

People Once Thought I Had Potential



1. [These Are a Few of My... Things?](#)
2. [D.I.E, Or Become Less Morbid](#)
3. [Romance Novelist](#)
4. [A List of Men With Their Names Redacted \[Unserious\]](#)
5. [The Patron Saint of Giving Up](#)
6. [Twenty-Twenty-Four](#)
7. [The God-Why-Don't-You-Just-Love-Yourself Blues](#)
8. [closing statements](#)

I wrote this because I wanted to be proud of myself for something.

All joking aside, this is just how I occupy my brain in 2024 and I only wanted to express parts of the last four or five years (and beyond) that will never come out in an official autobiography because I'll never be famous. I'm a hermit, I typically love hiding underneath a blanket, but if you're reading this it means I've lost my mind and decided to make at least one person say, "you still have so much potential! you're only in your twenties!"

People Once Thought I Had Potential by Keeley Young is an amalgamation of perception so hopefully it doesn't make anyone angry. If it makes you happy, you're psychotic. If it makes you depressed, come join me while we watch the world implode.

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1. These Are a Few of My...Things?

The head went first. The stomach tipped back and forth for a spell, then settled somewhat, but the head went first. The story I remember, how it played out, was I thought an illness overstayed its welcome. This will become a common thread, but for now, I was having headaches over a longer period of time with heightened frequency. I started to realise it was a headache per day. Lingering. I would take Panadol thinking I could overcome it, thinking I was dehydrated, or sleep-deprived, or just still sick. I would rub my temples and keep myself quiet because I figured at the time the pain would ease. This wasn't something to trouble other people over—they had their own problems, much bigger than mine. I had headaches.

After some time, I went and saw the doctor. I think I surprised myself, because it had been a while since I'd been to the doctor, really. For a while I'd been lucky—no serious illnesses, nothing odd or off-putting about my body, a self-assuredness that nothing was wrong with me (I could put up with the anxiety). This was late-2020. I was twenty-years-old and we were in the middle of a worldwide pandemic, and I stumbled on to a doctor's appointment about frequent, exhausting headaches. The shorter-than-me doctor ran through a series of suggestions, I had blood tests done, he asked me if I was an anxious person, if I had anxiety, it was suggested to me that I go see a therapist. My doctor thought the headaches stemmed from an over-anxious brain. That the feelings I'd had for years and years were the sudden cause for how painful my brain could get. Because it was overwhelmed, that was all.

It felt like the sort of handout cure I wanted at the time. I would go see this therapist, who operated out of a small office on his property, just five minutes down the road from me, and wham, I would be cured of two things at once: headaches and anxiety!

For a while, I'd held a certain nonchalance about wanting to go see a therapist. I was convinced, to an extent, that a therapist would listen to my ramblings with half-closed ears and then berate me for acting like a child. Or not being courageous enough. Or for being plain weak. If someone were to offer me up a time machine, I'd love to step back to sometime in the middle of 2020. It's a time in my life I have such a hazy vision of—while the world was almost in lockdown, while *my* world was almost in lockdown, I can't quite remember how I braved it. I went to work, I came home. I never journaled during that time, but I have some rough ideas of what I did. Or, more accurately, I can tell you what films I watched during, say, the month of May 2020.

One week, I watched a series of Reese Witherspoon movies:

- Election
- Just Like Heaven
- Legally Blonde 2 (an indicator of my insanity, for not rewatching the first one first)
- Sweet Home Alabama
- Walk the Line
- Home Again

May was actually quite an impressive line-up of films. I watched thirty-four movies across the entire month, which meant there were a number of days where I watched more than one. I know this comes across as number talk and shows how obsessively I love cinema, but when I struggle to remember what happened in that month of that year, I have a record. By no means a record of my mental state, or what was to come, but a record, nonetheless.

One month later, I would be nauseous constantly and upchucking onto rocks halfway up Mt. Ngungun.

For some context, June was a month of change. Things were opening up a little more, I was getting out of the house some more beyond just going to work, and I was seeing my friends in person again. Sometimes, of course, I would see them at work—during the worst of the pandemic I kept my job working at Woolworths, so I spent a lot of time telling people there were substantial limits on how much toilet paper and meat and pasta they could buy, while also reminding them with ferocious death stares that they were wearing their masks incorrectly. I watched *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* on the very specific day I vomited on a black rock climbing up Mt. Ngungun. That specific moment is the sort of story my brain has clung to. You remember things like this. Embarrassing flashes. A friend and I were hanging out with each other for the first time in a while, and I made it halfway before I keeled over and emptied my stomach. It was a surprise to both of us. Maybe I had felt a little nauseous that morning, maybe I felt the build-up, but vomiting wasn't something I had done for years.

When I was younger, I would over-eat sometimes, and I still have a complicated relationship with food. I can't say it has ever become problematic, but I had to rework myself a little over time to make sure I wasn't stuffing my face with food because it was there, because it was present. I think this little part of context is important for later. It also ties the noose nicely into my body image issues.

I stared down at the small pool of vomit. I won't describe it to you, largely because I cannot possibly remember what it looks like, just that I did it. Sometimes I blame the decision to climb a mountain coming out of months of being lazy. But I did continue to work throughout. I just didn't climb mountains. Other times I blame...well...this. [*You couldn't possibly see, but I'm gesturing down to my body*]

My friend will sometimes playfully remind me I spewed on a rock while we were climbing a mountain together. I made it to the lookout without much fuss. I told myself I was fine.

Then the nauseousness become a new limb.

