

Diary Of
Two
Quirky
Introverts
Hoodies, Hummus
And
Halloween.

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Chapter 1

Professionalism Is Just Panic With Lipstick



Josie - Monday, 2nd September

Goal for the week: don't cry on mute.

First day back after “summer break” (aka three months of pretending deadlines don't exist).

I had my first client call this morning. Of course, they started with: “Let's go around and share a goal for this week.”

My goal? Not to cry on mute.

But apparently, that's not "professional."

So instead, I said: "Oh, just refining some UX flows." Which is really technically true, if you count spiralling about button colours at 2 a.m.

Meanwhile, my Wi-Fi kept freezing on the one frame where I looked like I was reconsidering my entire life. Which... fair.

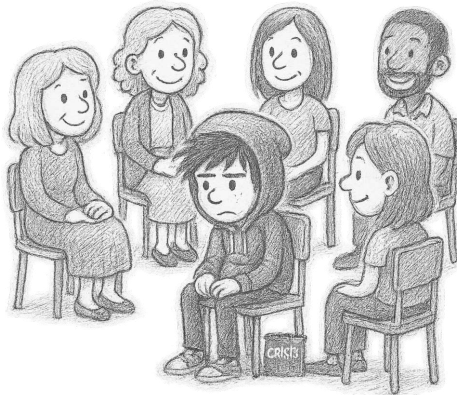


Owen - Tuesday, 3rd September

The email said "Fun Icebreaker."

Already knew it was a trap.

Work made us join a "staff welcome session" this morning. Translation: circle of strangers in a very beige meeting room, with a HR person who smiles too much and calls us a "family".



The fun icebreaker = Let's go around, say our name, and share a fun fact!

Here's the problem... I don't have fun facts.

I barely have facts.

And saying "I once ate an entire multi-pack of crisps alone" doesn't make me look like a team player.

While everyone else simply went with "I play tennis" or "I climbed Kilimanjaro," my brain was already mapping escape routes. Fire exit to the left. Toilets to the right. Window too small unless I grease myself with butter.

When it was my turn, I said: "Owen. I... like... err... buses."



Silence. Someone coughed. HR wrote it down on a Post-it note like it meant something.

I lasted twenty more minutes before faking a very urgent dentist appointment. Left my lanyard behind on purpose, so maybe they'll think I quit.



Josie - Wednesday, 4th September

Apparently, I was born today.

This morning started like any other: hoodie, laptop, coffee that tastes like burnt toast in liquid form. Then I saw I had three missed calls from Mum. Three. Never a good sign!

I didn't call back straight away, obviously. Instead, I listened to her voicemail because emotional confrontation is best consumed in small, reheated portions.

Her message went like this:

“Josie, it's your MOTHER. I suppose you're too busy to remember that today is the day I endured thirty-seven hours of labour for you. But don't worry about me, I'll just sit here ALONE, thinking about how ungrateful children can be...”

That's when it hit me. Oh. Right. My birthday.

To be clear, I wasn't ignoring my birthday out of self-loathing. I just... forgot. Like you forget to defrost chicken or answer an email from 2021.

The rest of the day became a minefield of awkwardness:

Colleague on Zoom: "Any plans tonight?"

Me: "No, just crying into pasta probably."

Colleague: "...Oh."

Me: "...It's fine, that's every night."

By lunchtime, Mum had sent a cake delivery to my flat. Carrot cake. Which I hate. She knows this. She weaponised baked goods. I ate it anyway because guilt cake is still cake.

I thought about posting a birthday selfie but then imagined all the comments:

"Happy Birthday hun x"

"When are you gonna have kids?"

"Haven't seen you since school, wow you've aged!"

So instead, I celebrated by shutting my laptop, putting my hoodie hood up, and eating cake in bed.

All done while re-watching the same episode of Parks and Rec I always watch when I don't want to risk new emotions.





Josie & Owen - Friday, 6th September
Back from the dead. And worse than ever.

By Friday night, both Josie and Owen had the same plan:



Josie: Hide under the duvet, eat the last of the guilt-cake, watch Parks and Rec (again).



Owen: Hide under the duvet, eat crisps, watch YouTube videos of buses turning corners.

Neither of them had the energy for people. Or fun. Or anything that required trousers.

And then it happened.

The ping

The sound of death. The sound of doom. The sound of the uni group chat, a digital ghost from 2014 suddenly waking up like a scary Frankenstein's monster.

The group chat had been silent for years, except for the occasional spam link from Ben (the one who definitely has a crypto pyramid scheme by now) and the odd "Happy New Year!!!" from Maya (who says everything like a Broadway announcement).

But tonight?

It was alive.

It was thriving. And both Josie and Owen were staring at their screens in horror.



Josie's brain:

Oh no. Not these people. These people know too much. They've seen me drunk on cheap vodka wearing devil horns.

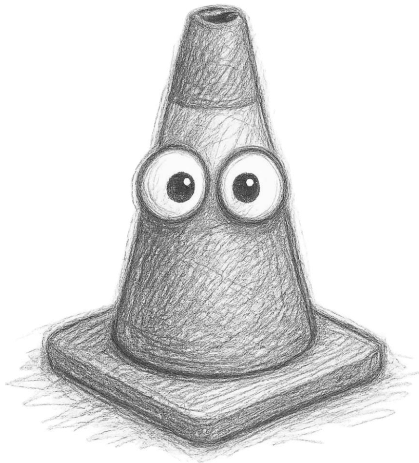
They know I once cried in the S.U. toilets because I lost my chips.



Owen's brain:

Oh no. Not these people. These people know too much. They've seen me sing "Wonderwall" at 3 a.m. like I meant it".

They know I once punched a traffic cone because it looked at me funny.

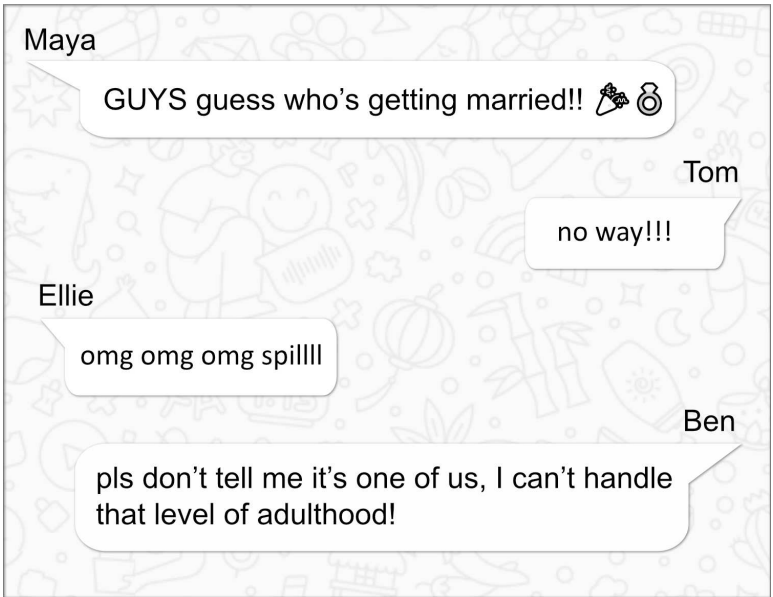


Josie tried to ignore it... Owen tried to mute it.

But the problem with the uni group chat is this... once it wakes up, you're already in it.

And just like that...

ping ping ping ping... the resurrection had begun.

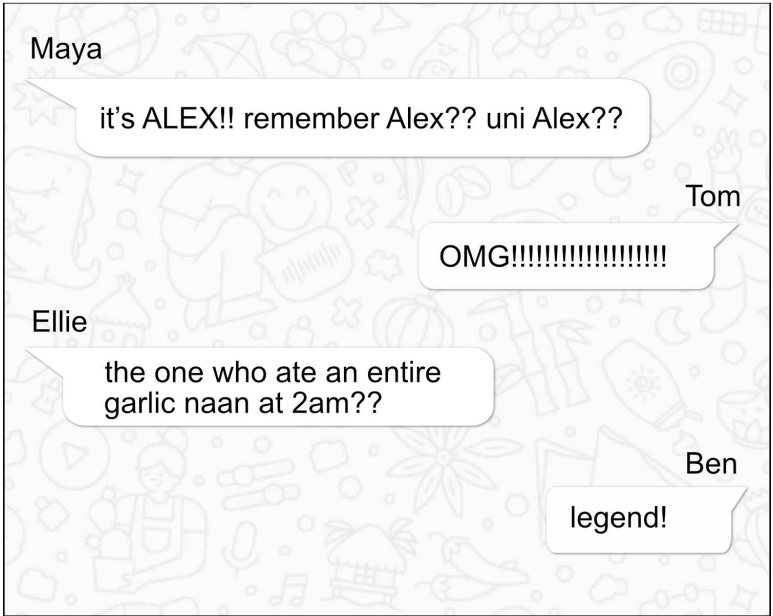


Josie's inner monologue:

Oh God, oh God, oh God. The group chat is ALIVE. I thought it died in 2014 with dignity.

Do I reply?

Do I lurk? Why is my heart racing like it's a job interview?



Owen's inner monologue:

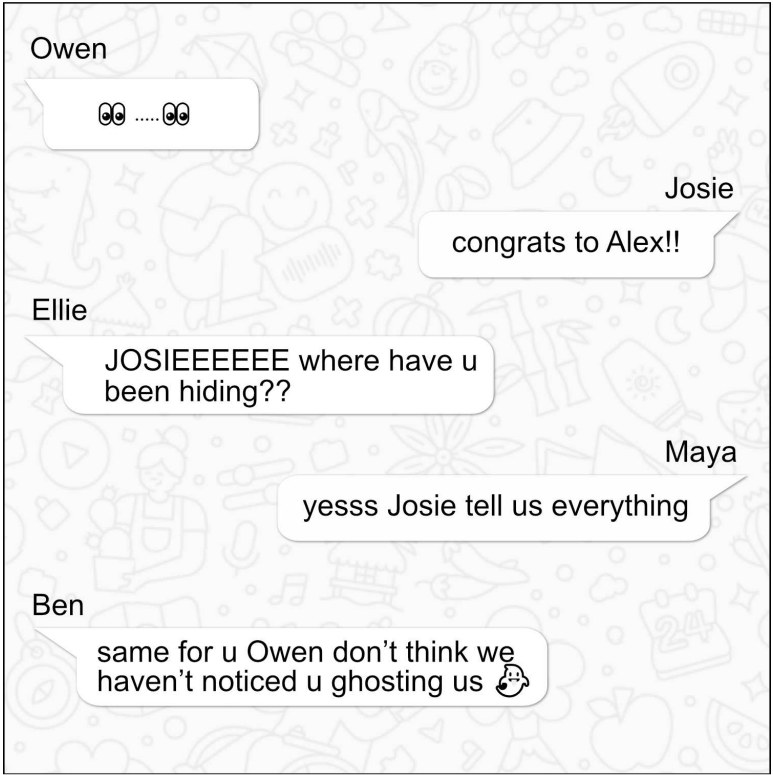
I muted this chat three years ago.

Now it's back, like a zombie.

If I don't reply, I'm rude.

If I do reply, I'm locked in forever.

Strategy: one emoji, minimal engagement. Like a hostage blinking Morse code.



Josie:

This is it. This is my worst nightmare. Attention. The friendly kind of attention, but still.

Do I fake an illness? Change my number? Throw my phone into the canal?



Owen:

They've seen me. It's over... I'm compromised.

Maya

we should all meet up soon 😊 drinks??*



Josie: Kill me.



Owen: Kill me faster.



Chapter 2

Adulthood Is Deciding Which Hummus To Get



Owen - Saturday, 7th September

Big Decisions: Life or hummus. Same thing.

Went food shopping. Mistake. Stood in the hummus aisle for twenty minutes because there were too many options:

Classic hummus.

Reduced fat hummus.

Red pepper hummus.

Hummus with “a hint of caramelised onion” (a hint... what does that even mean?). My brain decided this was a referendum on my entire existence.



Classic hummus: Boring, unadventurous, safe.

Red pepper hummus: Desperate attempt to prove I have some sort of personality.

Caramelised onion hummus: Who am I trying to impress? No one. Not even me.

Meanwhile, an old woman reached straight past me, grabbed some classic, and left like it was the easiest decision in the world.

She didn't even flinch.

A god amongst mortals.

I eventually picked up reduced fat because apparently, I hate myself.

Then immediately put it back, because what kind of person chooses diet hummus on a Saturday? A broken person - that's who! Left with no hummus... just a packet of crisps.



Josie - Sunday, 8th September

Relaxation, but make it horrifying.

Today was supposed to be about self-care.

I walked to Boots and bought one of those £2 face masks that promises "glowing, youthful skin" but really just makes you look like a serial killer in jelly form.

Then I told myself... Josie, today you rest. Today, you will heal.



Four hours later, I was still on the sofa, hoodie hood up, face mask slowly sliding off my chin, watching a documentary about a man who hid bodies under his patio.

Self-care, apparently, now means panicking about my pores while also convincing myself the man upstairs is definitely capable of murder. (He wears socks with sandals... that's definitely a red flag in my eyes!)

At one point the mask got so stiff I couldn't move my mouth properly, which is basically how my social life feels anyway, so... symbolic.

Did I feel refreshed afterwards? No.

Did I immediately order Deliveroo? Yes.

Did I really call it "self-care" anyway? Absolutely. Because branding is everything.



Owen - Monday, 9th September

Apparently, I'm a voice guy now.

Went for coffee. Already a mistake. Queued behind a stranger. When I ordered, the barista said:

“Wow, you’ve got such a nice voice.” What?

