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Both worlds.

Walking in both worlds, you see both sides. Walking in both worlds, they say you have nothing to hide. Your mask is a mirror, a perfect reflection; glass, it absorbs the uncomfortable questions. Paint your mask blue, they’ll say you’re a fake, paint the mask pink, they’ll say you’re a thief. Walking in both worlds, you *are* a reflection. Your mask may be splattered but you’re a clear person.

Secret.

The secret of mine is kept in a shoebox, it’s stuffed behind a mirror and draped on a bedpost. It’s worn around the house after dark and on rainbow days where they’ve called for an expression from the heart. It’s kept from former schoolfriends and shown to my true friends, it’s a shawl with the shine of purple, blue and pink. It keeps me happy, this secret of mine but I wish that the secret me didn’t have to be so secret sometimes.
all of the things i wish i could be instead of a gendered entity

my gender is
the longing for childhood moments
you can never get back
smells you can never find again
feelings that you know existed, but in
acknowledging them you
resign to never being able to feel them
like you did then
i want to transition into
those little bits of light the campfire spits out
raindrops in the foliage, the day after it rains
folded clothes piled neatly in stacks
the smell of a new book as you turn the pages,
the spine of that book as you break it in
the feeling of being in an unfamiliar church,
like you’re in the
presence of something big and you’re not quite supposed to be
there at all
beams of sunlight that illuminate all the specks of dust in the air
i repeat all of these things to myself,
reverent,
like a prayer
and i thank god for all the transsexuals on earth and i say Oh Thank The Lord! Oh Thank The Rain! Oh Thanks The Shapes The Light Makes Through The Bathroom Window! Oh thank The Quiet Sunday Mornings! Oh Thank The Smell Of Your Mother's Clean Laundry Which You Can Never Quite Replicate! Oh Thank The Way My Feet Feel When They Strike The Wet Pavement! Oh Thank My Bones And All The Ways They Creek! Oh Thank The Joy Of Waking Next To A Friend In Bed! Oh Thank The Raging T4T Faggots And Their Stubbed Out Fag Buts! Oh Thank God And All Her Little Queers! I Am Here! And I Am Here! And I Am Here!
A Person, Folded In Half

I couldn’t tell you at what age exactly, but I can tell you with certainty that at some point in my childhood I stopped (for the most part) being the person I was in my head, and started being the person I knew the world wanted me to be.

For a long time, first in my pre-teen and then spindling out into my early adolescent years, I felt distinctly like I was two different people. Or, perhaps more accurately, that I was living two different lives. I knew my home life, though deemed societally ‘normal’ in many ways - one mother, one father, happily married, middleclass, both academics, had one child together at an albeit slightly older but nevertheless acceptable age - was different in particular and peculiar ways to those of my peers. Partly because of all of those things, in truth, as I grew up in the elbow of Scotland’s most diverse area and my primary school was no exception to that. I am eternally grateful to whichever higher power allowed my father to win the argument about whether or not they should send me to the private school round the corner from the (actually much worse, but still better for any human being than private education) high school I ended up attending.

But, dutifully disclosed privilege aside, I always felt that my home life was unusual in a sense. Looking back, I feel it’s as if my childhood happened in an alternate dimension, outside the realm of time.
In conversation with a friend recently, he told me that the glimpses of life with my parents he had seen reminded him of the aughties ITV show ‘My Parents Are Aliens’, in which two aliens foster three children in an attempt to assimilate into society, the children then forced to wearily tolerate all of their foster parents otherworldly efforts to fit in. This is, obviously, an exaggeration. Sort of.

Where my peers watched Disney shows like iCarly, The Suite Life of Zack and Cody, or Lizzie McGuire; I watched old tapes of Ivor the Engine, Andy Pandy, Bagpuss, Mary Mungo & Midge, The Peanuts, and a Czech animated series called Pat & Mat - the Slavonic Chucklevision. My dad shared with me the things he watched growing up, which following on from cartoons, included things like Laurel & Hardy and many Ealing Studios films from the 1940s and 50s: The Happiest Days Of Your Life and Train Of Events were two of our favourites. I was also the baby of my family by the better part of a decade, as were both my parents, so I grew up pretty exclusively around those much older than me - and I wasn’t really babied either. If I wanted to argue a point with my parents, they’d expect me to hold my own in a debate. They would not concede simply because I was, you know, an eight year old.

