

roiskinda.cool

Recuerda PV : Chapter 1

5–6 minutes

It was a hot day. I remember it was a hot day because I only had air conditioning in my bedroom, so when I would get up in the middle of the night to get to the bathroom, the soft but tight squeeze of Cancun's nocturnal heat and humidity wrapped around me. The sharp temperature change wasn't uncomfortable, but it always got my attention.

I was up because I couldn't sleep. It was around my fourth or fifth week in Mexico after I had left Belize, where I had lived for the last two and a half years. I had initially moved there with my partner, whom I had met in NYC, where it quickly got serious. We had been together for three years before we decided to move to another place and build a life together. At the time, it felt like it was the right decision.

What happened and led to us splitting up is a story for another time, but I couldn't sleep because I was still reeling from the end of the longest relationship I had ever had and was on my own again for the first time in five years. My anger, sadness, and deep hurt were all mixing to form this slurry of emotion that resulted in me crying and drinking most of the time to get some relief. The constant ache of missing someone I know isn't good for me turned me into a zombie; I shuffled around to ensure my basic needs were met, but I didn't do much else—the night of the Not Living.

My last place in Cancun was a bedroom that someone was renting out of their house. It was hot as hell, but it did have a nice balcony so I could get some air that broke up my routine of weeping, smoking, and drinking. It seems odd, but I will remember that room fondly because it was where I started putting myself back together. But the next place I got had to have air conditioning.

I had been regularly getting up in the middle of the night because I had difficulty finding balance with the sudden and unexpected changes. Back then, I used to smoke cigarettes, so I would go out on my balcony (yes, this place had a balcony, too. I like balconies) and burn through a few so I could get that sweet nicotine high which would slow me down enough to get some rest. I had a steady diet of that and alcohol that I switched back and forth between them to deal with heartbroken insomnia. Balance is important.

During the days, if I had chores to run, I would paint on a brave face armed with an arsenal of poorly pronounced Spanish words and phrases and go about my business. I'm pretty charming, so I would smile and try to speak the language, usually met with appreciation or laughter. To be

honest, both were comforting.

Some days were better than others. There were days when I could dart in and out of the shop, drop some pesos, and be out, easy peasy. On other days, my stress and sadness would get so bad sometimes I broke out in a sweat to the point that the attendants would ask if I was ok. Here, I learned the effectiveness of slowing yourself down and focusing on the green floor, the blue door, the purple pack of... whatever. Going outside was not my favorite thing.

I wouldn't shower and stay online when I wasn't up for going outside. I didn't want to talk about anything specific, just anything to get my mind off of my current situation. I had a decent following on Twitter then, so I had no shortage of people that wanted to engage, for which I was thankful.

Twitter was also where I met Marcia, AKA [ArtistMarciaX](#), and we connected as nerds do over our shared love of quirky sci-fi shows, Firefly specifically. We would go on and on about details from the episodic that nobody else cared about. But we did. And a strange friendship was born.

As it turned out, she was one of the people I leaned on the most when my sorrow hit me the heaviest. She would let me babble and snot and cry about how devastated I was and gently sprinkle in some world of affirmation to get me to reflect on a particular point I had made. No, she didn't put me back together. That was my job. But she did give me someone to talk to, so I could start putting away the broken shards of my relationship and move on.

I'll never forget that.

So on that night, I was up again, and I didn't want to bother her because I had already been giving her so much of my sorrows. After all, even I knew she was too nice to say she needed a break. So I poured a glass of straight vodka, cracked open my laptop, and went back to Birdland to see what was happening. Anything was better than just dwelling and thinking about Sad Things.

Earlier that day, I had started a conversation about alternate forms of social media because I was/am a self-hosting person, and my distaste for Twitter was reaching the same crescendo as Facebook, which I had left entirely a few years before. The brilliant and talented [Catts Small](#) had responded to a tirade I made while I was drunk earlier in the day, which I wasn't sure was coherent as I read it back, but thankfully she is so much smarter than I am and figured it out.

And her message cut through the stupor of my messy and inebriated state.

"Hey, have you ever checked out this platform called Mastodon?"

roiskinda.cool

Recuerda PV : Chapter 2

6–8 minutes

Until then, I had never heard of Mastodon, which was strange because I made it a point to stay in the know about self-hosting options.

I've been running my email for years. I host my cloud service. I still use RSS to this day because it's still one of the single most valuable protocols ever invented. So my interest was piqued when I heard about a young dude from Germany building a platform that approximates Twitter but can be installed anywhere one chooses.