I froze. Didn’t know what to do with that information. Said “thanks” but it came out like a threat. She smiled anyway. More than likely out of pity.

Now my brain won’t shut up:

Do I have a nice voice? Compared to who?

Is it “podcast nice” or “late-night-radio nice”?

What if my voice is my only redeeming feature?



I replayed every word I said to her on the way home. “Latte, please.” Did I nail the tone? Did I sound mysterious? Sexy? Like a man who knows the bus schedule by heart (which, for the record, I do).

I tried to record myself talking on my phone. Immediate regret. I sound like someone reading parking fines out loud.

Conclusion:

Compliments are traps.

My personality is irrelevant.

I am now a pair of disembodied vocal cords with legs.



Josie - Tuesday, 10th September

Apparently, I'm replaceable now.

Owen casually mentioned he's been "hanging out with a new friend."

A new... friend.

Like it was nothing. Like he hadn't just detonated a bomb directly under my sense of security.

I nodded. I smiled. I even said, "Oh, that's nice." Out loud. Which, by the way, should qualify me for an Oscar.

Meanwhile, inside my brain:

Who is she/he/they?

Are they funnier than me? (Statistically, yes.)

Do they also hate small talk? What if they actually like people?

What if Owen prefers them to me because they don't show up to cafés carrying three stress muffins and an apology?



I tried to act normal, but then I spent the entire walk home working out a detailed timeline of how quickly I could be replaced.

It took me exactly six minutes to conclude: almost immediately.

The worst part is I don't even know if this "friend" is real. Maybe Owen made them up to torment me.

Or maybe this is how I find out I'm actually the side character in my own life.

So yes, technically I'm happy Owen has expanded his social circle. But also... betrayal.



Owen - Thursday, 12th September
Friendship ended by ellipsis.

Realised I forgot to text Josie back yesterday. Just one message. Just one.

Now I'm convinced our friendship is dead.

The message was: "Did you ever finish that documentary?"

I meant to reply "No, fell asleep. Killer still at large." But instead I opened the message, read it, thought "I'll reply later," and then... didn't.

Twelve hours later, my brain:

She thinks I hate her.

She thinks I'm ghosting her. She thinks I've replaced her with "the new friend."

She's already written me out of her will.

Every time I pick up my phone, I can feel her disappointment radiating through the screen. My thumbs hover.

My soul panics. And somehow this makes it harder to reply.

It's now been twenty-four hours. Too late to respond like a more normal human.

If I reply now, it looks like I've been in a coma. If I don't reply, I'm a monster.

Possible Solutions...

Move cities.

Change number.

Fake my death.

Finally reply but add "haha" so it seems casual.

Leaning toward "fake death." Less admin.





Josie - Friday, 13th September

Emergency... barista made eye contact twice!

Worked from a café today because my flat felt like a padded cell. Went to order coffee. The barista smiled at me. Twice.

Cue full-blown emotional emergency.

Was that:

1. Flirting?

2. Polite customer service?

3. Pity for the hoodie gremlin clutching three muffins like a survival kit?

My brain immediately held a crisis meeting.

“He likes you!”

“No, he smiles at everyone, you narcissist.”

“But what if he didn’t?”

“Okay, calm down, he literally just wants you to pay for your latte.”

The whole thing lasted three seconds but ruined my entire day. Every time I looked up, he was there... smiling. Which meant either:

He is flirting, or he has resting smile face, which is just statistically impossible in Britain.

Of course, I said thank you in a voice three octaves too high, tripped over my chair, and left with oat milk foam on my chin. So, if it was flirting, that window has been slammed shut.

Anyway, I'm now banned from that café (self-imposed). Going back to working at home where no one can accidentally validate me.





Owen - Saturday, 14th September

New guy detected. Evacuation required.

Met the “new guy” at work today.

Big mistake. Extrovert.

Smiles too much. Said things like:

“We should grab a drink sometime!”

“I love getting to know the team!”

“You’ve got such a calm vibe.”

Translation... he wants to socialise.

My survival instincts kicked in immediately. I mumbled something about having “a dentist appointment” (it was 10:15 a.m.) and then hid in the stairwell until it felt safe.

Later, he appeared in the kitchen while I was making some tea.

I just panicked and said I had “an urgent meeting.”

Didn't mention I was the only one in the office that day.

Now he probably thinks I'm mysterious. Or incredibly rude. Or both. Which, honestly, is fine.

If this continues, I'll need a rotation of fake excuses:

Dentist.

Boiler inspection.

Emergency crisp shortage.

Sudden death (mine). Avoidance level... expert.





Josie & Owen - Sunday, 15th September
Accidental yes. Immediate dual regret.



Josie:

Somehow, **SOMEHOW**, I agreed to meet our old uni mates next week.

It started in the resurrected group chat (still alive, still terrifying). Someone said, "We should all catch up!"

And instead of ignoring it like a sensible introvert, I typed: "Sure!" I don't even remember pressing 'send'.

One second I was clutching my phone, the next I'd committed to leaving my house and interacting with people I haven't seen in ten years.

Now I'm lying in bed, hoodie hood up, rehearsing excuses. "My flat flooded." "I broke both legs." "I've joined a silent retreat in Tibet."



None of them sound convincing enough.



Owen:

Apparently, I said yes to this too.

Not sure how.

I opened the chat. Someone mentions “Saturday drinks?” Thought I was pressing the thumbs-up emoji. Accidentally sent “Sounds good”.



Immediate regret.

Now I'm trapped. No way out. The social contract is ironclad. My only hope is a global catastrophe.

Meanwhile, Josie texted me:



Josie: “Why did we agree to this?”



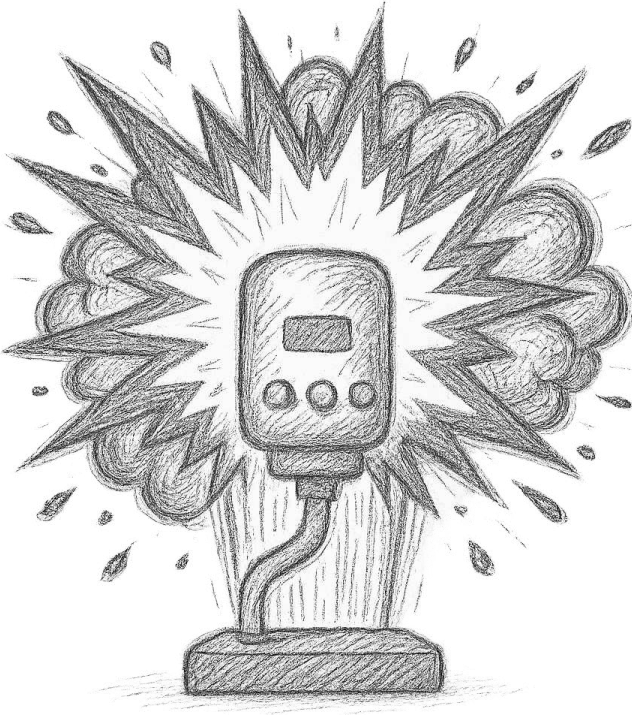
Owen: I don't know. Probably because saying 'no' would have taken energy.

Current plan:

Show up.

Sit quietly.

Leave after 45 minutes citing a "boiler emergency".





Chapter 3

Regret, Replay, Repeat



Josie - Tuesday, 17th September
Warning... Brain Gremlins Ahead.

This morning I made toast.

Simple. Harmless. Comfort food.

Except halfway through eating it, my brain decided to stage a one-woman retrospective of “Top Ten Most Cringe Conversations I’ve Ever Had.”

Episode One: Me telling the barista last week, “See you tomorrow!” even though I had no plans to go back.

I did not, in fact, go back. So now I can never return.

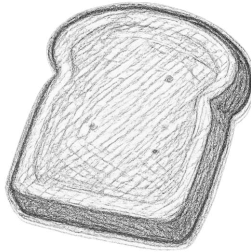
Ever.

Episode Two: That time in Year 11 when I called my maths teacher “Mum”. My brain insists on replaying this at full volume at least once a week.

Episode Three: A two-minute Zoom silence where I thought someone else was about to speak but no one did, so I just sat there, smiling like a malfunctioning chatbot.

I tried to shake it off, but my brain was like, “No no, let’s analyse this from seventeen different angles.”

Toast completely ruined.



Meanwhile, Owen texted me “Boiler exploded again lol,” which I think was an excuse to avoid the “new guy”. (Respect.)

Anyway, now it’s lunchtime and I still haven’t done any work at all, because apparently my full-time job is remembering every socially awkward moment since birth.



Owen - Wednesday, 18th September
Slack: The Soundtrack of My Doom.

This morning started with a single ping.

Not even a full sentence.

Just the sound.

Like Pavlov’s bell, except instead of drooling, I spiralled into questions about every decision that’s led me to this desk job.

Who was it? My manager? Probably. Asking if I’d “circulated the update.”

Or maybe my old uni group... with another emoji-heavy message like:

“Hey guys, who’s pumped for Saturday’s drinks?”

The problem is, once you hear the ping, there's no un-hearing it. I couldn't even bring myself to check the message.

Instead, I sat there, staring at the little red dot on Slack like it was a bomb about to go off.



Then my brain wandered... do I even like this job?

Would the medieval peasants have had less email anxiety?

Is “career path” just a really polite way of saying “existential treadmill?” meanwhile, the message sat unopened.

Eventually, I turned my laptop volume off so I could pretend I lived in a world without pings.

But then I just sat there waiting for a vibration from my phone instead.

At lunch, Josie texted me a photo of toast with the caption: "Mood."
Honestly, same.



Josie - Thursday, 19th September
Can't Cancel, Can't Cope

I don't know how it happened. One second I was nodding along politely in the group chat, the next second I'd basically RSVP'd to "Drinks on Saturday."

Me. At drinks. On a Saturday.

In public. With people.

I could literally feel Past Josie, Present Josie, and Future Josie all screaming at once. Past Josie:

Why didn't you learn from the last time? Present Josie: Abort mission, ABORT.

Future Josie: Guess I'll die in a pub bathroom after two lime sodas and a panic attack.

The thing is, cancelling would be easy if I hadn't already sent the cursed emoji. Do you know what that means in social contract law?

It's binding. More legally binding than signing a mortgage. You can't unsend a thumb. You can't just thumbs-up your way out of life.

So now I'm stuck. My brain is drafting at least fourteen excuses: "Migraine," "boiler exploded," "sudden relocation to Tibet."

But each one feels worse than just going and standing in a loud bar pretending I know how to order a drink that isn't tap water.

Mum left me a voicemail this morning saying, "Oh, good, you're going out! See, you're not such a hermit after all."

Translation: If you cancel, you prove me right.

So I guess I'm going. Against my will. Against my better judgment. Against every fibre of my introvert hoodie.

If you need me, I'll be Googling "how long do you have to stay at drinks before it counts as socially acceptable" while stress-eating chocolate.





Owen - Friday, 20th September

Ghosted by my Dentist.

I didn't even know a dentist could ghost you.

Had my appointment at 2:30 (yes, "tooth-hurty," ... hilarious... not).

I planned the whole day around it, skipped crisps, flossed like I was auditioning for Colgate, brushed so hard I basically erased enamel.

Then: ping.

"We regret to inform you Dr Patel is unavailable...

please reschedule."

Unavailable? That's not a reason, that's a break-up text.

So I sat in the waiting room anyway, like some tragic character in a romance film, holding flowers (Tesco carnations) and a blue balloon that said "Good Luck!" (closest I could find).

Nobody came.

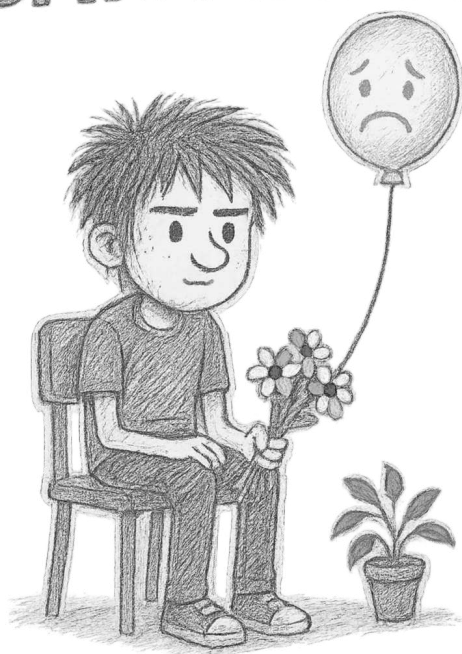
By 3pm, I had convinced myself Dr Patel had a new favourite patient.

Someone reliable, probably with perfect bite alignment and “naturally healthy gums.”

I went home and sulked with a toothbrush in my hand like it was a microphone.

I think I might be in a one-sided relationship with my dentist. And worse... I'm the clingy one.

CANCELLED





Owen & Josie - Sunday, 22nd September
Shared Couch, Separate Spirals

The Olympic Sport of Overthinking (Now With Spectators.)



Josie: Arrived at Owen's flat with a Tesco bag containing two tubs of hummus (because I panicked and couldn't choose) and a packet of chocolate digestives.



Owen: I'd already set the crisps out on the table in what I thought was a casual, nonchalant way, except it looked like a shrine to my potato-based anxiety.

They both flopped onto the sofa.



Josie: Pulled my hoodie strings tight like I was trapping in my spirals.



Owen: Sat with my arms crossed, staring at the muted TV where some nature documentary played footage of penguins sliding across ice.

It was almost too on the nose.

The thing about hanging out as introverts is... silence isn't always comfortable. It's... loaded.



Josie: My brain decided to replay the barista's double-smile on a loop.

Was it flirting?

Was it pity?

Should I have said something witty about muffins? Spoiler... no!