My mother was a Polish immigrant, who came to the UK to work in the academic field she wanted to pursue (a field in which there were no jobs in her home country), and stayed to marry my father. She grew up in communism, of which my understanding as a child was that there were always very long lines for things and that’s why mum will absolutely never queue for anything not even a roller coaster. Especially not a roller coaster.
It also meant that my primary school lunches were an anomaly in the playground for which I was teased mercilessly by other kids - whose parents packed lunchables and cheese strings in place of salt with radishes, boiled eggs, and kabanosy.

I tell you all of this as to provide you a backdrop to the events of my childhood I really wish to discuss. The two lives, part. So, yes, growing up I already knew I felt different for reasons outwith the obvious. The obvious being, that I am a raging transsexual. My earliest memories of my sense of self beginning to split down the middle and peel apart from itself in that overtly transsexual way, come from stock photos. I mean like, the stock photos in clothing catalogues, the ones of little boys mid-jump wearing denim and polo shirts. Those. I remember staring longingly at those pictures whenever my mum flicked through the ‘boy’ section to get to the ‘girl’ section. I remember the feeling so clearly now. The way I yearned to peruse the pages of those catalogues and caress the faces of the boys I wanted to be. The same aching trans-masculine want I feel now when I’m pining over a crush, the same bloodcurdling gut-wrenching gender-envy I feel for whichever skinny white twink is on my Instagram feed that day. Oh, the he/they of it all. Yup. Three year old me was just as big a trans masc then as he is now. Surprise.

As best as I can figure from these fragmented memories, I started to feel like I was a different person in my head around the age of four or five. But the thing that really gets me is this: I don’t ever remember a time where I consciously realised I couldn’t be the person in real life that I was in my head.
I just always knew I was supposed to be a girl. And somehow I knew, without ever being told, the things that forbade me from. I knew when people called me he, as they often did, I couldn’t let it go uncorrected. I knew when I turned eight and was informed by my mother that after having had the same bowl cut slash bob hairstyle symptomatic of being a child in the aughties for my whole life it was time to change it, I couldn’t say - no matter how much I wanted to - that I wanted my hair cut ‘like a boys’. I knew I would have to settle for whatever approximation of that her hairdresser decided to give me, and I would have to smile at myself tight-lipped in the mirror and say I like it and thank you very much.

And I learned, too. I learned that being a girl meant you have to keep your mouth shut because people get annoyed when you talk too much. I learned that being a girl meant accepting that you will never get the attention that the loud boys get, because even when you cry all the time you’re only told to toughen up and don’t be so sensitive and you have to be more mature and set a good example for the boys because otherwise how will they learn that nothing is their fault. I learned that even if you think you relate to the autistic characters you read about in books, you can’t possibly be one because you’re not smart enough or male enough and besides you’ve been taught to doubt everything you feel because it’s probably wrong anyway. And, because of this, I surmised what I saw to be the unequivocal truth: that there was something deeply wrong with me, it had no name, and no one else would ever see it. I was ten.
It was five years before anyone would place the word ‘autism’ in my orbit with any suggestion that it could describe me, too. In those five years, unfortunately, the word ‘autism’ had generally been popularised at least in the teenage social spheres of my high school to mean ‘stupid’, and was getting thrown around the way the r-word had been a couple years prior. And that was about all I knew of it. You can imagine my shock, when after rattling through what amusingly might as well have been a list read verbatim from the NHS web page on symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder to my CAMHS counsellor (a wholly lovely woman who was for a time someone I felt to be my only ally in the adult world, a metaphorical needle in the haystack that I now know to be CAMHS), she said ‘What do you know about Aspergers?’.

