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Prince of Shadows and Stars

 I can remember when I was a five-year old boy with an overactive imagination, I created a world for myself where I was stolen away from the dinosaurs, the missing prince of the survivors of extinction.

The dinosaurs had traveled, long ago, on a meteor up to the skies to a certain star I could point out in the sky- That star was home, not here. There they traveled to escape the events that took out dinosaurs.

I thought I was trapped in a cycle where I had to live out my life once as each creature and as soon as I finished my human life, I could return home, crowned king of the dinosaurs. My name was “Dino.”

My childhood, angry most of the time, adult hating self, was able to believe this on some level all the way until fifth grade.

As soon as I was old enough to voice my opinion, I refused to wear dresses and did whatever I could to get my mom to shop for me from the boy’s section. To my mom’s credit- she let me. I also got to play with Beyblades, toy soldiers, Legos, plastic swords and lightsabers.

But for me, I know I heard more than once, something along the lines of, “You can be a girl and play with whatever you want, enjoy whatever you want, as long as you stay a girl.”

And I was never allowed to cut my hair.

Even as I found joy every time someone couldn’t figure out which gender I was, even as I stopped participating in gym class because I couldn’t decide which side of the room to go to when the class split into boys vs girls, even when the kids wouldn’t let me sit with them at the “girl’s” table or the “boy’s” table and got moved to the peanut free table after eating lunch on the floor.

Even when I turned ten, and told my therapist, “I think I’m a boy.”

I was never allowed to feel free to be.

I can remember being jealous of a friend who got to wear swim shorts, and I asked my mom if I could- to be shut down and reminded of puberty coming up. That was the first time I really realized that “I” would go through puberty and it was panic inducing for me.

The last thing I ever wanted to happen to be was for breasts to grow…

At some point, in panic I voiced this, and got the response of “You will never be a boy.”

I wouldn’t have admitted it at the time but that idea spiraled me badly, and much more than other people I became my own prison guard, and I locked myself away in a mental tower.

And if others would bring up the idea of being trans or gay to me, I’d shut it down.

But a shadow would stare across from me. The dysphoria I’d try to hold back, bubbling to the surface to me would appear as a threat.

Others go through similar phases, experiencing hyper femininity or masculinity before coming out, but for me that wasn’t an option due to the nature of my disabilities. To me- I felt if I let my thoughts step out of line, or even fully accepted others identities, that I would be forced to confront my own.

The first key to breaking out of my own spiral was when I realized people weren’t making up sexual attraction.

This was when I was fifteen.

This took arguing with somebody online, a few hundred replies in, them saying never wanting to have sex was impossible unless you were asexual or something- and me looking up asexuality. Accepting it as an identity definitely took longer- but that was a start.

Each key took time, I kept finding trans people and finding that they hit too close to home in a way that made me very frustrated as someone who didn’t want to be trans- I probably ended up hurting some people.

I tried to overwhelm myself with schoolwork and tasks, which wasn’t hard. In my thought process, if I was too busy to notice dysphoria it was gone right? I totally grew out of it right? No matter how many tasks you do you can’t run from something attached to you.

I can remember from this time, watching videos of women with PCOS that had beards, thinking “Gosh I want a beard” and noticing I was thinking about facial hair, tacking onto the end, “They are women with beards, I can be a bearded woman that’s fine, she even made it pretty, see?”

The next key came around when I was sixteen, older in that year, when I was realizing just how many autistic people are LGBT+. I tend to want to support my fellow autistics- and I trust their judgement. The more autistic LGBT+ people I was exposed to, the more open I was to the idea- this was a continuing trend through my teen years.

Age seventeen, late that year my school gained a Dungeons and Dragons club- and most of the members thankfully were queer neurodivergent people. The people who satellite around that club but who weren’t members I am also thankful for, the transwomen, my non-binary friends. The power of DnD, gay demons, and friendship forced me to look at myself more critically. I was able to talk about gender with them even before I was sure and ready to admit anything to myself.

I ended up having to take an extra year of high school which was very stressful for me- though it did give me more time for DnD... And to think about my gender.

My gender didn’t finally overflow until I was forced off school, because of Covid and broken glasses. Then, when I could do nothing else- I could think of nothing but my gender. One man cannot hold back the sea and no man can untie their shadow.

I realized I couldn’t go on forever pretending to be a woman-

All it would do for me was make me hit walls.

All I was doing was fighting myself.

Even if living truthfully is much more scary,
I do find myself wishing sometimes- I could go back to the start and just through all the years see myself as a lost prince from the stars. Never losing that positive view of myself, as something fascinating.

I’m learning there's a requirement to see yourself.

It’s hard to recognize your own existence when other people won’t, when you don’t want to.
The world doesn’t change on a dime and external validation won't always help and won’t always be there to be found, regardless of what you do.

If there's one enemy you shouldn’t have to fight, it’s yourself.
 Don’t get tangled up with your own shadow.

You can’t win- but you can make peace, eventually.