No one needs a muffin joke.

Meanwhile...



Owen: I was still emotionally recovering from being ghosted by my dentist.

I kept trying to calculate whether it was worse that an actual medical professional choosing to prioritise their other patients over me.

I'd spent £6.99 on "cheerful" flowers that now looked like a botanical betrayal.

Neither of them spoke.

But somehow, sitting side by side with their snacks, spiralling into completely different but equally unnecessary catastrophes, felt... okay.

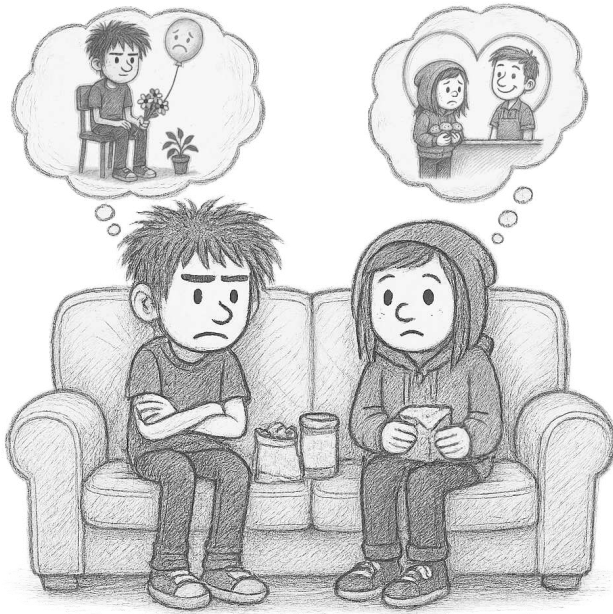


Josie: I nudged the packet of crisps closer to Owen's side.



Owen: I shoved the digestives slowly toward Josie. No words were exchanged. Just a quiet trade agreement between two spiralling introverts.

And for us, that counted as connection.



"Together in silence, apart in spirals."



Chapter 4

Emotional Support Tote Bag Emergency



Josie - Monday, 23rd September
Are biscuits a good substitute?

This morning, I committed the ultimate act of self-sabotage. I left the flat without my tote bag.

Not just any tote bag. My favourite tote, the one that basically doubles as my personality, therapy session, and survival kit.

Inside it:

Three emergency lip balms (all the same flavour).

Two notebooks I'll never finish.

Receipts from every coffee I've ever panic-bought, and the invisible force field that makes me feel like an actual human in public.

Without it, I felt... exposed. Like everyone could see me. Raw and un-toted. A freelancer without her portable office security blanket.

So what did I do?

I overcompensated. At the café, I hugged my laptop charger like it was precious cargo. On the bus, I clutched a multipack of digestives I'd got, like I was protecting the crown jewels. Spoiler: I was not.

Everywhere I went, people kept giving me the look. You know the one: "Is she... okay?"

No. No, she is absolutely not. She is tote-less, and therefore spiritually compromised.

By the end of the day, I was googling “emergency tote delivery same-day” like it was a medical procedure.

Conclusion: Next time I’ll forget my dignity, my keys, or even my lunch. But never again will I leave behind the emotional support tote bag.





Owen - Tuesday, 24th September
Therapy Is Expensive. So I Baked.

Bananas. Therapy for the soul, apparently. Or at the very least, they are therapy adjacent.

I had three of them sitting on the counter, slowly going black, like a visible countdown clock for my sanity.

I could either let them rot and spiral into “failure mode” or I could bake. Cheaper than actual therapy, right?

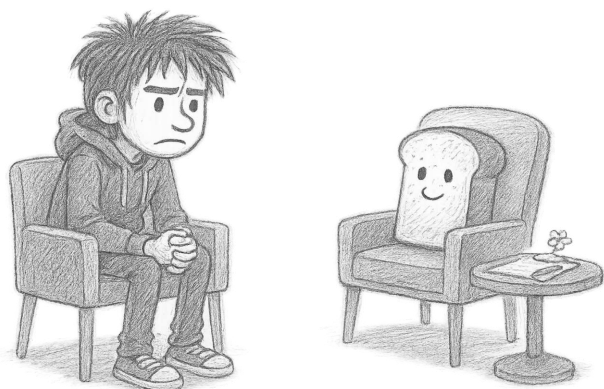
So I did what any anxious, overthinking introvert would do: I set up a kitchen battlefield. Measuring cups, bowls, wooden spoon... it felt less like cooking and more like surgery.

Every ingredient became a metaphor for my brain. Flour: messy, everywhere, hard to contain. Sugar: compensating for bitterness.

Baking soda: does anyone actually know what it does, or are we all just pretending?

Then came the bananas. The emotional core. I peeled one and stared at it like it might give me life advice.

"How ripe is too ripe?" I asked it. It said nothing, which was somehow worse. As I mashed, I gave the loaf a therapy session.



"How are you holding together?" I whispered, folding in the flour.

"Because I'm not."

The loaf didn't answer, obviously, but at least it didn't charge me £70 an hour.

When I finally pulled it from the oven, golden and cracked across the top like it had survived something, I felt oddly proud. Like we'd both made it through a session together.

Except my therapist would surely frown upon me eating the patient straight after.

I sliced it, sat on the couch, and decided that yes, therapy might be expensive. But banana bread... banana bread listens.





Josie - Thursday, 26th September

Four Teas and a Funeral (For My Dignity).

Just those two words in my call log "Mum (Missed)" and I was instantly catapulted back to being 14, hiding in my room with a Smash Hits magazine while she demanded to know if I'd "done something with the washing machine again."

When I finally rang back, she opened with: “We need to talk.”

Translation: Josie, your life is over. Prepare your will.

Cue: instant paralysis. My brain locked up tighter than my laptop when I forget the Wi-Fi password.

Did I leave something incriminating in the fridge? (Like hummus past its sell-by date... that's Owen's bad influence.)

Did she finally discover my secret Instagram where I post pictures of my plants and call them “the children I actually nurture”?



To cope, I made tea. Four cups, back-to-back.

Cup one: steaming panic. Cup two: shaky hands, over-brewed, bitter (relatable). Cup three: just lukewarm enough to reflect my collapsing will to live.

Cup four: basically, tap water with trust issues.

When I finally picked up, her big emergency was: "Have you thought about your pension, Josie?" I nearly choked on Cup Four.

Imagine me... 34, surrounded by mugs like a ceramic army, preparing myself for a terminal diagnosis... only to discover I was just being ambushed by Future Financial Planning.



Some people go to war. I go to war with tea bags.



Owen - Friday, 27th September

Stranger Danger, in the condiment aisle!

There I was, back shopping, courageously facing the hummus aisle again like some knight returning to the battle scene.

This time, I had a plan: grab hummus, no spirals, no thinking, just checkout. Easy. Except, of course, fate had other plans.

Because there he was. The stranger. The same one from last week. Standing in front of the hummus like he lived there.

We made full eye contact for approximately 0.3 seconds, and my brain immediately decided this was my new arch-nemesis, soulmate, and executioner... all rolled into one.

He smiled. Or maybe grimaced. Or maybe he just had hay fever. Either way, I panicked and grabbed the first pot I saw, like it was a hostage negotiation.

Didn't even check the flavour. It could be beetroot... or it could be cement.

My inner monologue:

"If I say excuse me, am I starting a conversation?"

"If I don't say excuse me, am I rude?"

"Does he remember me? Do I remember him?"

"Are we locked in some Aldi-based time loop?"

By the time I escaped, sweating like I'd run a marathon, I then realised I'd bought eight tubs of hummus and no actual food.

Which means I've either accidentally meal-prepped for the week or just invented the most depressing diet plan in history.

Some people meet strangers and gain friends.

I meet strangers and gain eight tubs of hummus-related anxiety.





Josie & Owen - Saturday, 28th September

Cancel Club Initiation... Together, Alone, Victorious.

We were both supposed to go out tonight. The same plans. The same people. Same dread.

At 6:12 p.m., Josie texted: "Thinking of bailing.."

At 6:13 p.m., Owen replied: "Already typing my excuse."

At 6:14 p.m., history was made.

Instead of shame, there was relief. Mutual cancellation was like both exhaling after holding our breaths for a week.



Josie:

By 6:20 p.m., I was on Owen's sofa, clutching my multipack of digestives like an offering.



Owen:

I ceremoniously placed three tubs of hummus and a family bag of crisps on the coffee table, like a shrine.



Josie:

"We should make this official." I then broke a biscuit in half like it was a sacred wafer.



Owen: I nodded gravely.

The Cancel Club. No officers, no dues.

It's just eternal avoidance.

They drafted the rules on a napkin with a biro that barely worked:

Rule 1: All cancelled plans must be celebrated, not regretted.

Rule 2: Excuses may range from "migraine" to "boiler exploded" to simply "no."

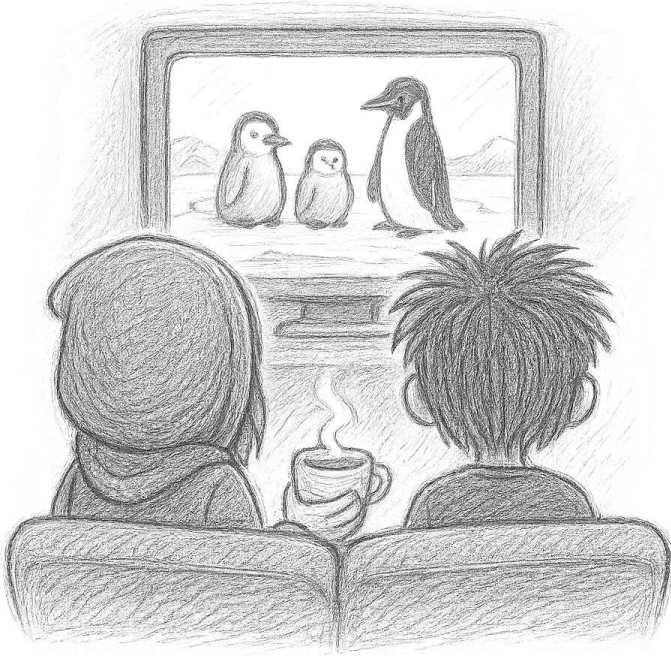
Rule 3: Meetings are always fuelled exclusively by hummus, crisps, and emergency digestives.

When Josie laughed at Rule 3, Owen smirked and said, "It's totally constitutional now. No changing it."

The rest of the night was spent eating, watching penguins slide across ice on mute, and occasionally high-fiving each other for both having dodged real-life interaction.

It was possibly the most fulfilling social event either of them had ever attended.

Cancel Club Motto: Together, alone, forever united... in not showing up.





Chapter 5

Eau De Perfume Crisis



Josie - Sunday, 29th September
Scent of a Spiral

I was minding my own business, doing what normal, functioning adults do on a Sunday: buying tea bags, a multipack of digestives, and pretending I was definitely going to cook real meals this week.

Then it happened.

That smell. His cologne. The one my ex practically bathed in back in 2014.

One whiff and my brain launched me straight into a wormhole: uni flashbacks, bad dates, “let’s take a break” speeches echoing like ghosts in the Co-op frozen aisle.

My body froze in the middle of the queue like I’d been tasered by Lynx. People behind me sighed, but I couldn’t move.

Was he here?

Was he behind me? On the bus outside?

In Gregg’s, buying a steak bake?

Suddenly every man with hair gel became him.

I didn’t see him, of course.

But I did replay five years of conversations in my head, all starting with: “If I’d just said THIS instead of THAT, maybe...”

Classic introvert brain: rewriting the past like it’s an essay I forgot to proof.

By the time I paid, I'd convinced myself he was everywhere... Boots, Pret, maybe crouched in the cereal aisle.

My tote bag was cutting into my shoulder like a punishment. All this because of one whiff of aftershave.

Cologne bottles should all come with warnings. May cause a sudden regression to past life events.

Side effects include panic, nostalgia, and irrational extreme Gregg's surveillance.





Owen - Monday, 30th September

Bin Night Reflection ... Rubbish Existentialism

Today I wheeled my bins out like a condemned man dragging his final belongings to judgement.

I opened the lid of the wheelie bin only to find myself face-to-face with my entire mortality.

Hummus, gone off.

Mouldy bread, uneaten.

A sad bag of rocket leaves that never lived up to its promise.

Each expiry date glared back at me like a cosmic stopwatch.

What if this is it?

What if life isn't measured in years, but in tubs of tasty chickpea condiments I optimistically buy and then forget about?

A man doesn't just throw away food, he throws away potential.

I stood there too long.

The neighbour probably thought I was doing performance art. Really, I was having a one-sided conversation with the bin.



“Is this how it ends?” I whispered. “Not with a bang, but with another two-for-one deal gone bad?”

The bin said nothing. Which was rude, but also felt like time itself was looming silently in judgement. I swear the mouldy bread winked at me.

I trudged back upstairs, crisps in hand, questioning everything. Do I age like hummus?

Will I, too, grow a fuzzy layer no one wants to deal with? If so, please, someone just throw me away before the smell hits.



Josie - Tuesday, 1st October

When "low-maintenance" feels like low-priority.

Apparently, I am "the chill one."

Someone said it on a Zoom call today casually, like they were paying me a compliment.

"She's just so low-maintenance. Easy-going."

I smiled. I nodded. I sipped my tea.



And then I spent the next three hours combusting internally, and because... excuse me?

"Chill" does not mean I'm breezy.

"Chill" means I'm silently spiralling, but my hoodie hides the smoke.

“Low-maintenance” means I’ve trained myself not to be noticed, so congratulations, it worked!

Also, if I’m so low-maintenance, why do I own three separate teas explicitly labelled for anxiety? (And drink them in rotation like a prescription regimen.)