Now imagine the loop for which I was thrown when I scrolled through the website she had told me to look through on the bus from CAMHS to my local LGBTQ youth group (another needle), only to see a list of every single issue I had just expressed. Trouble making eye contact? Check. Can’t read social cues? Check. Hate loud noises? You guessed it, check. I now realise many of these things had been subtly hinted at by my aforementioned friend (of the ‘My Parents Are Aliens’ simile) and were thus in my subconscious before I knew he was trying to tell me he thought I might be autistic. Which he then told me, when I met him at McDonalds for our pre-group scran, and I promptly blurted out ‘I think I have autism’. He said, ‘yeah, my mum thinks that too’. He then gently explained to me that his older brother is autistic, and his mum tends to be right about these things. And she was. Two years later, I had a diagnosis.
I have dealt with a lot of capital T Things, trademark, in the nearly three years since that diagnosis. A lot of feelings, a lot of realisations. You know, Things. Amongst it all, I am realising all of the ways the world made me into a shape that fit. And not just the world, but the people in it. I was taught who I was supposed to be, and how that person was supposed to act, and that was supposed to be the end of it. So I adapted. I became a person, folded in half. And what I’m realising is that not only did I fold in half, I was then forced into thinking I had to fit someone else’s narrative of my dissent from that folding. Peeling. Whichever. So I tore myself in two trying to make sense of the cissexist, digestible-to-the-reader narrative I had been provided with. If you’re trans, you’re born in the wrong body. If you’re born in the wrong body, you have to either admit you’re a betrayal to your past self, or you’ve betrayed everyone else.

You can tell these narratives suit the cis people they were created to serve, by the way, because they act as a cop-out. It’s always you think you’re trans, you were born wrong, never we told you you had to be something you’re not. Cis people like to think gender exists as an oppressive force outside of their control, and not one which they help enact.

For quite a while, I dealt with this internalised feeling of being a betrayal. To myself, to my past self. To my loved ones. Half of my life had been ripped from me, and now lay in a heap of papers somewhere I couldn’t find. And I feel ridiculous, almost, to tell you how it ended. Years of self-loathing, and all it took was a random Tuesday. I was standing in front of the
fridge, and on the fridge there was a photo-magnet of me and my dad on a rollercoaster when I was around six or seven. I hadn’t seen the photo in years. Suddenly, I was looking at seven year old me, staring straight into the camera in his High School Musical t-shirt (my brief stint with gender-envy for Troy Bolton) and the floodgates opened. I remembered how I used to make my dad go on that rollercoaster with me over and over. I remembered being the little boy who loved Annie, and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and The Sound of Music, and Mary Poppins. Who padded barefoot through a house in the hills of Poland. I thought, God. I am him. I still yodel in the bath. I still love all the same movies. I still pose for a photo and smile like him. I was standing open mouthed, yoghurt and spoon in hand, in front of the fridge, in my boxers, and I laughed. I was Lindsay Lohan acting opposite herself, holding together two pieces of one torn up photograph strewn across a decade and an ocean and two different childhoods. I was him and I was me, and we were the same person. We were the same person, the whole time.
I come from

I come from a family where love is unconditional. Where I’m encouraged to grow tall and I’m picked up when I fall.

I come from a friend group who keeps me in high spirits. Who make me laugh when I’m sad and calm me down when I’m mad.

I come from the people who believe I have potential, who challenge me to be the change I want to see.

I come from stacks of unread books and a longing to learn through quizzical outlooks on a world that is filled with suffering, with pain, with those who would do anything for a superiority gain.

I come from the knowledge that Equality is the key to ensure that everybody is safe, just like me.

I come from a hope: to change the world. I come from a hope that the world can be changed
I'm you when I'm with you

I've always been told
that I don't need to change
for anyone at all.
But I alter myself
for everyone
and that is my downfall.

I become who I'm with.
security in similarity.
No conflict or chaos
in the feeling of familiarity.

