

I'm not ready to share this yet.

But you want to save it?

I want to save it.

But you save it like this. You save it in a book. You obscure the meaning, but it's there. It's in the ink. It's on the page. It's in the realm of the physical.

That's not the same as sharing.

It's exactly the same as sharing.

And who asked you?

Who invoked me?

Well played.

Do you remember when you met me?

When I met you? I don't remember it so much as a meeting as you were just already there.

I was, yes.

After high school, then. That's when you showed up. That's when life began. That's when I started thinking of myself as a person. That's when I started thinking of others as people, with their own motivations, their own desires, their own incentives and failings.

And you made it through.

After a fashion.

You're here, now. You made it through.

*She never wanted to be
What she became;
The irony of which
Is not lost on her.*

Touching.

Hey now, don't be rude. Aren't you supposed to be my ally?

I am your ally. I'm just not your friend.

Fair enough.

So you showed up after high school. You showed up after life slid sideways through puberty. I went digging, you know. To find this out.

Oh?

Yeah. June 2004. There you are. I say,

The navy blue I've been seeing at waist level in front of me and to my left is contentment. I'm not entirely sure that it being omnipresent is a good thing, however, considering the colors it's mixed with. Am I really content with longing and hopelessness? It's not out of the question, I suppose that it could just be another aspect of my personality. But that just brings up the question of whether or not it's something I ingrained into myself through habit, something where I just kinda accepted that feeling such things is normal, okay, and what I want; or is it something I was born with, or that we're all born with? Is it a side effect of love, expecting impossible desires and the blind hopelessness that follows the end of a four year undertaking?

And you replied...?

You're rambling.

So pleased you remember.

You're rambling.

I suppose I am. But there you were. You said *You're rambling* to which I replied "Guilty, conspirator." And that was that. That was us. We never greeted each other. Why would we?

I kept digging, too. You stuck around for a year. I saw you off and on until June 2005. In October, 2004, I said that empathy is

cooler in person. *Why?* you asked. *So you can verify? Don't you trust your feelings?* I said I didn't know, and then I begged you not to go.

Everyone always leaves, don't they?

Perhaps. It's good to hear from you again. Even after fourteen years, I've missed you.

And what was the last thing I said to you?

I was going to call you emo, or suicidal, but no, not goth. It was when Ash and Shannon and I found a house to move into.

I believe I also called you a prick.

Was I?

Yes.

Am I still?

Yes, but a different kind.

You're as chipper now as you were then.

Yes, but a different kind.

Why am I here?

Aren't you always?

With you, sure. Why am I bound to words, though? It's been fourteen years.

Surely that's not all on me. You must play some role in it. I was talking with my partner about doing something autobiographical for my next project, after all.

I'm the observer and the mirror. All I can do is reflect your choices back at you. Choice itself is not my department.

After getting *Restless Town*¹ finished, I needed something to do. Some other project that would make me feel like I was being productive.

Feel, or seem?

Both. If I sat still, I'd burn up. If I was seen sitting still, clearly I'd be worth less in the eyes of those around me, right?

Not my department.

Right.

So I started digging through stuff I'd already done, seeing if any of it could be cleaned up and turned into a new project. I stumbled across *Rum and Coke*² and found it mostly clean as it was, so I decided to publish it as a book. Paperback and ebook, I mean, not just the stories online.

¹makyo.ink/publications/restless-town

²makyo.ink/publications/rum-and-coke

Were you proud of them?

To an extent. A different me wrote them. A lesser me, in some ways. I was younger, I hadn't quite found my voice and tone. No *Arcana*,³ no *Disappearance*, no *Getting Lost* or *Post-Self*.⁴ All I had was a few scattered tidbits and my mom's words ringing in my ears: "You wrote your own wedding vows, right? I could tell."

A me with a different identity, too. A me that was working on gender through small steps. I hadn't yet picked up the word 'trans' for myself. I was non-binary, presenting male, writing to justify myself. Or maybe to hype myself up. I was writing works about gender and poly problems being worked through to convince myself it was possible.

They read like parables.

They were, to me. Each one came with an internal discussion after the last line, *now, what can we take from this?* Something in a circle. Socratic. A talking stick.

I know, I was there.

Of course.

Why didn't I show up then?

I was too...something. Too busy, too preoccupied. I was focused too much on identity, too much on The Work, as it were, to reflect. Maybe I was moving too quickly to notice my choices being shown to me.

³makyo.ink/publications/arcana

⁴post-self.github.io

You'd mostly stopped [adjective][species]⁵ by then, too.

Life got weird. I was transitioning–

A choice.

–I was solidifying my relationship with Judith–

A choice.

–I was starting to burn out at work–

Was that a choice?

The result of choices, maybe. The result of the choice to start drinking. It is called *Rum and Coke*, after all. The result of the choice to get into computers. The result of the choice to work from home, which itself was the result of a choice to take the previous job so far from home.