Of course, I wasn't at my best mentally due to my lack of sleep and excessive drinking. Fortunately, I had some savings from a few gigs I worked on earlier in the year, so I was pretty cool money-wise, which was a good thing because I was in no condition to take on new clients.

But my formative years as a creative were made in the crucible of the New York City tech scene, where I had lived for close to a decade. I dealt with every issue imaginable, from server crashes to belligerent clients and project managers making last-second logo changes from small mom-and-pop shops to multinational conglomerates. And in a city that never slows down, one is rarely at total capacity from just having to survive life in the city. So learning something new while I was drunk and heartbroken didn't feel like that much of a lift.

So I did what most tech nerds do in this situation: read the docs.

I remember being surprised that the Masto docs were not poor. I had assumed that a young project would not have its information organized, but to my surprise, there was some intention to describe how Masto could be installed, maintained, and updated. I was impressed because it felt like an actual project rather than a hobby, which is what many open-source projects felt like.

Still, I wasn't ready to take on the challenge of setting up a new server. I wanted to start by making an account on a pre-existing instance (which is a server set up to host software that connects to the [fediverse](#) in this case Mastodon) to get a feel for how it moved. I didn't want to join the central instance because I just didn't. I wasn't looking to replicate my experience from Twitter, so I looked at the directory of sites that used the Mastodon framework to build a social media presence and decided to go with one that didn't have a particular theme. I wanted something general to see what people talked about.

I landed on mstdn.io and made an account.

Now, you have to understand that as a Black cishet dude with an advanced career as a creative tech freelancer, I'm pretty used to spaces that don't have many people who look like me. I had long become accustomed to navigating primarily white and male spaces, the demographic over-represented in the tech industry, so I had a frame of reference for what to expect as I logged into my first Mastodon instance.

Looking back, I can't say it was a terrible experience overall, but what surprised me was how concentrated the monoculture of white men of various tech skill levels present. It was *aggressively* white.

Most social media platforms are going to have a lot of white people. That's the reality of technology

companies in most western countries. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., all are like this. The thing of note is that other cultures involved have carved out space to form their specific niches on all these major platforms. So while many white folks populated them, they had a significant presence of other demographics, which gave it a more balanced feel. It's one of the reasons I stayed on Twitter for so long. The different subcultures in that space gave it flavor and uniqueness, Black Twitter being the most well-known.

Mstdn.io, at that time, didn't have that. It was populated with a cacophony of white guys talking over each other, constantly proclaiming how much they knew about some esoteric language. When I would attempt to get to know people on that platform, it usually resulted in some sanctimonious explanation about the basics of programming that was supposed to make me realize how great Mastodon was. And more often than not, that condescension was casually flavored with a disdain for people who were not white, male, and had some technical know-how about... something.

Another situation that immediately jumped out at me was the complete lack of moderation. Sure, people were talking about dogs and cats, their hobbies and families, and most of the obligatory things one shares in these spaces, but there was also comfort with casual bigotry. I would see memes with swastikas carelessly thrown about. I would see men make sexist jokes to each other and laugh at what they felt was clever misogyny. It was raw and out in the open in a way I hadn't seen because, at the very least, centralized platforms attempted to curtail this behavior. That effort didn't exist here.

I knew pretty quickly Mstdn.io was not the place for me, so I closed my account a few days later.

I was still captivated by creating a self-contained social media platform where I could set the culture. I saw the potential for making an entirely new community without depending on an external service. A place truly for the people and by the people.

Seeing it as an opportunity to talk to Marcia about something other than relationship woes, I decided only to have one drink the day I called her to talk about it so I could be somewhat coherent. She had reservations when I spoke about my experience with mstdn.io. Still, she was open to at least making an account on something that I built and ran because she was intrigued by the idea of having a social media site that wasn't attached to anything, having shared many of my concerns with Twitter.

The next day, using my curiosity as fuel, I decided to get up and clean up my place, go grocery shopping to make some real food, and shower. I wanted to get myself in a stable place to dig into what it took to run a Mastodon instance.

That was the same day I bought the play vicious social domain and a new server for my first experiment into the fediverse.

I wasn't sure what I was doing, but I knew I wanted to try. And that sense of purpose and enthusiasm to figure out something new pushed me to get out of my stupor and contemplate something other than the abrupt ending of my relationship.

One that has always been consistent with me as a person is my love of learning. And now that I had something to focus on, that love was pulling me slowly out of a dark place I had been in for a while.

And that night was the first time in a long time I didn't wake up before the sun came up.