In myself, I see
a bit of everyone surrounding me.
I mimic my family,
match my friends energy,
steal sayings I've heard but never used.
I copy the expressions on your face,
carry your headspace,
And hope that you don't get confused
when you start to see
yourself in me.

I'm so used to
masking
That finding myself is
tasking.

Because then I'm forced to
think about who I am
when I'm alone
and I don't know where to start.
Believe me, I've tried
but the truth is I can
no longer tell apart
the characteristics that are yours
and which are truly mine at heart.
The secret me

The secret me has no filter.

I'm filled with messy feelings that I can't neatly put into words and dangerous thoughts that I can't safely display.

I am not the finished product but that's all you see. "I'm talented," you say to me but I do not agree.

The secret me feels like a fraud.

You don't understand.

You didn't see how I struggled for inspiration, which comes from triumphs and tears, from fights and fears, from the state of feeling helpless.

You aren't aware of the hours that I tend to spend, staring at a blank page in a pitiful rage just willing for words to come

You don't think about how much effort it takes to fix all of the mistakes in a first draft.

The secret me is constantly rewriting, a work in progress.
Nice to meet you, I’m…

Every time I turn that camera on,
I sit up straight,
my face lightens up,
I smile and much to my surprise,
I become this confident well-spoken woman,
Let’s call her Eliza.
People say Eliza’s funny,
she’s interesting,
she looks great.
People come to her for advice
and tell her, she is a role model.
They put Eliza on this pedestal,
It makes me feel great that people see her like this.

But…

As the camera switches off,
I take off that Eliza mask,
my postures slumps,
my mood changes
and I go quiet.
I switch to this other version of myself,
let’s call her sue.
Sue is different from me,
she looks at the body I love,
the body that I spent a lifetime creating
and she tears it apart like one would tear open presents at Christmas.
She looks at my shoulders, my feet, my belly and my face, 
She hates them all. 
Sue takes everything I said and over analyses it. 
My friends, My family and My crushes. 
She tells me everything I said to them is wrong. 
She tells me I messed everything up because of it. 
She tells me everyone hates me because of it. 
The worst part is I believe Sue, every word she says.

But...

At the end of the day, 
I'm not Sue but I'm also not Eliza. 
I'm the true me and the true me is awkward, funny, hot and interesting. 
The true me cares about my loved ones and is loved by them too. 
The true me doesn't let me be brought down by Sue and doesn't let others decide who Eliza is. 
I decide what I am and I am.
We Are Now Approaching

i have an oversized hoodie and nervous patience.
(hiding my heart inside my sleeves)
train station platforms reek of recent nostalgia,
with suitcase and rucksack, always taking more than i need;
clothes,
love,
time.

when is too soon to leave?

i watch lovers hands holding each other to the background
music of "the next stop is",
speeding through tunnels,
important phone conversations,
and children pointing out the obvious.

how obvious am i?

is it better to be first but to be seen,
or last or late but at your own pace?

i have an umbrella and stubborn patience
i won't leave until those thoughts stop.

they never will.
Synchronous

The secret me is an asshole.
I judge and bite,
run away from my problems (and my friends)
I am lonely and selfish and crave to fight.

But I also know how to be kind,
to others and myself.
I know that in reality if someone started squaring up with me
I'd probably just cry.

I make an effort not to judge,
My nails are the only thing I really bite
(they're painted black as a deterrent)
((looking cool is more fun than bleeding cuticles))
I'm working on standing firmly on the ground,
even when it feels like one gust of wind, or anxiety,
could blow me down

I phoned my friends last week. It was really nice.
Back Seat Passenger

The secret me loves to dream
The secret me loves to create
The secret me loves to love.
Secret me sees the world through rainbow-tinted glasses
Secret me wouldn’t have it any other way
The secret me wants to share her hopes and optimism and colour with outward me
She wants her to take off her shadow ridden, battered black spectacles and look Through her lens of awaiting happiness
The secret me longs to see the world through her own glasses,
She sits in the backseat, Longing to touch the steering wheel, But the driver is too afraid Of crashing the car.
My Many Selves.

