirs, I intended to act as the narrator of my story in which the poems and dialogue act as the characters in motion and the memoirs as my direct narration. A tongue-in-cheek fairy tale tone, but coming from a sincere place.

My intended audience is anyone who is looking for people like me, I wanted to see more of Transgender Gay Men and so I set out to fulfill that role. I wanted to facilitate solidarity and my need for acknowledgment I sought after in my own life. I know my actual audience will be mostly Cisgender Heterosexual readers who will find this work hard to relate to, uncomfortable, or even distasteful. I embrace the alienation as a form of protest, not all media is made for the majority. But ultimately I am the main audience, I am inviting myself to a front-row seat of exploration and self-reflection, I wish to be brave enough to share it so that readers can bare witness to queer art.

I have scrapped, rewritten, and largely reconstructed most of this project many times. I tried to stay within the original idea laid out in my proposal but so much of this project evolved with every piece. I completely replaced one intended piece after having a conversation with a friend in which they mentioned a long-buried memory from our childhood. It inspired one of my favorite pieces in the collection, “Oh, My Cousin From Out Of Town”. This led me down my path of focusing on the good and kind parts of my journey. I toed the line with certain regrets or losses in my life but steered away from segments that would have centered around the traumas of my life. This project grew and grew, a bit out of my control which I tried to lean into and embrace instead of fight against. It is longer than expected.

'Hidden Histories' is the theme for my capstone class. Upon hearing this topic I thought of myself and then dismissed the idea as egotistical and self-indulgent. I pushed against this idea after sitting through the seminars and reliving the experience of being a queer student in a largely non-queer class. My story is important, my journey is quieted by the people and society I am surrounded by. I am just one singular person, I have not achieved any sort of acclaim, but I have lived a life of ignorance toward my own identity. I grew up not having the words and knowledge to define how I felt or explain who I was. I had to stumble over embarrassing and sometimes dangerous situations in order to discover the truth. I wish to encourage more people to share their stories, and to refuse to be hidden away or shamed out of speaking. A search for equality in self-reflection.