Meanwhile, my inbox is a Greek tragedy. My laundry is a political scandal. I cry at the sight of overripe bananas.

But no... apparently I’m zen.

So now I’m sitting in a café, pretending to be fine, while also steeping like a teabag that’s been left in the cup far too long.





Owen - Wednesday, 2nd October

The Enemy Next Door

It started with the faint clink of glasses. Then the unmistakable roar of group laughter.

And just like that, the neighbours had transformed into the dreaded... extroverts.

Through the paper-thin walls of my flat, I could hear it all: the shrieking "OH MY GOD STOP" laughs, the chorus of "cheers!", the soundtrack of clattering cutlery. Basically, an audio horror film.

I sat in my living room, crisps in hand, trying to work out the best survival strategies.



Option A: Noise-cancelling headphones. (Did nothing. Laughter cut through like a knife.)

Option B: Passive-aggressive broomstick tap on the wall. (Too on-the-nose. I don't want to become that neighbour.)

Option C: Spy-level extraction. Lights off, hoodie up, tiptoe out the door, vanish into the night until the extroverts disperse.

For 20 minutes, I stood by my door simply rehearsing excuses. If anyone saw me leaving, I'd say:

"I've got an... appointment."

"At 9:47 p.m.?"

"...Yes."

At one point I considered just joining them, purely to guard the sacred hummus supply, which of course would be present, from those double dippers... I'm an advocate against condiments abuse!

But the thought of any kind of small talk made me sit back down immediately.

So here I am. In my own flat. Hiding from someone else's dinner party like it's an air raid. This is my life: espionage, via thin walls.



Josie & Owen - Friday, 4th October

Awkward Shared Uber... Two Introverts, One Backseat

We hadn't planned it. Neither of us had planned anything, really, except, apparently, to cancel.

Josie bailed on drinks. Owen escaped "Neighbours Who Think They're Uni Freshers" night.

Somehow, like fate or a very bored algorithm, our Ubers overlapped and we ended up sharing one.



The ride started like a hostage situation. We both sat rigid in the backseat, staring straight ahead as if the middle distance contained all the answers to life.

The driver, cheery and relentless, threw out the line: "Busy night then?" Instant cardiac arrest.



Josie's brain: Do I lie? Do I confess I was home by 8 eating heaps of digestives?



Owen's brain: If I speak, I'll reveal everything. If I don't, I'll reveal everything!

We both settled on the same strategy: nodding really vigorously while avoiding eye contact with both the driver and each other.

The silence stretched.

Every bump in the road felt like punctuation to our failure at human interaction.

At one point, Owen almost said something about the weather, but Josie's peripheral glare clearly communicated: Don't you dare.

By the time we were dropped off, the relief was so palpable it was basically a religious experience.

No words exchanged, just two overthinkers speedily walking in the opposite direction like they'd just pulled off a heist.



“Together, apart... the introvert’s natural formation.”



Chapter 6

Please Lower Your Aura



Josie - Saturday, 5th October

Caffeinated despair, with a splash of passive aggression.

I was deep in deadline mode, hoodie up, headphones on (not even playing anything, just noise-cancelling the human race), laptop open, a cup of tea next to me like an emotional airbag.

Classic Saturday.

Then it happened.

The door chimed.

And in bounced Sophie, aka “that really lively freelance girl from the networking event I blacked out during.” Apparently, we’re co-working friends now.

Not real friends.

Not stranger-strangers.

That cursed in-between zone where you are politely, but spiritually praying for a natural disaster.

She waved like we’d just been reunited after a ten-year war, and before I could even fake a toilet emergency, she’d plonked herself right next to me.

Her energy? Unironically “Let’s crush it!”

My energy? “Please fall into a moat.”

She started talking. Fast. Bright. Loud. “How’s the hustle? Are you SLAYING that deadline? You’re glowing!”

I hadn’t showered in two days. My “glow” was sweat and “I’m running on empty” fumes.

Her joy felt like an act of violence.

The thing is, I don't hate her. I just don't trust people who are that... upbeat.

It's like they've never spiral-texted "lol sorry I only just saw this" while actively ignoring it for six days.

Meanwhile, I was trying to focus on editing an article about user interface design and somehow ended up writing the phrase "death by drop-down menu."

Felt accurate.



She offered me one of her vegan oat bites.

I declined. Twice. She left it on my napkin anyway.

Now I'm stuck with a crumbly guilt square judging me.

I tried to side-eye her so hard she'd disintegrate.

Nearly sprained my eyeballs.

Eventually, she bounced off to "grab a turmeric thing!" And I... exhaled.

Like a ghost finally released from a cursed object.

Anyway, I didn't finish the article.

But I did Google "Can I freelance from an actual medieval tower?"





Owen - Sunday, 6th October

The Plant is Dying, So Am I

It's official: I've failed as a parent. A plant parent. Which feels worse, somehow.



The succulent on my windowsill, once described by the woman at the market as "impossible to kill", is now flopping sideways like it's performed in one too many monologues and would like to exit stage left.

I was sitting cross-legged on the floor, staring at it like we were about to have a break-up conversation. There were very clear instructions on the tag. Minimal care required. Water weekly.

Weekly.

Not annually, apparently.

Water weekly? I thought that was a suggestion, not a rule of law!

Now it's drooping like it knows something about me. Like it's trying to warn the others.

He can't even hydrate himself properly.

We were doomed from the start.

I Googled "how to tell if a succulent is dead or just dramatic." Turns out, I'm the dramatic one... that's fair.

It's not just about the plant. It never is. It's about the fact I've bought five plants since moving in, and every single one has either gone crispy or mouldy. That's range.

Maybe I'm not meant for life maintenance.

I can manage a library shelving system, my Spotify playlists, and a moderately suspicious sourdough starter, but living things?

Apparently not.

The worst part is I talk to it. Not like "how's your day", more like "you good, mate?" with a sense of dread.

I don't even talk to people that often.

Anyway, I gave it a heroic dose of water and repositioned it like that would undo six weeks of neglect. Then sat next to it for ten minutes like a priest at a bedside.

If it survives, I'll consider it a joint win.

If it doesn't... well. One of us had to go first.



Josie - Monday, 7th October

Almost Said No. Didn't.

I almost said no today.

Almost.

Instead, I said, "Yes, of course!" with the exact tone of someone who is agreeing to help bury a body.

Then I immediately wanted to set my inbox on fire.

It was a "quick favour"... that cursed phrase.

A small freelance thing from someone I sort of know professionally.

Just a few tweaks, they said. Shouldn't take more than about an hour.
Translation: emotional hostage situation disguised as networking.

I was at my kitchen table, staring at a cold cup of tea and an open laptop that looked suspiciously smug, when I said it.

"Yes, of course!" Brain... what the hell was that. Mouth... Oops.

Dignity... logged out.

I didn't scream. I didn't cry. I did what all emotionally responsible adults do when boundaries are crossed: I rage-cleaned.

The Hoover came out like a weapon.



I hoovered with the fury of a woman who just keeps replaying a conversation from 2016 and found new ways to feel humiliated by it.

Then came the mugs. Scrubbed like they'd called me "hun" in an email.

I bleached the sink. Rearranged the cupboards. Polished the kettle.

By the end, my kitchen was sparkling and I was sweating like a maid on her third nervous breakdown.

The worst part? I still haven't started the freelance thing. But at least my anxiety has a hygienic backdrop now.

If anyone asks, I love working weekends. And bleaching the sink at midnight.



Owen - Tuesday, 8th October

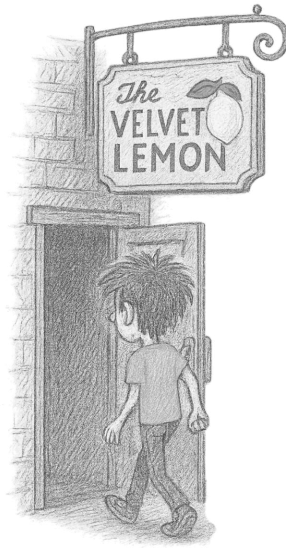
"Quiet" Bar Lies

"Just a quiet drink," he said.

Which, in my mind, really meant: dim lighting, some moderate hum, possibly a dog in a corner. You know, manageable vibes.

What it actually meant: Strobes. Shouting. Someone ordering shots while Britney screamed through the speakers like a crazy caffeinated megaphone.

The pub was called The Velvet Lemon.



That should've been a red flag. Anything with an adjective and a fruit is never quiet.

It's marketing code for "you will leave with tinnitus and a mild trauma imprint."

The bouncer side-eyed me like I was either underage or in the wrong century. Inside, it was full chaos.

Sticky floors. Flashing lights.

An actual conga line? Why is there always a conga line?

My mate, who I now consider an emotional saboteur, waved me over from a corner where the decibel level could legally qualify as a war crime.

I sat down and immediately started counting exits. There were three. None felt close enough.

I clung to my pint glass like it was a flotation device.

Tried to nod politely at whatever he was yelling about (work, maybe? dating? an Airbnb horror story?) but my brain had switched to full evacuation mode.

Plan A: Fake stomach bug.

Plan B: Claim I left the oven on.

Plan C: Actually perish, for convenience.

Eventually I bailed. Mumbled something about an early start (lie), shuffled to the exit, and practically hugged the night air like it was an old friend who doesn't ask questions.

The cab ride home was spent replaying the whole thing and crafting the perfect version of what I should've said:

"This isn't my scene." "Too loud for me." "I value my hearing and sanity, actually."

What I said instead? "Yeah, all good mate. Let's do it again sometime."

So. A coward. But a polite one. 'Quiet bar' is like saying 'just one crisp.'

A lie. A trap. A betrayal.



Josie - Wednesday, 9th October
Pumpkin Spice Panic

Went into town for a candle and came back with a social crisis.

I was minding my business, hoodie up, tote bag full of comforting nonsense (tea bags, a new notebook I'll never write in, aggressively autumnal crisps). Then I heard it.

“JOSIE!”

Capital letters. From across the street.

It was Lisa. Lisa of the relentless energy.

Lisa who always smells like cinnamon and somehow knows everyone's birthday. She bounced over, all scarf and serotonin, holding a tray of takeaway lattes like some sort of extrovert barista fairy.

“We're doing a PUMPKIN CARVING NIGHT! You HAVE to come!”

I don't have to do anything, Lisa.

But did I say that?

No. I said, “Aww that sounds so fun!”

And then panic.

I added, “But I've actually got plans that night!”

Plans. Plural.

I don't even have singular plans. I was going to go home, put on my murder documentary hoodie, and attempt to remove a weird smell from my kettle.

But now?

Now I am booked. Booked and blessed. Fully committed to a fictional schedule that I am currently building in real time.

So far I've got:

Dinner with my non-existent book club (we're rereading books we pretended to finish in school).

A mysterious family obligation (no follow-ups, please).

A self-care night involving elaborate skin care rituals I absolutely don't own the products for.

I carried a pumpkin home out of guilt. It's huge. I don't know why I bought it. It's just... here now. Watching me.

If Lisa messages to "reschedule," I will move to another city.

So I guess I'm now fully booked with some imaginary obligations. Including a dinner with my non-existent book club!





Josie & Owen - Friday, 11th October
Halloween Plans Pressure

We were meant to be working. Or cleaning. Or doing something adult-ish.

Instead, we were slouched on Owen's couch, surrounded by crisps, biscuits, and a fog of mutual avoidance.

I glanced at my phone. Mistake. Instagram was an assault of group shots, themed drinks, and people who clearly own wigs for fun.



Owen:

One post said : “Can’t wait for spooky season with my chaos coven!” Chaos coven? I can barely commit to socks.



Josie:

I asked Owen if we should go to that Halloween party Claire mentioned. The one with a costume theme.

His face looked like I’d just asked him to emotionally process something in public.



Owen:

Costume parties are just unpaid theatre. You’re expected to perform joy and character commitment in polyester.



Josie:

We spent ten minutes trying to remember the last time we wore actual costumes. Mine was probably “tired witch”, which to be fair, still applies.



Owen:

I once went as “low-effort vampire.” Which just meant I wore a black hoodie and didn’t speak.

Everyone said it was “very me.”



Josie:

We considered going as a “joint costume”, but all the ideas involved too much... effort.

Or cardboard.



Owen:

So we landed on this... two ghosts, but like... introvert ghosts. Bed sheet chic. No eye holes. No social contact.

Just pure, simple, shapeless anonymity.





Josie:

Our costume this year is “two people actively avoiding costumes.” We are the Halloween version of Flight Mode.



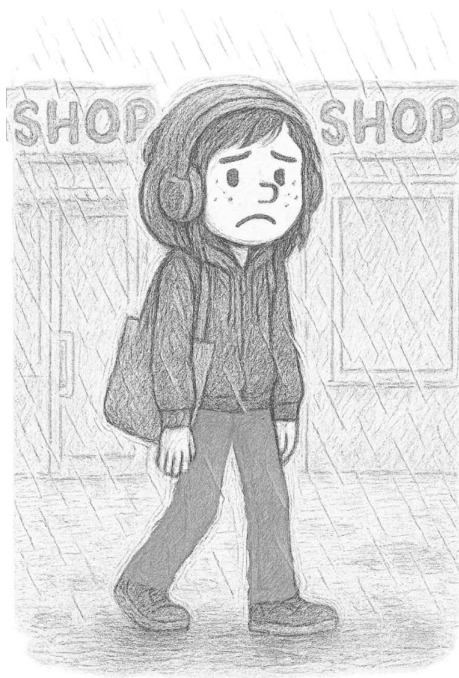
Owen:

Honestly, it's the most on-brand we've ever been. We might even leave the flat... unlikely.