You burned out in part because you burned so hard at the start.

Was I not supposed to? I had to prove myself.

To whom?

You?

Not my department.

One of your neighbors, perhaps. A cubicle over, a floor above, something like that.

⁵adjectivespecies.com

Do you anthropomorphize me that much?

No, I suppose, I don't. You're not my therapist, sitting in a chair across from me and talking me through my problems. You're not person shaped. You're the shape of my hands displaced half an inch behind my own, navy blue and trimmed with sea-foam green.

You haven't used colors in fourteen years, either.

What I'm trying to say is that maybe you're back because of nostalgia. *Restless Town* was done and couldn't be published yet, and a prideful part of me didn't want it to be my first book, so I pulled *Rum and Coke* into shape.

It rubbed my nose in the past. I published it a few weeks ago, and I wasn't done with the past, so I started archiving more data. I dug up my old hard drives. I grabbed stuff from Dreamhost, both files and database backups. I finally unlocked my LJ account and archived that.

And you work at an archive.

I go through phases, looking back at the past. I'll spend a few days trying to backdate some log files, or dig through my old scores and publish them — I did that too, alongside *Rum and Coke*, publish a bunch of my old music — or resurrect my notes on *Nanon*,⁶ or the like.

You are quite mercurial.

A failing. That may play a role in my burnout. I'm only good at something for seven years before it becomes so intolerable that I have to leave. Happened with school.

⁶nanon.lang.drab-makyo.com

So here I am, your ally, twice seven years later.

I hadn't thought of it that way.

*Portentous. The only way it would've been more so is if
it were thrice seven years.*

I ran away thrice seven years ago. In seventh grade, in 1997, no less.

Ill omens. What will happen to me in seven years?

Will you leave me for good?

Can an ally disinhabit a mind so easily?

I'm not comfortable with that question. I'm not comfortable with its implications. Either way, the past is important to me because maybe it can help me figure out the present. Those who don't know history are doomed to blah blah blah.

And have you figured out your present?

For me to pull out that trite quote about my own personal history speaks pretty well to my fears of doing things accidentally. I've certainly figured out my present better than twice-seven-years-ago me had figured out his.

Apophenia

What?

Apophenia. Connections. Imaginary lines traced from topic to topic in cheap butcher's twine.

And the topics?

Imaginary. Or real, but only half remembered. I'm spinning a web.

Are you catching something?

You?

Are you answering with a question?

I'm unsure.

You're not catching me in that.

You sound so final.

Not my department.

Right. Is that a fact, then? I'm not catching you in this web. Are you the web?

Not my department.

The spaces between, then. The negative spaces outlined by twine wrapped around pins. There are connections—

Or not.

-or not, and there are topics, imaginary or not, and then there's you, there, in the place between. You, the liminal creature. You, defined by absence.

Presence and absence are not my department, either.

Are you some cousin to apophenia, then? Some relative to that *unmotivated seeing of connections accompanied by a specific feeling of abnormal meaningfulness*? Are you that numinous, abnormal meaningfulness?

*I am easier to define in negatives. I am not presence and absence, but between them. Beyond them. Your ally, but not your friend. Real enough to impinge on your reality, but totally imaginary. **Not here. Not doing. Not thinking, feeling, acting.***

So, are you?

Anything else is just pareidolia.

I'm sorry this is taking so long.

To whom are you apologizing?

You? Or is that not your department?

Not really, no. Doubtless, I appreciate — if that's the right word — the time we spend together, but only in the sense that one appreciates one's ears popping. The world that exists for me when you're not engaging with me is just the world. A bit muffled, perhaps. I can't hear as well. I hear by speaking, and when I can speak, there's a little pop, and suddenly I can hear much better.

That's a very embodied-person thing to say.

So? Is a metaphor not allowed to use metaphors?

I suppose so.

When 2007 rolled around, I turned 21. *What if*, I thought to myself. *What if I decided to see what it feels like to be addicted to something?*

By that point, alcohol was this nebulous thing. I'd roped a few people into getting me alcohol now and then, and it was fine. I'd started brewing and it was whatever. I had beer and it was alright. I went through a mead phase—

You went through several.

—I went through a wine phase, and an absinthe phase—

Don't sell yourself short. You wrote an essay on absinthe.

—and a gin phase. That's the one that got me. I had a bottle of Beefeater's, what was to become my gin of choice, and I had an inch of it poured over ice and I was standing in the kitchen. Such a wide open space. The kitchen at that apartment was larger than my bedroom now, and it opened onto a living room the size of what we have now. I was standing tall in that vast plain of a room, staring down into my glass and watching the way the ice melting into the gin created swirls of two different kinds of transparent. I was thinking how it was probably due to the different ways the two liquids refracted light, and then I was laughing, because I was staring down into my drink like something out of a bar.