Watery eyes staring for answers never found. 
The reflection of a rainy day stares back, 
Bleak, bland, uncertainty. 
I see him, He sees me too. 
Dark lighting makes for easier imagination, 
In day he is unfamiliar, a faint taste on the tip of my tongue.

Fading memories of foamy water drowning the pebble beaches, 
The taste of salt that lingers from tears and ocean water. 
A childhood image that mirrors what mine should have been, 
but never was. 
She was a smiley and laid back child, outgoing and brave. 
He is a gloomy teen, trapped and drowning in a body that isn’t his.

When he stares in the mirror, mesmerised by missing memories, he sees her smiling back. 
She and Him are not the same. 
Two different people inhabiting the same idea, detached from what everyone sees. 
He is the truth, while she is a memory, a lingering smile.
The depths of the ocean conceal the clouded judgement of formerly close friends,
Aching hearts left from bitter misunderstandings.
He never understood why they couldn’t understand.
He never understood why they didn’t care.
His mind was flooded with fears and thoughts of rejection.

People change, he learned that the most difficult way he could,
From alone to an abundance of love.
People change, he sees it daily now,
From closed minded to open, free spirits.
Maybe the world is finally changing for the better.

No longer alone, no longer angry.
He finds light in the darkest of corners,
He finds solace in the busiest of cities.
While the mirror still doesn’t show the truth,
People still look and find it within him.
(Where I Come From) We Write Ourselves Into Monsters

Every book I’ve ever read has carved a stripe into my chest, a rotted cavity in which facade resides. Umbral flowers which take root inside the staining scales of poetry still spin unending mystery and rush in morphine tides.

It doesn’t matter who I am or where I’m from in retrospect as all we are in retrospect is someone’s art automaton.
Each Side of the Light

Side 1 - Condescend

I walked into the restaurant with my metal boot-heels clicking, wiretapping cadence I was sure I’d deign to dampen. There they sat like spectral spirographs: each shallow breath was measured.

I was juxtaposed against a netherworldly storm front, some political bombardment offering me pizza. From that moment I was shut. I could not crumble, could not weather.

I in all my alchemy was bound by their intentions, their circumstantial weary interventions. I found myself a chasm, one mind on either side; the cabaret would covet my attention.

I switched my Walkman off.

Side 2 - Broadcast

There are neighbours playing me; there are records whinging ringback tones. My thoughts have grown suspicious since your clouds have billowed in. Your pillow talk is warm abject remorse, and in the days when I am left to slip alone the backdrop clips. I drop my dishes. Blood alights prophetic quartz.

Next thing I know, I’m flying up to meet you at your end; the words which tumble aimlessly are daggers now and streaming through your air as you descend, a harpy and a counterfeiter.
I Wish I Could Just Let Go
(and be taken by your octopus euphoria)

The secret me
is solar, stripped
of tongues and cherry cola;
captured in nets, it slithers
susurrant from shore
and thrashes. Ashes
scatter on the ocean floor.

With the ticking of the clock
it cowers not for leering rocks
and with the shouldered war
of cold and hoarse
unknown peculiarity

its paralytic amperage
is malice swept in suavity.
The secret me is sun-bleached
and the secret me is angry.
She Can't Go Back to Bottleneck

This castle in the air uncurls,
its seams now cleft
and us dichotomised.

The glitch in your reflection
as an echo brushed
like jetstreams through my eyes
left nerves exposed
in wireframe brainwaves
smothered.

Temporary comfort
rests in
artificial lovers.

Presently, my lesson's learned:
if lifeblood flows in retrograde
then matter burned
will ever be discoloured.

I sewed my future black and white,
a sultry step from cherished life;
you stand behind the studio lights
which shine too bright
for me to see.

A little piece of crystal lies
inside our hearts. Our hands are tied
by only my sequestered land
which falls so bland
into the sea.
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