We'll probably just watch bad horror films, share snacks, and then pretend we might show up somewhere.

Which, for us, is a party.





Chapter 7

The Day My Jeans Turned Against Me



Josie - Saturday, 12th October

Rain + Jeans = Rage

New chapter. New mood. Today's forecast: betrayal with a 90% chance of trench foot.

I left the flat for twenty minutes.

Just a quick errand to run, hoodie up, tote bag strapped, headphones on but nothing playing (obviously).

It was cloudy, but manageable. I even felt mildly productive. Briefly considered calling that self-care.

Then the skies opened.

Not gentle drizzle. Not whimsical autumn rain. A biblical sky tantrum.

And the idiot that I am was wearing jeans. JEANS. The world's most absorbent regret fabric.



Within seconds, my legs were cling-wrapped in cold denim despair. My umbrella folded in on itself like a dying star.

I stood there on the high street like the final scene of a war film, just me, a snapped umbrella sword, and a thousand tiny raindrop insults slapping my face.

Honestly, it felt personal.

The kind of rain that doesn't just soak you, it rewrites your will to live.

I tried to keep going. Trudged into Boots, squelching like an old sponge. Bought plasters and conditioner like that made me a functioning adult.

Even the self-checkout machine sounded judgy. "Unexpected item in the bagging area."

Yeah. My soul.

The worst part? Every time I passed a dry person under shop awnings or smugly inside cafés, I felt like a ghost of myself.

Like I was haunting the life I could've had if I'd just stayed inside. I got home, peeled off the jeans like a wet burrito, and stared out the window.

Still raining.. still raging. The enemy is denim. And I am losing the battle.



Owen - Sunday, 13th October
Someone Sat Next To Me

There were twelve empty seats. Twelve!

And yet. He chose mine.

I was on the bus home with my hoodie up, crisps tucked in my bag like emotional contraband, headphones on but nothing playing (the universal “do not engage” signal).

The bus was quiet.

Peaceful, even.

Then came The Man.

Mid-50s. Windbreaker energy. Carrying a bag that looked like it had seen some things.

He looked around, scanning the bus like he was choosing a seat at an awards show and then sat.

Next... to... me... I froze.

Like maybe if I didn't move, he'd think I was part of the seat.



Within seconds, he was talking. About the weather. Then the state of buses. Then I swear a nine-minute story about his dog's toenail infection. I don't remember the dog's name, but I now know the name of its vet.

I nodded, said "yeah" a few times, and mentally drafted my own will.

Nothing says panic like rehearsing how to say "yeah" to someone's anecdote about their dog while wondering if jumping off the bus mid-route is a valid escape.

I considered faking an urgent phone call. Then faking a bus stop.

Then faking my own death.

I didn't do any of those things.

I just sat there, squashed against the window, listening very politely,
spiritually evaporating.

When my actual stop came, I shot up so fast I almost headbutted the
luggage rack.

He waved goodbye.

I waved back.

Why am I like this?

Anyway, I ate my bus-crushed crisps on the walk home and whispered
“never again” to the night.



Josie - Monday, 14th October

Brain vs. Therapist

Therapy today.

Cosy room. Soft lighting. Tissues in every corner like little emotional
landmines.



I sat in the chair, hoodie up for protective armour, clutching my tea like it held the answers.

My therapist smiled gently. Dangerous start.

Then she hit me with it.

“And how did that make you feel?”

Time slowed. My brain screamed:

(ABORT. ABORT. ABORT.)

I blinked. Sipped tea.

Pretended to think.



I then expertly changed the subject to the office biscuits.

She didn't flinch. Just smiled again, like she's on to me.

Which is infuriating, because she is.

I always say I want to work on myself, set boundaries, explore feelings, open up, blah blah healing! But when someone asks me directly how I feel, my inner system responds like a haunted Victorian child who's never known joy.

Honestly?

I don't know how I feel. Or I do, but it's filed under "Not Now" and protected by several layers of sarcasm and caffeine.

I'm getting better at noticing it. The dodge. The clench. The urgent topic pivot to baked goods.

It's a weird kind of progress.

I still want to crawl out of my own skin, but now I can name the urge.

That's something, right?

I left the session feeling wrung out and vaguely proud, like I'd run an emotional marathon while sitting perfectly still.

Yes, I pay £60 an hour to professionally dodge questions.

But at least I'm doing it with style.



Owen - Tuesday, 15th October

I'm Fine (Lie)

The message popped up just after I closed the work tab but left Slack open like a digital haunted house.

"Hey, you okay?"

From a mate. Casual. No context. Just four words. A normal check-in.

And without thinking, without breathing really, I typed:

“Yeah, fine”.

Sent it. Felt instant regret... because now we've entered The Spiral. Was I fine? Define fine. Emotionally functional? No. Hydrated? Also no.

Able to remember the last time I didn't feel like a slowly unravelling USB cable? Definitely not.

If lying were cardio, I'd have abs.

I sat at my desk, the glow of the screen mocking me, surrounded by the debris of my “day off” (which involved 7 emails, 2 missed calls, and a tragic attempt at hoovering that ended with me Googling “how to unclog emotional dust”).

I stared at my half-eaten crisps like they might contain the truth.

The truth is: I didn't want to explain.

Not because I didn't trust him, but because I couldn't articulate the grey-zone mess that is “sort of okay but also deeply not.”

So instead, I chose smiley-face diplomacy and carried on.

Ate more crisps.

Scrolled mindlessly.

Wondered if the “smiley face” was too much.

(Yes.)

Then drafted a follow-up message in notes I’ll never send.

I’ll probably message him back in two days saying “sorry just saw this” and then pretend I forgot we ever had this conversation.

Which is peak avoidance, yes. But also peak me. I’m fine. (Lie.)



Josie - Thursday, 17th October
Emotional Ambush at Gregg's

Today I cried in a Gregg's.

Not just misty-eyed. Not a tasteful single tear.

I ugly cried. In public. Onto a sausage roll.



It started normally enough.

Hoodie up.

Head down. Coins clutched in hand like a 12-year-old trying to prove they're old enough to buy lunch alone. I was queueing for my standard introvert fuel... the sausage roll, no eye contact, maybe a pastry for emotional insurance.

Then it happened.

The woman in front of me turned, smiled, and said:

“Love your hoodie. Really suits you.”

That's it. That's all she said. No big deal. Normal human interaction.

Except it was a big deal.

Because my brain wasn't prepared for kindness. Especially not some spontaneous kindness.

Especially not the gentle compliment-based spontaneous kindness from a stranger in a queue where the default vibe is “mild rage and pastry lust.”

My first reaction? Panic.

Second reaction? Cry.

The cashier said, "Next!"

And I stepped forward eyes watering, voice cracking, sausage roll requested like a war crime confession.

She handed it to me. Warm. Greasy. Solid. I held it like a life raft.

Then I just... stood there.

Crying. In Gregg's. Hoodie on. Roll in hand. Tears forming a sort of sad gravy.

The woman was long gone. Probably saving someone else's soul with a two-second compliment.

Meanwhile, I was left spiralling about how long it's been since I actually believed something nice about myself without mentally filing it under "suspicious."

Stranger kindness is terrorism.

Emotional, unsolicited, well-intentioned terrorism.

I ate the sausage roll on a bench like I was recovering from a small war.

Ten out of ten.

Would recommend.



Owen - Friday, 18th October

Passive-Aggressive Neighbour Energy

I tried to be the bigger person today.

The adult. The responsible bin-conscious neighbour.

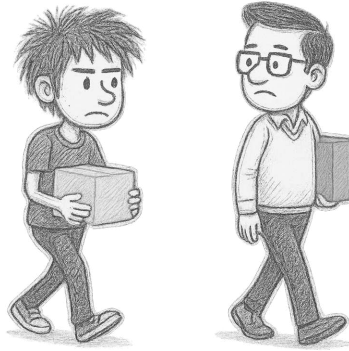
And now I'm at war.

I live alone in a flat above the florist, quiet, cosy, strategically crumb strewn, but I share a hallway with two other flats.

We don't talk, obviously.

We exist in a sort of tense, polite silence punctuated only by Amazon deliveries and the occasional nod that says, "We both exist.

Let's leave it there."



But the bins. The bins have become... complicated.

Last week they weren't put out. At all.

And the smell was starting to creep up the stairs like a sentient fog.

So today, I left a very mild, very reasonable, softly worded note in the hallway:

"Hey all! Just a reminder that the bins go out Thursday night Cheers!"

Foolish. Naïve.

Because this morning, there was a reply. A sticky note. Bright yellow.

Two words:

"ok noted."

The smiley face. The condescending smirk of doom.

It wasn't a thank you.

It was a challenge.

I stood there, still holding my recycling, reading that note like it was a declaration of war.

Passive-aggressive diplomacy had, in that moment, been initiated and I was woefully underprepared.

I spent 20 minutes back in the flat drafting counter-notes in my head.

"No worries! Just trying to keep the hallway less pest-friendly"

"Always happy to help! (Even when others aren't)"

"Interesting tone. Let's unpack it sometime." Did I leave a response?
No. I crumbled.

But I did Google custom Post-it printers, just in case things escalate.
International relations have been ended by less.



Josie & Owen - Saturday, 19th October Misread Text Meltdown



Josie:

It started with a thumbs-up.

The most passive-aggressive emoji in the digital language canon. Owen sent it after I messaged, “No worries if not!”



Owen:

To be clear, I meant it as chill. Casual. “All good!” But then she didn’t reply for 27 minutes.



Josie:

Twenty-seven minutes of me rereading the “thumbs-up” like it had personally insulted my ancestors.

Did I overstep? Was I being annoying?

Maybe he did have worries, actually. Maybe he wanted to say no and I emotionally blackmailed him with my breezy phrasing.



Owen:

I almost followed up with a “ha ha” the universal peace offering, but that felt weird.

So I sent a smiley face.

Which somehow made it worse.



Josie:

The smiley face arrived mid-spiral. Friendly? Sure.

Also robotic, vague, and terrifying.

The emoji version of someone smiling through gritted teeth at a dinner party.



Owen:

Then she sent a “totally fine!!” Double exclamation marks.

Which is either casual or deeply, deeply not fine.



Josie:

Then came the emoji flood. Three hearts, a “ha ha,” and one of those sparkly stars I never use.

Why did I use the sparkly star?



Owen:

I replied with a crying-laughing face and a pancake. Pancake was an accident. But at that point, the damage was done.



Josie:

Finally I just texted: "I'm spiralling. Are we okay?"



Owen:

And I replied: "So hard. We are." We ended up laughing about it. On the phone. For 45 minutes. With zero emojis.



Josie:

Turns out nothing says "we're fine" like sending 47 clarifying emojis, deleting half, then calling anyway.



Owen:

Digital friendships: delicate, dumb, and weirdly beautiful.





Chapter 8

Public Transport, Private Hell



Josie - Sunday, 20th October
I Googled "Do I Hate People?"

I should've walked.

But no, I got on the bus, because my knees were being dramatic and my tote bag weighed approximately three metric tonnes.

Contents: laptop, anxiety, my kindle, lots of stuff I don't need, and a banana that's now a smoothie.

I pretend to be reading my kindle whilst talking on my phone... dual do not disturb signals!

Five minutes in, I regretted everything.

There was a group of people talking across the aisle like they were in a TV family drama.

A child behind me kept kicking the seat rhythmically, like a vengeful drummer.

And someone was FaceTiming on speaker.

Yes... speaker... blasting out like a megaphone!



I pulled my hoodie strings tighter. Adjusted the tote like a makeshift emotional support barricade.

Still not enough.

So I stopped pretending to be in a conversation with someone and instead asked Google...

“Do I hate people or am I just tired?”

Google did not hesitate.

Suggested results included: “Signs you’re an introvert” and “Am I emotionally burnt out?”

“BuzzFeed quiz: What type of loner are you?” ... I took the quiz.

Apparently I’m a “Selective Recluse with Introverted Tendencies.”

(Which feels aggressive for a Sunday.)

Somewhere between the seat-kicking and someone’s loud recount of their weekend “adventures,” I considered faking a stop just to escape. But my Britishness wouldn’t let me move.

So I sat there.

Suffering.

Googling my own mental collapse.

If Google says I'm an introvert, does that count as therapy?

Eventually, I made it to my stop. Stepped off the bus like I'd survived something historic.

Contemplated permanently wearing noise-cancelling headphones and getting a cabin in the woods.

Instead, I bought a pastry and whispered "never again" into the paper bag.



Owen - Monday, 21st October

I Said No to Plans. Then Panicked.

Tonight, I cancelled plans.

Not major ones, just casual drinks.

"No pressure, just pop by." kind of drinks.

Which is always code for: pressure.

Pop in, get stuck for three hours, smile until your face detaches.

So I said no.

Typed it out: "Hey, bit wiped today.

Hope that's okay... maybe next time?"

Hit send.

Felt euphoric.

Like I'd escaped a bear trap. In slow motion. To emotional spa music.



I made a mini feast to celebrate: hummus, three types of crisps, an emergency Babybel. Hoodie on. Lamps dimmed. No shoes, no stress, no social performance.

Just pure, uncut introvert heaven.

For exactly 17 minutes. Then it started. What if they never invite me again?

What if this was my last chance at being a semi-functional social human?

Are they all at the pub right now, raising a glass to my absence?

“To Owen: May his ghost find peace, since he clearly didn’t want to be alive with us.”

I refreshed messages. Nothing Worse: read. No reply. Even worse: two blue ticks and a “No worries”.

The death knell of polite friendships. I tried watching something. Couldn’t concentrate.

Laid on the sofa surrounded by snack wrappers and regret.