What if I decided to see what it feels like to be addicted to something? I thought. I drank every night that week.

Why ruin your life on accident when you can do it on purpose?

I don't think I was thinking in those terms at that point.

Are you now?

Perhaps.

Maybe you're just afraid of doing anything by accident.

Perhaps.

You're sounding like me more by the day.

Learn from the best.

And so you set about with a will.

Like magic. I set forth my will with a stated goal and made it happen. My spell was spoken and washed down with liquor. I drank nearly every day from then on out. I spent thousands of dollars on alcohol over the next ten years. I went through more mead phases and more beer phases. I went through a distillation phase. Magic is empowerment through attention to detail.

The MEAD principle. Cute.

I drank hard with the choir, and then I left school and drank hard with the programmers. If there's one thing that most programmers do better than computers, it's drinking, after all.

I did some work at a bar, even. Just making their menu and website for them in exchange for free drinks.

You mastered \LaTeX that way. A very you thing to do.

I did well at it. I still have one of the menus and some of the paper laying around somewhere. I did that until the bartender left and, when I asked for my next payment from the owner, he flipped out at me and threatened to sue me for impersonating him. I don't

think I realized Raffi, the bar manager who hired me, was already on his way out.

I drank my way out of one job and through a good chunk of another. I drank until I got better at it than I was at software. I drank myself into burnout. I drank until I collapsed.

You used up your spell slots. You ran out of will. You had to quit by accident.

I worked to quit, I'll have you know. It wasn't easy. It took meds and some rough nights.

*You were less of a person then than you were when you started drinking. The you who started drinking by focusing on **starting drinking** was more real than the you who collapsed in the kitchen from a PNES and stopped drinking because she was completely empty of intention.*

Should I start the daily drinking again, then?

You're more of a person now than you were when you started drinking.

That, coming from you, is a glowing endorsement.

You may have been more of a person when you started than when you stopped, but you weren't much of one, even then.

When I was young, back before I knew what mental health entailed, what anxiety and abuse and depression really meant, I was convinced I was having semi-regular mental breakdowns. That was the phrase I used then, because I was unsure of what it meant to have a panic attack.

This was before LiveJournal, of course. This was before I was writing on the internet, or even really on the internet at all. This was before you.

No, it wasn't.

Right.

When I ran away, my dad found my paper journal. I had kept it infrequently, as something about daily journaling to a seventh-grader felt dishonest, stupid. What could I possibly write about?

In the journal, I mentioned on a few occasions that I'd had a mental breakdown. My dad called me several times over the next few days after my mom found me, and in one of those calls, he yelled at me about that. "Do you really think you're crazy?" he said. "Do you need to be taken to an asylum?"

I told him no. I whispered it. I murmured it. I wasn't crazy. I didn't need to go to an asylum. I just felt like time stopped for me and the world around me sped up. I just felt like I was holding on by the barest amount of friction on my fingertips. The whorls of my fingerprints providing my only grasp on reality.

That was me saying hi.

Blunt-force greeting?

I was quiet as a mouse.

I have the words now. I have the vocabulary. I can say derealization, depersonalization, dissociation. I can say panic attack and anxiety and depression and hypomania. I can say *ah, **this** is what is happening now.*

You have emotions now, is what you have. That's your mental breakdowns were.

Dad didn't believe in those. Not for boys. *Mood's a thing for cattle and loveplay, right? Emotions are for women.*

He was half-right.

I suppose he was.

I think of myself as a trans woman, not a woman. I think of past me as male, not female. To an extent, I think of past me as cisgender. I was a guy. I was that gay guy who tumbled out the other side of puberty and was left to figure out what the fuck. I am not who I was.

You have ship-of-Theseus'd yourself into what you are.

I was not Madison. I am not Matthew. I can't deny his existence, though. He was him, and to erase that, to toe the party line and say I've always known that I was Madison, would do a disservice to him.

He got in all those relationships. He loved so hard it hurt. He dreamed of being held. He struggled with the words.

He fought. He enacted his cruelty in countless subtle ways. He promised himself he'd be better than his dad and failed more often than not.

He rode the same crests of hypomania and crashed just as hard after. Once, he tried to schedule his hobbies into his day so thoroughly that he forgot to schedule meals, then, having failed two weeks later, considered shooting himself in the head. Anxiety rode him just as thoroughly. Once, dead convinced that he had meningitis, he wrote a note apologizing to loved ones and left it on the bedstand.

He was just as mercurial, too. The brewing phase—

Phases. Plural.

—the gun phase, the photography phase and all its subphases: digital, film, cross-processing, rangefinders.

Yeah, he was a prick.

You said I still am, but a different kind.

In all fondness.

How kind.

All this to say, I have not always known I was trans. To pretend such would be to erase a real, actual person who tried his best more often than not.

Have you answered Theseus' question?

I don't know.