

Pinocchio; A Guide to Being a Real Girl

by Clementine MacLeod

When I was six, the best thing I could be was good. Good and kind, like Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty*. I liked her pink dress, her singing, and her long thin fingers that were pointed at the tip. I remember looking down at my own chubby, kid hands and thinking I couldn't be pretty without long pointy fingers. I'd grow into them, I reasoned; for now I'd just be good. Aurora smiled and danced and was nice to the forest animals, so I smiled and signed up for a dance class that I hated. I tried my best to be patient and kind to my baby sisters. If I was like Aurora on the inside, I'd grow into my fingers.

I was eight when princesses became dumb. I adapted quickly, falling in love with *Pokemon* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. These were shows my brother and his friends liked, with tough, wise-cracking girls who were "cool, not girly." These girls had spiky hair and hated dresses, and my ringlets, which used to make me look pretty, suddenly made me look weak. I followed my brother closely and desperately tried to keep up with him and his friends. All older, all boys, all unequivocally cooler than me. Instead of joking with them and being "cool, for a girl," I was nothing but a little princess. I wouldn't give up, brushing out my curls and revelling in the straight, sharp-looking nature of my wet hair. I was gonna be tough and sharp and unafraid. That was the best thing I could be.

From ages eight through ten I fought in vain for this "one-of-the-boys" type of character, only to fall short and end up crying to my mom. *The boys are making fun of me*. I didn't know who I should be if I couldn't be a princess and couldn't keep up as the tough girl. I wasn't athletic, and the second I turned ten I towered over every boy and, to my great chagrin, I had to wear a sports bra! The tough girl was skinny and scrappy and fast. I was big and sensitive and always too slow, though I tried desperately not to be. In the dead middle of this mid-pubescent identity crisis, I opened *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and met a girl called Hermione Granger.

For once, Hermione was someone like me. She liked books, argued with boys, and had a head of unruly brown hair. More than anything, though, Hermione was *smart*. Being smart was the single greatest discovery of my childhood, because it gave me an excuse not to be tough or, God forbid, "cool." I threw myself headfirst into my studies and, by the next month, I was at the top of my grade 4 class. And there I remained. Being smart gave me something to hold onto, a way to be interesting and enviable without being a good soccer player. Little ten-year-old Clementine had found her kindred spirit and was not about to let her go. A year later, a classmate came up to me and admitted that when he read *Harry Potter*, he didn't picture Emma Watson in Hermione's shoes, but me. It was the single greatest compliment I'd ever received, and he hadn't even intended it as one.

The darkside of being the Smart Girl didn't rear its head until years later, when my friends started being called pretty and "liked" by the boys in our grade. I didn't care, I told myself, only stupid girls care about boys. I was decidedly better than that. I didn't wear makeup; I didn't like shopping; I didn't like boys. I was Smart and that was the Best Thing. As the months wore on, the intelligence I had so readily clung to began to feel like my downfall. Was that the reason I wasn't pretty? Was that the reason I wasn't popular? I didn't *care* about these things, obviously, but the thought wouldn't leave me alone. If I wasn't the Smart Girl, I was nothing, so I would stay the Smart Girl. I had to.

My second perfect discovery came the summer after Grade Eight. High school loomed on the horizon and I was forced to grapple with my discovery that I did, in fact, care about boys and

that I actually liked how I looked with makeup. The admission should have been freeing, but instead I felt unmoored. Pointless. I was at a bookclub, of all things, the first time I heard the term Manic Pixie Dream Girl. The MPDG was awesome! Despite all the critics saying she was a male fantasy, my thirteen-year-old brain felt certain she was everything I wanted to be. Stylish and bubbly while still being smart, she made everyone and everything fall deeply in love with her. This was the girl I was looking for.

And it worked – for a while. I got more attention and people would say to me, “Clem, you’ve got everything together.” And I did. Until I didn’t. Until I couldn’t keep up, once again, with the character I was in my head. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl was perfect, but she was unattainable. This realization hurt, more than it realistically should have. Realism, though, has never been my strong suit.

I’m sixteen now and I still don’t know what the Best Thing for me could be. I’ve been the Girly Girl, the Tough Girl, the Smart Girl, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, but never a real girl. Never a person, always a character. In the movie *Pinocchio*, a wooden puppet’s greatest wish is to be a real boy. In my life, I’ve never wanted anything *less* than to be a real girl. I know Pinocchio gets his wish in the end and becomes a real boy and, although it’s never been a dream of mine, the same thing happened to me. I’m a real girl, and I guess I’ll have to live with that.

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