Eventually climbed into bed and stared at my phone like it was holding a vigil.

Introvert heaven comes with a built-in guilt tax.

And I paid in full.



Josie - Wednesday, 23rd October

I'm Not Crying, It's Just Cold

Went out for milk.

Came back with emotional damage.

It was a routine shop: hoodie up, tote bag, emergency list scribbled in biro, tea bags, oat milk, something snacky but not joyful (emotional snacking, but make it humble). I wasn't even out for long.

And then I saw it.

A dog. Tiny. Elderly. Wearing a hand-knitted jumper with pom-poms on the back.



Just... waddling down the pavement like it pays council tax. And I broke.

Tears. Instantly. Like someone had punctured me.

Right there outside the corner shop. Emotions on full display. Mouth doing that weird twitchy thing where it's trying not to sob.

Naturally, I crouched down and pet the dog. (It sniffed my knee like I'd been pre-approved for love.)

And when the owner smiled at me, I blurted:

"It's just cold!"

Loudly. Too loudly.

As if anyone had asked.

The tears kept going. I tried to hold them in but my body had other ideas.

I stood up, clutching my tea bags like emotional talismans, and started speed walking back to the flat.

Narrating it to myself, quietly, like David Attenborough doing a voiceover for a nature documentary on social meltdowns:

"Here we see the urban introvert, emotionally compromised by an unguarded moment of unexpected tenderness.

She retreats to her habitat with tea and shame.”

I got home. Put the kettle on. Still slightly crying.

Emotions? No. Just weather leaking from my face.



Owen - Thursday, 24th October

Stared at a Wall. Felt Understood.

Today I bonded with plasterboard.

It was post-work, post-Aldi, and post the kind of social depletion that makes you want to retire from being perceived. I was attempting to relax and be zen... it was not going well.

And then I looked up.

Just slightly.

And locked eyes with... The Wall.

Not a special wall. Just a patch of blank magnolia near the bookshelf. Bit scuffed. Slight dent from where I dropped a chair that time I pretended to do yoga.

But today it spoke to me.

Not literally (don't worry, I'm not that far gone).

But emotionally? Spiritually? Existentially? Yes.

It just sat there.



Blank. Still.

Non demanding.

Not pinging, not buzzing, not asking "quick Q?" or trying to schedule a coffee.

And I... connected with it. Deeply.

We just existed together. Me and The Wall.

Two emotionally exhausted beings, quietly coexisting in mutual non-judgement.

I stared for a good seven minutes. Didn't move. Barely blinked.

At one point I said, "You get it." Out loud. To the wall.

I briefly considered naming it.

I still might.

It's probably the most stable relationship I've ever had.

Always there. Always consistent. Never overreacts when I ghost it for weeks.

Sometimes the only thing that really gets you... is plasterboard.



Josie - Friday, 25th October

The Rage of Group Costumes

Got a WhatsApp notification from Lisa's "fun group."

Always a red flag.

Opened it.

Instant regret.

“Hey team! We’re doing group costumes for Halloween! Theme is Magical Autumn! I’m going as a sparkly witch! Eeeek!”



There were GIFs.

And at least three suggested colour palettes.

Someone replied “DIBS on sexy gourd!!!”

I threw my phone across the bed like it had insulted my ancestors.

Group costumes. The seventh circle of hell, but with glitter.

I could already see it... me, stuffed into some scary polyester pumpkin monstrosity, trying to pretend I'm "having the best time!" while silently checking the exits for a plausible fire alarm.

Why is "fun" always so... organised? Why does it require themes and group energy and matching tights?

I can't even match my socks.

I haven't washed my hair in four days.

And now I'm being gently herded into a "whimsical" collective identity where I'll probably have to wear orange lipstick and cackle on cue?

Not today, Satan.

I typed a vague reply, "Sounds cute! Might have plans, will check!" and then immediately began crafting my backup excuse. So far, top contenders include:

Sudden 48-hour flu.

Unexpected editing deadline.

Out-of-town funeral (dark, but efficient).

Being possessed by a ghost who hates costumes.

If anyone asks, I love Halloween.

Just not the part where I have to participate.

Nothing is scarier than mandatory fun.



Owen - Saturday, 26th October

I did something brave today.

Texted someone.

Not a romantic someone. Not even a particularly close someone.

Just... someone I've been trying to maintain contact with, ex-flatmate from uni.

We used to bond over library printers and shared hatred of group projects.

Lately we've been doing this slow-motion messaging dance. I'll send something. They'll reply in three to five business days. Then vice versa. Very chill. Very low-stakes.

Exactly how I like my friendships: at a distance, fond, and conducted entirely through screens.

So tonight, I sent:

"Hey, random thought, do you remember when our kettle exploded mid-essay? Hope your week's been less chaotic than that."

Sent at 7:58 p.m.

Read at 8:02 p.m.

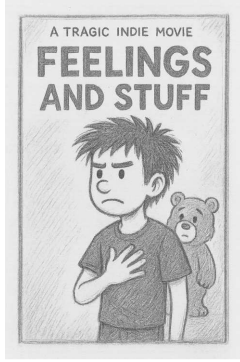
Nothing since.

Just that cruel, passive line of digital doom:

Read 8:02 p.m.

The Spiral did not wait.

Suddenly I was the protagonist in a tragic indie film called *Feelings And Stuff*, soundtrack by Sufjan Stevens, soft crying optional.



My brain:

You reached out. You ruined it. They regret ever knowing you. They've now deleted your number and reported you for emotional spam.

I lay in bed, hoodie up, eyes glued to the glowing betrayal. My thumbs hovered.

Rewriting a casual "lol ignore me!", 47 times. Didn't send it.

Instead, I lay there and imagined my obituary:

"He meant well. He texted once. He was never heard from again."

Some heroes are forged by fire.

I was forged by three dots disappearing.



Josie & Owen - Sunday, 27th October
Halloween Is Coming: Couch, Crisps, Silence



Josie:

There were at least three Halloween party invites in my inbox.

All ignored.

I didn't even do the polite "Maybe!" this time. Growth? Instead, I texted Owen: "Are you ignoring the outside world tonight?"

He replied with a thumbs-up and a photo of hummus.

Which, in our language, means, "Yes. Please arrive in full anti-social mode."

So I did.



Owen:

Josie showed up in full gremlin attire: oversized hoodie, tote bag full of snacks, blanket already wrapped around her shoulders like a cloak of invisibility.

She just walked in, nodded, and dropped onto the sofa like we were mid-conversation.

We weren't. But we also were.

It's hard to explain.

You get it or you don't.

We didn't speak for ages. Just sat. Crisps. Silence. Netflix menu screen slowly melting into our retinas.



Josie:

It was perfect... until... the knock. We both froze like houseplants in winter.



Owen:

Three tiny knocks. Followed by a chorus of squeaky voices shouting "TRICK OR TREEEAT!" through the letterbox... the early Halloween sweet collectors are on the prowl!



Josie:

We made eye contact like: It's way too soon for this... do we simply pretend to be dead?

I silently mouthed, "Do you have anything?"

Owen, with the energy of a man accepting his fate, opened a kitchen drawer and pulled out a single unopened pack of Bourbon biscuits.

We both nodded. It was time.



Owen:

I opened the door slowly.

Two very small witches and what might've been two traffic cones with googly eyes stared up at me.



I offered the biscuits like a tribute. They said thank you. One of them said, "You smell like crisps."

Which... fair.

Door shut. Souls returned to bodies.

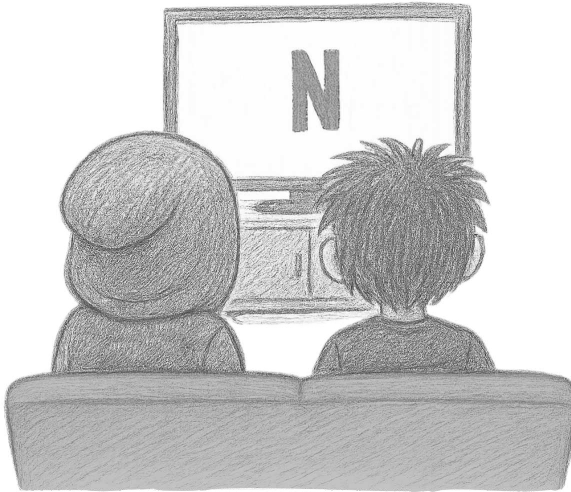
Silence resumed. Back to the sofa. No further comments.

Just us, the couch, the snacks, and the sacred agreement that this is what a party should be.

No costumes... no noise... just quiet company and occasional emotional biscuit.

The scariest thing about Halloween?

Unexpected interaction.





Chapter 9

Procrastinating... Professionally!



Josie - Monday, 28th October

Cup of Tea = Crisis Delay

Woke up today to an inbox that looked like it had witnessed a war crime.

Red flags everywhere. Tabs open from last Thursday.

A note in my own handwriting that just says: "URGENT!!!"

Helpful.

I sat at my desk. Laptop blinking. Emails groaning, and the deadline approaching like a hungry pigeon.

So obviously I made tea. Not because I needed tea. But because tea is how I stall the collapse.

First cup: "Let's centre ourselves."

Second cup: "Let's get in the right mindset."

Third cup: "Now we're definitely about to start."

Fourth cup: Microwaved the first one. Forgot. Re-microwaved. Still forgot.

I have brewed six cups of emotional avoidance today. I have edited precisely zero pages.

I have, however, organised my pens, cleared half the fridge, and sorted my emails into colour-coded folders that I will immediately ignore.

Somewhere between tea bag dunking and spiralling, I had convinced myself that tea was an act of professional preparation.

Self-care. A ritual.

I told myself: "You wouldn't go into battle without armour."

Except the battle is a Word doc.

And the armour is PG Tips.

By 4pm, the tea had gone cold again. And so had my will to achieve. So, I closed the laptop and lit a candle.



And whispered: "Tomorrow. Tomorrow will be powerful."

Then made one last cup for good luck.

Nothing says emotional maturity like microwaving the same cup of tea four times and still not drinking it.



Owen - Tuesday, 29th October

My Brain is a Tab Graveyard

There are currently 47 tabs open on my laptop.

I counted.

Started with one simple article about how to store winter jumpers.

Now it's a labyrinth of chaos:

3 abandoned recipes (including one for hummus I've never made but emotionally support)

7 articles I've "been meaning to read" since 2021

2 mental health listicles that stressed me out too much to finish

12 tabs I genuinely forgot I opened... and one very angry, blinking tab that just says "Update Required."

I stared at it all today, not just the tabs, but what they meant.

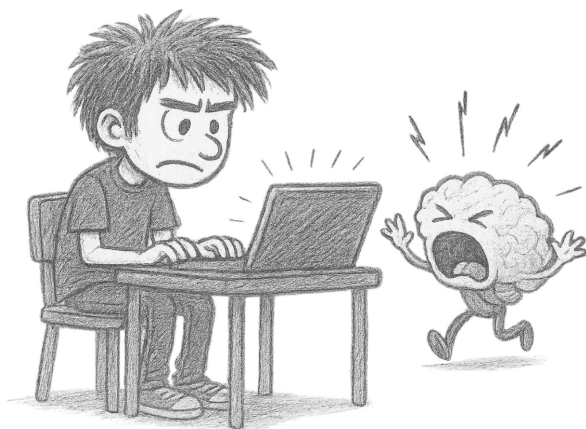
Every link a metaphor. Every loading circle a personality trait. Every red notification dot screaming: “You are not okay, Owen.”

I thought, maybe I’ll close a few.

Be ruthless. Start fresh. Instead, I opened up Pinterest to take a look at minimalist workspaces.

Then added two more tabs:

“How to Focus When Your Brain Is Screaming”



“Can you get a refund on adulthood?”

Eventually, I shut the lid of my laptop and whispered: “You win, Chrome.”

I sat in silence. Tabs still multiplying like guilt rabbits.

Because really, I am but a man. A man made entirely of tabs that will never be closed.



Josie - Thursday, 31st October
Someone Said "You're So Quiet"

So here it is again... Halloween.

A sacred time to stay indoors, eat other people's sweets, and pretend you're not home.

Except I needed milk.

So I went to the shop. In my darkest hoodie. Not a costume, just my soul in fabric form.

And while I was there, queuing like a civilised ghost, some stranger cheerful, beanie hat, way too much eye contact turned to me and said:

"You're so quiet!"

I froze... my brain short-circuited. My soul left the building.

What is the correct response to that? “Thank you”? ... “Sorry”?

“Wait here while I monologue about my trauma?”

Instead, I smiled awkwardly and laughed in that polite, “please don’t perceive me” way.

But in my mind? Oh, in my mind... I snapped. Lightning cracked.

The ceiling peeled open. I grew cartoon devil horns and stood on a chair, shouting:



“YES. I AM QUIET.

AND MYSTERIOUS.

AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS.

AND DEFINITELY MORE INTERESTING THAN YOU.”

Everyone applauded. I floated upwards. The hoodie became a cape... it was glorious.

Then the person said, “Anyway, have a good one!”

And walked off like they hadn't just launched me into a full personality spiral.

The real horror story? Being noticed for not talking.



Owen - Friday, 1st November

Cancelled Plans Club (Hosted by Me)

Phone buzzed tonight.

Was supposed to meet up with a uni mate for a drink. Nothing wild. Just “a quick pint.” (Lies. There is no such thing.)

Then the text came through:

“Hey! So sorry going to have to rain check. Work’s manic!”

My response:

“No worries at all!”

My actual response:

Serotonin. Euphoria. Inner fireworks.

Like winning the lottery and finding the last bag of Thai Sweet Chili crisps!

I stood up, lit a candle like I was honouring the gods of Avoided Social Obligation, and rearranged my snacks into neat little bowls.

