

A Queer Manifest (17/07/2022)

Dear Reader,

What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'identity'? Do you think of the colour of your eyes and the sound of your voice? Is it the clothes you wear and the music you listen to? Is it that sense of surety when someone calls your name? Or, the pang of desolation, when you look in the mirror and don't recognise who you see?

The meaning of identity is ever-changing and individual, yet we all seem to seek it. We also all seem to disagree on what, exactly, makes us who we truly are. Curious, isn't it?

Obviously, I cannot solve your puzzle, and neither can you solve mine. Perhaps, however, I can help you to scavenge a few pieces. For me to do this, I feel it is important that I show you a piece of my puzzle. And what better way to do that than a story?

"Once upon a time..." Who am I kidding? This isn't a fairy tale, nothing real ever is.

There was a child born just before the hour trickled to a close on one insignificant night in Autumn. At the time, this child was not particularly special. For no child is born with the majesty of Loki or the augury of Heimdallr. Those things come later.

As most infants are, this child was assigned a gender and given a name upon their arrival into our world. These labels, as most do, were to act as an expectation of who this child would be. For years to come, they played their role. A little in ignorance, a little because they were content. But there is a point when a mind starts to rebel against the mundanity of being stuffed into boxes.

Identity is not linear. Discovery is not linear. Neither happens all at once, nor at the same point for any one person. At first, the subject of our story attempted to walk through life in the shoes of a "girl". These were their baby shoes, the shoes that felt safe and acceptable. Next, they pulled on a pair of mittens labelled "boy". They discovered that identity did not have to conform to one's genitalia, facial structure or the colour of their bedroom walls. It felt like they had just discovered the key to a new land. But not all lands grant easy passage.

The next few years were filled with turmoil and confusion. Learning that the world isn't a black and white television does not make the transition to colour any more intuitive. The veil of youth felt as stifling as the air on

a January day. They did not know everything. They needed to know everything. Ignorance itself had placed a hand around their throat and even their beloved books couldn't teach them how to breathe.

As days dragged to months, the child learned how to paint a convincing smile. Striking out at the world became a remedy, but not a cure, and hurting people around them was easier than addressing their own hurt. Soon anguish turned volatile and it nearly cost them their life. Despite everything, however, this was not what they wanted. And, oh, what a coward they thought they were for it. With bloodshot eyes and an aching heart they once more took to the stage. They had little hope that their pantomime would succeed, but sometimes trying is all you can do.

Some time later, the door to their key still eluded them. They realised that sometimes ruby slippers wear out before they lead you to Oz and that fairy-godmothers cannot be relied upon. They danced between the only genders they knew until they grew too tired to lift their feet off the ground. Something had to give, but they weren't sure what.

Having given up faith in finding an outfit that fit their queer frame, the young person let slip their hold on those pretences of "female" or "male". They were too weary to play such roles anymore. And so, like one might let droplets trickle from their fingertips after submergence, they let these concepts fall away. They decided to exist, just exist, for a while and this was when they started to find their Seiðr — their magic.

Dear reader, my quest to repair the fractured glass of my gender-identity has been full of blunders and heartache. Many times, throwing in the towel of life has seemed preferable to what I was going through. What I was putting myself through. I can spin my story into as many poetic words as I want, but the truth is that my experience with trying to find myself was not, and will never be, *easy*.

Waking up in a body I feel isn't wholly my own is hell some days. But you know what, I'm sick of trans kids being known only for their pain. We are not just a statistic of suicide rates. Of course, my trauma is a part of me. What I went through was excruciating, but that was not *all* it was.

On my journey, I have become more fully myself than I've ever been. I've learnt that there are people like me in this world and that there is a place for us. Through my pain, I've unlocked not only the potential inside of me, but also a gateway to a land of learning and acceptance. I've discovered that I hold the power to make an imprint on this Earth. However, the thing that astounds me the most, is that I've grown to like parts of myself.

I do not have all the answers. In fact, I have very few. I am a nonbinary teenager, probably not much wiser or older than you. But I have a story to tell. Now that I have done that, I have no control over what you do with it. I can only hope that my perspective has opened your eyes to the potential of yourself and of those around you.

A dear friend of mine once told me that I was transcendent. Yes, this word has the inherent meaning of being better than others. However, at its roots I believe that there blossoms the capability to grow beyond ourselves — to become better than ourselves. And really, isn't that something to be striven for? I'm also appreciative of a good pun.

People often get lost in their circumstances and forget that taking control of something small can do more than they think. Ripples turn into waves. You may not realise, but you have the power to shape your life. You have the power to shape the lives of others. You and I are far from done discovering ourselves, let alone the world. And what's more; it is up to us how far we choose to let our journeys take us.

Sincerely,

A Person on a Quest for Transcendence