I even put on a playlist. Mood: Gently triumphant.

Some people go out clubbing on Fridays.

I am the club. The lights are soft. The crisps are many. And the dress code is strictly “whatever you’ve been wearing since 2 p.m.”

There’s no awkward small talk here.

No forced “catch-up” conversations where you're both pretending to remember each other's lives.

Just me... a clean hoodie... a perfectly arranged biscuit pyramid... and the smug joy of plans that no longer exist.



I should start a movement. Cancelled Plans Club.

Membership: self-appointed. Headquarters: this flat. Mission: never any mingling.

Applications not open.

We're already at full capacity.



Josie - Saturday, 2nd November
Social Hangover, Day 3

I'm still in bed.

Not in a fun, "treat yourself" way.

More in a "brunch was now three days ago and I'm still emotionally dehydrated" kind of way.

It wasn't even a dramatic social event. Just eggs. Small talk. That weird moment where Lisa's friend hugged me goodbye even though we'd only exchanged five sentences.

Still, here I am horizontal. Hoodie on. Blanket level: burrito.

I tried to reply to Lisa's follow-up message:

"So nice seeing you! Let's do it again soon"

I stared at it for... twenty-two minutes.

Typed: "Yeah, really lovely! I" ... deleted.

Typed: "Sorry just saw this!" ... deleted.

Typed: "Ahhh ha ha yes!" ... deleted.

Blank screen.

Phone judging me.

Typing... bubble popping up and vanishing like a ghost of obligation.

Eventually I put it under the pillow like it had personally betrayed me.



Because honestly?

I feel jet-lagged.

Like I've just returned from an alternate dimension where people talk freely, and touch each other's shoulders, and say things like "What have you been up to lately?" with genuine interest.

I don't need rest.

I need social recovery leave.

Like an actual medical note that says:

“Josie cannot engage with humans today. She recently smiled too much in public and her serotonin reserves are critically low.”

Social jet lag is real.

Time zone: introvert.



Josie & Owen - Sunday, 3rd November

We Accidentally Had A Moment. Disgusting.



Owen:

We were just doing what we always do.

TV on, volume low. Crisps and biscuits laid out with zero ceremony.

Josie had brought one of those overly niche herbal teas that smells like sadness and damp leaves.

All very normal.

Then I ruined it.

I said:

“Do you think we’ll be like this forever?”

Just... lobbed that into the room like a rogue IKEA catalogue falling from the sky.



Josie:

He said it so casually.

Like he was asking about the weather.

And I, being a rational adult woman with a stable emotional interior, panicked immediately.

Internally, I aged six years.

I took a sip of tea. It burned my tongue.

I said, “What, like... snacks and no eye contact? Probably.”



Owen:

Then we just sort of... stared into the middle distance together.

Not in a bad way.

More like two people quietly realising that this strange, low-volume, high-carb friendship might actually be it.

Like, capital I It. No party. No grand declaration.

Just a shared blanket and the occasional emotional biscuit.



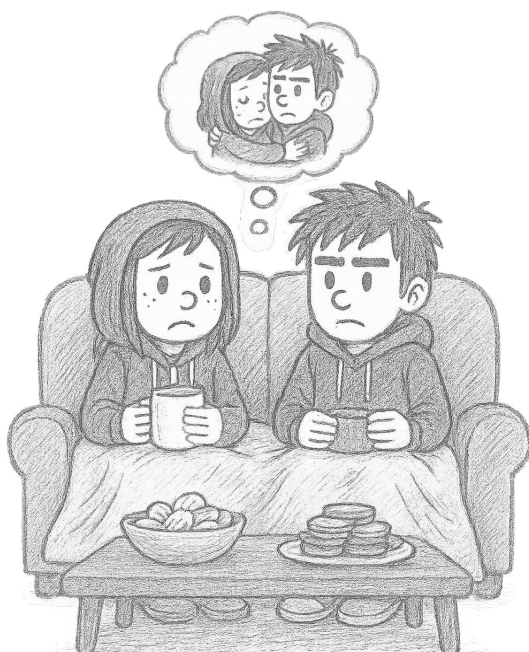
Josie:

Then one of us, I genuinely don't remember who, said "Gross."
And we both laughed. Which, for us, is basically hugging.



Owen:

So yeah. We accidentally had a moment. Disgusting.





Chapter 10

Wheelie Bin Woes



Josie - Monday, 4th November
Bin Night Breakdown

There's something about bin night that always feels like a personal attack.

The dragging... the squeaky wheels... the public display of your weekly shame.

Tonight was peak bin trauma.

It was raining.

Obviously.

I was already in a mood, hormonal and tired, somewhere between a nap and a crime.

Mid-journey... just before I made it to the bin... the bag broke!

In the middle of the driveway... I swear the bin was laughing at me!

The one working streetlamp lit me up like I was on stage in some tragic suburban opera.



Tea boxes. Crisp packets. Empty biscuit trays.

My life spilled across the pavement in recyclable shame.

It looked like I was being haunted by the ghost of my own snacking habits.

And then came the worst part:

I could feel them.

The neighbours. Watching. Judging.

Probably from behind their net curtains with binoculars and a moral superiority complex.

Is she crying?

Did she just say “you’re doing great sweetie” to a soggy box of Earl Grey?

Yes.

Yes, I did.

Because this isn’t rubbish.

This is my emotional support trash.

Every empty packet tells a story.

Most of them start with “Lisa invited me out” and end with “I said yes and immediately regretted it.”

Eventually I scooped it all back in and power-walked inside like I was fleeing the scene of a crime.

Which, in a way, I was.

RIP the last shred of dignity.

We hardly knew ye.



Owen - Tuesday, 5th November
Reconnected, Regretted

I made the rookie mistake of replying to a text from my sibling.

It started simple.

Just a “Hey, long time. You alive?”

Classic sibling code for “I need something but haven’t worked up to it yet.”

I replied with a picture of toast.



Felt safe. Neutral.

Toast can’t trigger anything deeper than a craving.

But then came: “We should catch up properly soon. Things have been... rough.”

Cue emotional implosion.

I stared at my phone like it had betrayed me.

Which, to be fair, it had.

There’s this moment when someone you should be close to actually tries to be close. It felt like my insides were made of cling film and they had just poked a hole in it.

I didn't know what to say.

Didn't want to say the wrong thing. Didn't want to feel anything, actually. So I made more toast.

It's my version of a panic room. But warm. And crunchy. Two slices, precisely buttered... bit of salt.

Stared at them like they were ancient scrolls of wisdom.

Because family is complicated.

Toast is not.

I chewed slowly.

Ignored the buzzing.

Let the toaster hum become white noise for my brain.

I'll reply.

Eventually.

But for now, carbs are doing the heavy lifting.



Josie - Thursday, 7th November

Too Tired for Feelings

I've entered the "blanket burrito and candle shrine" phase of the week.

Laptop: closed.

Phone: face down.

Candles: lit like I'm summoning peace at a vigil (or at least preventing a breakdown).



Mood: do not perceive me.

The messages are stacking up.

Lisa. Mum. A client who used the phrase “quick turnaround” with zero shame.

I haven't replied to any of them.

Not because I'm busy.

Because I'm tired. Too tired to form thoughts. Too tired to people. Too tired for feelings, really.

My brain's running on a kind of soft static like those old TVs when the channel stopped working but you kept watching anyway, hoping it would sort itself out.

I briefly considered texting back.

Started typing:

“Hey! Sorry for the delay, just been a bit...”

Then I got emotionally winded by the word “bit.” Put my phone back down.

Wrapped the blanket tighter.

Picked up and held a candle like it might grant me three wishes.

One of them would be:

“Please let me cancel everything forever, without consequences.”

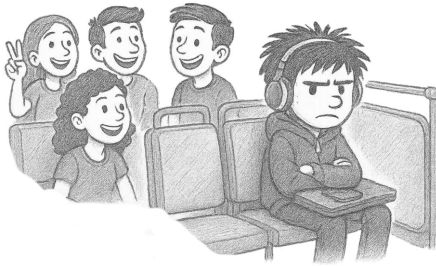
I’ve now decided that ignoring messages is a form of wellness. It’s called Emotional Airplane Mode. All my apps are still there.

I’m just not... boarding right now.



Owen - Friday, 8th November
Bus Ride of Doom

I got the top deck.



Noise-cancelling headphones on (not playing anything, obviously just for social camouflage).

Outside, the world was autumnal and smug.

Inside, I was conducting a one-man performance of *What Am I Doing With My Life: The Musical (Sad Jazz Version)*.

There was a group of people behind me laughing, scrolling, existing like it was easy.

Like they'd all been handed the *Instructions for Life* leaflet in Year 9 and I'd just... missed that day.

Sick, probably.

Or hiding in the library toilet.

They had reusable coffee cups and layered outfits and energy that said "I know what I'm doing."

I, meanwhile, was panicking because I forgot to press the stop button and now the bus is going past my stop, and possibly into my midlife crisis.

I've come to the conclusion that everyone else is on Season 5 of their life.

They've got plot twists and personal growth and themed playlists.

I'm still stuck on the pilot episode.

There's no budget.

The lighting's bad.

I think the protagonist is just me in a hoodie, staring out of windows and waiting for something to make sense.

By the time I got off, I'd imagined five different versions of my future, mourned three parallel lives, and decided to buy hummus on the way home because if I'm going to spiral, I may as well dip something in it.



Josie & Owen - Saturday, 9th November

Flat-Pack Feelings (Unexpected)



Josie:

It was meant to be a shelf. Just a freestanding shelf. You click, you screw, you admire... maybe put a couple of books and a candle on it.

Instead, it became a full-blown nightmare event starring me, Owen, and an Allen key we immediately lost.



Owen:

She said, "Can you help me with this?"

I heard, “Would you like to emotionally implode in my living room?”

But I came anyway. Because saying “no” felt worse than manual labour.

Barely.



Josie:

The instructions were in Swedish... possibly ancient Swedish. The diagrams all looked like a robot screaming.

Owen tried to make a plan. I tried to make tea.

Neither worked.



Owen:

At one point, I sat on the floor and whispered “I’m just tired” to a plank of MDF.

We both spent 40 minutes assembling three identical pieces before realising they were not meant to go together.

I may have said “This is why I live alone” out loud.

Josie threw a dowel rod at me.



Josie:

He laughed so hard he dropped the screwdriver and we had to take a break.



Owen:

It was ridiculous. It was loud. And for some reason... it helped. Like all the tension that's been living under our hoodies finally got a little release.



Josie:

We finished it. Kind of. It leans slightly left, and it wobbles if you breathe near it, but it's standing. Just like us.



Owen:

I didn't cry about my life. I cried about a shelf. Progress.





Chapter 11

Therapy's Great Until You Feel Things



Josie - Sunday, 10th November
One Good Therapy Thing

I made the fatal mistake of saying something honest in therapy.

It just... slipped out.

One second we were talking about weather, small talk and the next I said...

“I think I’m just really lonely sometimes, but I make myself too busy to notice.”

And she nodded.

Smiled.

Said, “That’s important.”

Then paused so I could sit with it.

Which is code for: let the emotional nausea marinate.

My brain immediately sounded the panic alarm.

EMOTIONAL EXPOSURE.

REPEAT: SHE SAID THE QUIET THING OUT LOUD.

RETREAT. RETREAT.

I took an aggressively long sip of tea.

Stared at the biscuit plate like it held the meaning of life.

Considered climbing into my tote bag and pulling the zip closed behind me.

I get it.

Therapy's good.

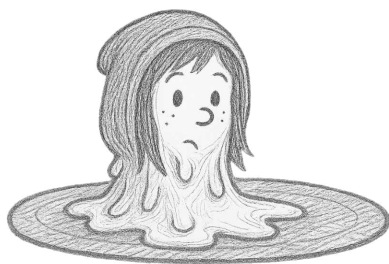
Healing's helpful.

But sometimes I think I'm just a sentient ball of repressed feelings wrapped in a hoodie, and if I loosen the drawstrings even a little, I might unravel entirely.

Still... I said the thing.

And the world didn't explode.

And I didn't dissolve into a massive pile of emotional goo on her ethically-sourced rug.



So... that's something.

One good therapy thing.

Look at me. Growing. Ew.



Owen - Monday, 11th November

End-of-Autumn Energy: 3%

I made a to-do list last night.

A good one.

Structured, colour-coded, motivational headings.

Tick boxes so perfect they practically begged to be completed.

Today?

I've stared at it for two hours.

Haven't ticked a single thing.

Not “laundry.” Not “email that person back.” Not even “buy more crisps” despite currently eating the last bag.

My only real action today has been... thinking.

Thinking about doing the things.

Which must count for something, right?

Like, spiritually?

At one point I got up to start the washing.



Opened the machine door. Looked inside like it might be whispering encouragement. Then closed it again and sat back down.

Forever.

And yes, the list is still there. Taped to the wall like it's supervising me.

Judging me, mocking me in Times New Roman.

I think the problem is autumn. Or possibly capitalism. Definitely not me.

Either way, I'm currently at 3% battery and too proud to admit it.

So I've declared today a success based on the fact I'm upright and wearing cleanish socks.

I didn't fail the list... the list failed me.



Josie - Tuesday, 12th November

Burnout in a Blanket

I am currently operating at the emotional bandwidth of a potato.

A tired potato.

Wrapped in a duvet.

That may or may not smell faintly of biscuits.

I've missed three client emails.

Two friends messaged me days ago.

My mum left a voicemail that included the words "concerned" and "vitamin D."

My laptop is somewhere inside this blanket pile.

I think.

I haven't seen it since Saturday.

It pinged at one point, but I just rolled over and pretended I was a moss-covered rock.

I've told myself this is relaxing.

That cocooning is healing.

That ignoring every notification and surviving on toast is a wellness ritual.

But mostly it's just... not having the capacity.

People keep talking about "burnout" like it's this dramatic collapse.

For me, it's more like being gently smooshed by a very soft sofa until I become one with the upholstery.

Every time I think about replying to someone, my brain goes:

Loading.. Please wait...

Forever.

So here I am. Still here. Wrapped like a badly folded burrito.

Trying to recharge in 10% increments.



Owen - Wednesday, 13th November
Too Much Noise, Not Enough Crisps

The library's heating broke today.

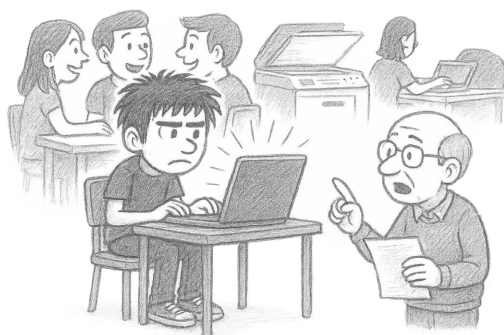
Which meant I was relocated to the “overflow space”, a euphemism for the communal work area near the café where silence goes to die.

My job is usually a soothing cycle of shelving barcode-beeping and quietly judging people who dog-ear pages.

But not today.

Today I was seated next to a group project of sixth formers “studying,” aka taking turns oversharing about their weekends.

Behind me, someone had left the photocopier open like it's catching flies.



In front of me, an elderly man with no volume control was asking the assistant how to spell “dysfunctional.”

I didn't have the heart to chime in with “It's me.”

I reached for my crisps, my last defence.

Gone.

Turns out, I'd already stress-snacked through them during the great bookmark reordering of 11 a.m.

No big deal, I thought.

I'll just buy some from the café.

WRONG.

Out of stock.

Even the dusty off-brand ones that taste like stale regret.

At one point I genuinely thought about taking my break inside the returns chute just to hear myself think.

Instead, I spent ten minutes sketching a comic strip titled *The Day Silence Died (Also I Starved)*.

Silence is golden.

Crisps are silver.

Today, I had neither.



Josie - Friday, 15th November
Cried Over a Cartoon Fox

Tonight I did the sensible thing.

Stayed in.

Lit a candle.

Made tea.

Put on a "gentle background film" so my brain could melt in peace.

Unfortunately, that background film...



...was about a cartoon fox who gets abandoned by its cartoon family and has to live with strangers in the woods.

I am not okay.

Five minutes in: mild snuffle.

Ten minutes in: full-body sob.

By the end?

I was actively mourning a fictional animal that doesn't even speak it just looks at things sadly with big, round eyes and whimpers in high-def animation.

Why did I think this was safe viewing?

How do children survive these films?

Why does Pixar want me dead inside?

Somewhere around the third goodbye hug I whispered "You're not alone, little guy" out loud.

To my TV.

Then paused the film so I could sob respectfully, without missing the ending.

Eventually I Googled “can you die from empathy?”

(Not helpful. Mixed results. One Reddit thread just said: Yes.)

I’m not sure if it was the fox, or the loneliness, or the weather, or the fact that I haven’t spoken to another human today unless you count yelling “NO THANKS” at a delivery scam text.

But my face is now 80% tears and 20% biscuit crumbs. Pixar owes me emotional compensation.

In the form of lifelong therapy and a weighted blanket shaped like that fox.



Owen - Saturday, 16th November
New Book, New Crisis



Went to Waterstones for a “browse.”

Left with a bag of self loathing dread wrapped in a pastel-coloured cover.

The book promised answers.

Clarity.

Transformation.

Possibly abs.

Title: Unlock Your Best Self (Before Lunch!). I made it three pages in.

Chapter One: "Just be yourself."

I stared at the sentence like it had personally insulted me.

Be myself?

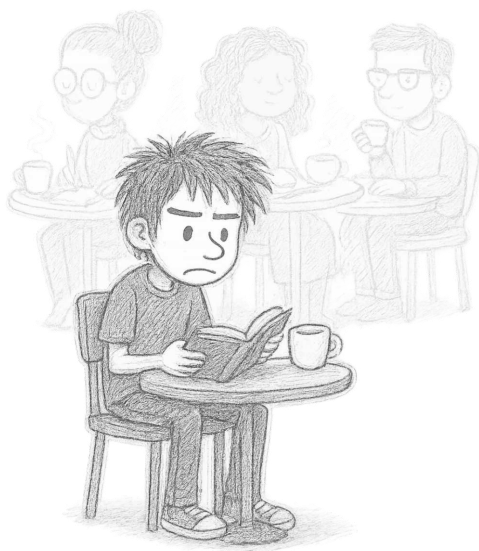
The entire reason I bought the book is because being myself has so far resulted in anxiety sweats, avoidance spirals, and a fear of answering the doorbell.

What if I've never been myself?

What if I've just been a collection of social defence mechanisms in a hoodie?

What if the real me is still waiting to be downloaded like an emotional software update I missed in 2007?

Sat in the café trying to read, surrounded by super productive people journaling and latte-arting their way to peace.



Meanwhile, I'm Googling "How to find your authentic self without eye contact or group activities."

I bought a second book just in case.

It's called How To Stop Overthinking

I've overthought every paragraph so far.

If being myself actually worked, I wouldn't need the book.

Or the backup book.

Or the receipt... which I kept, because let's be honest: I'm going to return one of them and pretend I bought it for "a friend."



Josie & Owen - Sunday, 17th November
Unexpected Hug (It Was Awful)



Josie:

I knew we shouldn't have come.

The invite said "just a casual gathering."

Translation: people standing in clusters talking about mortgages while I grip a lukewarm drink and wish for invisibility.



Owen:

I wore my safest outfit. Grey hoodie. Neutral jeans. A don't-touch-me aura.

Didn't matter. The hug still happened



Josie:

She came at me with arms open. Like a social missile.

I froze.

Some part of me whispered, "Don't make it weird," but it was already weird. My body went stiff like I was being arrested.



Owen:

I tried to sidestep it. She adjusted mid-air. I got caught in a diagonal half-hug, half-clap situation.

Our cheeks touched. I felt my soul leave my body.



Josie:

Then she moved on to Owen.

He looked at me like I'd betrayed him. Like I should've warned him. Like I had time to build a human shield.



Owen:

I'm still replaying it.

Was my arm meant to go over or under? Did I accidentally pat her back like a small child?

Did I make a noise? I think I grunted.



Josie:

We spent the rest of the evening hiding near the snack table, saying things like “mmm hummus” just to avoid further contact.

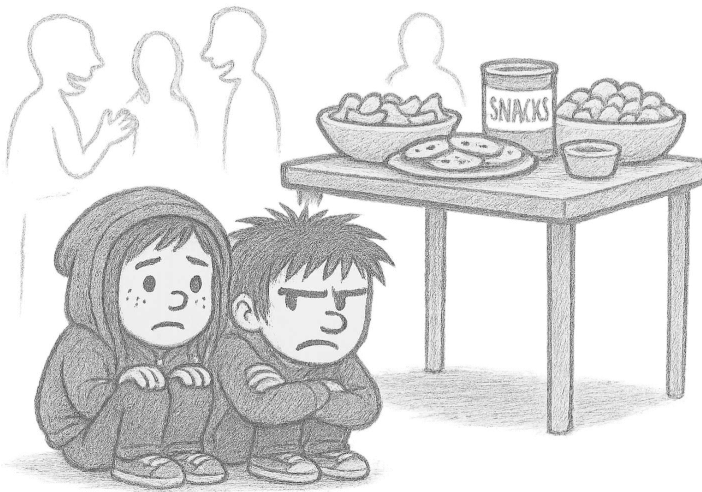


Owen:

They say trauma bonds people.

Well... now we are bonded. By one hug. One horrifying, unexpected hug.

Consent isn't just for dating... it's for hugs too.





Chapter 12

Supermarket Chaos... Trolley Gridlock



Josie - Monday, 18th November
I Just Can't "People" Anymore

It was supposed to be a simple shop. A reset.

Tidy list. Calm vibe. Maybe even a smug post-shop tea with my "I've got my life together" face on. But no.

The universe said: Supermarket Chaos Edition.

Kids screaming. Trolley gridlock. Someone arguing on speakerphone about a stolen vape.

A man in pyjama bottoms shouting “WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE’RE OUT OF QUORN?”

I stood in the condiments aisle, clutching a basket of good intentions, oat milk, hummus, bananas and thought: Nope.

Not today, Satan. Not today.

I executed the kind of stealth exit they really should teach in survival training. Abandoned the basket mid-aisle.

Grabbed tea bags and digestives on the way out like it was a hostage situation. I swear the basket was judging me.

Like: “You’re just going to leave me here? After all we’ve been through?” I didn’t quit.



I strategically retreated.

With carbs.

As I departed, the automatic doors wheezed open like they too were exhausted.

I feel you, doors. I really do.

Back home now. Hoodie back on. Tea brewing. No regrets. Unless you count the hummus... I might regret the hummus.



Owen - Tuesday, 19th November
Overheard Someone Say "Chin Up"

Popped downstairs to collect a parcel.

(Which turned out to be pens I forgot I ordered, but that's another tragedy.)

On the way back up, I passed the florist.

Outside, two people chatting, one of them full of sunshine energy.

The other: clearly mid-life meltdown.

And then it happened. The phrase. The curse. “Chin up!” she said, all teeth and optimism.

I spiralled.

What does that even mean? Chin up? Have you seen what the world looks like with your chin up?

Fluorescent lighting. Pigeon bellies. Social dread.

I didn't say anything, obviously. But in my head, I launched a full courtroom drama.



Welcome to: The People vs. Toxic Positivity.

Prosecution Exhibit A: “It could be worse.” Objection! Relevance?

Exhibit B: "Good vibes only." Sustained as evidence of the emotional repression.

Exhibit C: CHIN UP. Criminal. Maximum sentence. Honestly, I should've worn a powdered wig today. Felt like a judge.

Back upstairs now, hoodie hood restored, pens unpacked.

Still not sure why I ordered ten. Probably emotional damage control.

Anyway.

My verdict: Chin up? Absolutely not. Chin exactly where it wants to be.



Josie - Wednesday, 20th November
Almost Made a Phone Call

Today, I nearly did something brave.

Something reckless. Something deeply out of character. I almost... made a phone call.

I know.

I'll give you a moment to recover.

It wasn't even an emergency. Just a boring admin thing confirming delivery details for a project. Could've sorted it in thirty seconds flat.

But instead, I stared at the screen like it was a countdown to a live bomb detonation.



Finger hovered over the glowing CALL button. Sweat gathered at my hairline.

Heart doing that thing where it tries to jog away from responsibility.

I swear the air got thicker. I could hear my own internal narrator whispering: "She knew the risks. But she dialled anyway..."

Except I didn't.

I deleted the number.

Texted instead: "Hi! Just checking the delivery ETA :)" The smiley was a panic decision.

It's passive-aggressive now, isn't it? Still. I sent the text. They replied. The world didn't end.

And that, my friends, is what we call character growth. Not the kind where I'm suddenly doing yoga at sunrise.



But the kind where I didn't vomit over a voicemail box. Small wins.

Phone calls: the extreme sport no one asked for. Texting: Olympic gold in emotional dodgeball.



Owen - Thursday, 21st November
Sunday Scaries: Extended Cut

It's Thursday night.

Which apparently means it's now Sunday in my nervous system.

I was lying on my bed, with hoodie strings drawn like some medieval drawbridge, just... existing.

Then, somewhere between crisp #4 and crisp #7, it hit me.

Emails.

The ones I've ignored since Tuesday.

Meetings next week I haven't mentally rehearsed for.

A library shift where someone will definitely ask me where the "books with the vibes" are again.

And just like that, the Scaries arrived. Not Sunday Scaries. No. These were Thursday Scaries.

Early access horror.

Which means Friday will now be Pre-Scary.

Saturday = Total Peak Dread, and actual Sunday? Final Boss Level:
Existential.

Honestly, I think I've developed a new calendar system.

Weekdays rebranded by mood swings.

Somewhere in a parallel universe, someone's inventing a mindfulness app for this.

Mine would just scream softly every time you hit Thursday. I tried calming down by sorting my hoodie strings by length.

Didn't help.

Might start a petition to remove Thursdays altogether. Skip straight from Wednesday to blanket.

Turns out Sunday Scaries have siblings. Their names are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. And they've all moved in.



Josie & Owen - Friday, 22nd November
The Accidental Plan (Oops)



We were packing up snacks at my flat, digestives in Tupperware, the hummus sealed like it was going into deep storage, when Owen casually muttered:

“See you tomorrow?”

And like idiots, we both nodded.

Then froze.

Tomorrow?

What... what did we just commit to?

Cue inner spirals.



Josie: My brain created a full PowerPoint deck on "Boundaries and Why We've Just Betrayed Them".



Owen: I started wondering if there's a polite way to move countries overnight.

It went quiet. Uncomfortably quiet.

Not our usual comforting quiet. Not "shared hoodie silence" quiet. This was new quiet.

The kind where something might be happening. Emotional growth? Early-onset co-dependence? Horrifying.



Josie: I reached for my tote bag like it was a fire escape.



Owen: I backed toward the door holding leftover crisps like a shield.

We made eye contact.

It felt like the ghost of that awful group hug had returned to haunt us.

Somewhere in the background, the kettle clicked. That was it. The sign. No turning back.

Tomorrow exists.

And we're in it.

We've made accidental plans. This is how it begins.