I would struggle through days thinking I was one step away from puking. Constantly. It's hard to remember how long this lasted, but it certainly had different phases. While the nausea would eventually subside, something changed that day on Mt Ngungun. It sounds like a true cliché, but something shifted. I have unresolved stomach issues to this day. The alien didn't escape my body on Mt. Ngungun.

I'm wandering down memory lane in a document I call *The Collection*, where I store information like how many Julia Roberts movies I watched in one week in August (six). There's one date that month that sticks out to me plainly—August 7th. I watched a Disney Cruise Line performance of *Tangled* I had found on YouTube. Late at night. Struggling to sleep. I tossed back and forth. It was difficult to breathe that night, there was a bowl from the kitchen I'd aptly named the spew bowl underneath the bed, and I needed the comfort of Rapunzel singing *When Will My Life Begin?*. I didn't like the actor's portrayal of Flynn Rider. I loved Mother Gothel. I wanted to punch my stomach and rip my throat out.

These moments kept repeating over the course of what remained of 2020. That painful, miserable night isn't a trigger for me anymore. I laugh about it, because if I don't laugh, I'm agonising over the panic I felt. I would nudge my body too much in the wrong direction and struggle to breathe. The position that helped meant I was propped up and would have no chance of falling asleep. There I was, then, confronted with a brand-new opening number to *Tangled*. Who needed this??

Who wants to feel like this?

I started to worry the nausea would never fade, and then it did. I had a cold in September, I was sick of some kind, and then I began to have these never-ending headaches. Ending only when I am asleep. I saw my therapist for the first time in November of 2020.

My first impression of him was a stark difference from how I predicted a therapist would react to me. He was understanding, he listened to everything I had to say, and already from the first session he was providing me with tools to progress forward. I figured it would be a lengthy process—if these headaches were tied to my anxiety like the doctor suggested, then I would have to get control of my anxiety first, and that would take time. This conundrum flashed inside my brain like the bright lights at the end of *Chicago*, and I had a white plastic gun ready for the shooting. I would shoot and slay my anxiety. I had a therapist now that wanted to help me do that.

In front of me was a wheel that sort of reminded me of my sexuality—very rainbow. The wheel represented the variety, the array, of emotions across a spectrum. In the centre were six core states of being: peaceful, sad, mad, scared, joyful, and powerful. It was important to see this base-level. Of course, as a writer, I already knew the extent of emotions...but had I ever known my own to the full extent of being able to label it as daring, or foolish, or apathetic, or serene? Maybe. But I'd stopped being able to be serene with the headaches. With the nausea. With myself.

My anxiety had always been something I could label but not define. When I was younger, I would be distressed if one of my parents was running even a little bit late to pick me up from school. I can still remember the thought patterns I would frequent—that my mother had been in a car accident on the way there, or I'd been forgotten about, or someone had kidnapped my parents and...

I suppose the stereotype of therapy is that you dig through your childhood to find the juicy parts your brain has latched onto. Making an infographic about my childhood trauma wouldn't be a complicated task for me. There are a few things I inevitably circle back to:

- my parents' divorce when I was very little
- my stage-prop years when my father remarried (I have scarred-in memories of coming home and telling someone, maybe even just myself, that I felt like a prop to be positioned in the far back of the car whenever I stayed with my dad, his second wife, and her two daughters)
- being bullied in primary school for not acting enough like a *boy*
- losing my primary school friends in high school

In a crude way, without really breaking down any of these things, the obvious connection between them all is that these were things that people did to me. So much of why I was so incredibly people-pleasing throughout high school I think reflects on how I was reacting to these events. With understanding, and years of therapy, I know my parents didn't divorce to give me childhood trauma. I know I wasn't rightfully bullied—although being called gay in primary school wasn't like factually inaccurate, I am gay. Any tension and splitting-off between myself and the friends I made in primary school was a two-way street. I was making new friends, forging connections that truly helped me survive high school, and I can never be certain what life would look like for me had I clung desperately to the relationships I made when I was a very, very small being.

I do maintain that my ex-stepmother was unnecessarily cruel to an eleven-year-old.

I had been in therapy for some time at this point, but my therapist wasn't very convinced my anxiety could be responsible for constant headaches. I was no closer to understanding why my head was tormenting me so, but at least I was grasping what my cognitive distortions are. My therapist explained

to me that cognitive distortions were essentially traps the mind crumbles into when it wants to overwork itself, or when something negative happens, or when you have headaches each and every day and start to assume you have brain cancer. The last part of that sentence is an example of catastrophising, or cataastrophising as I sometimes like to call it. The root word is obvious: catastrophe. Things turn from bad to worse, things turn from bad to very much the worst they could be. I have a habit of assuming that when disaster strikes, I will be swallowed by the earth, or have brain cancer. This one felt like an obvious tumour of my anxiety. I'd grown up thinking the world was out to punish me, obstruct me, and I hadn't even grown up religious. Unless you count watching *VeggieTales* in Religion class in primary school.

I was given a sheet with a list of common cognitive distortions, and I circled the three I most identified with. Catastrophising, mental filter, and jumping to conclusions. Jumping to conclusions reminds me a lot of catastrophising—both linger on this idea that things will be harmful to me because they just will. Me thinking my parents had been kidnapped or murdered was probably a little of both. Some catastrophising here, some jumping to conclusions there. They work hand-in-hand for me, certainly. My anxiety is fuelled by thinking I am one breath away from everything falling apart.

Mental filter is... truthfully not too far beyond this scope. It handles the notion that your mind takes something negative that exists already, be it about yourself or in your path, and tasks itself with clinging to that detail so extremely that you begin to not be able to escape thinking about. My example for this is typically whatever mistake I've made that day. I like to believe humans make mistakes, and it is how we grow from them that matters more, but my brain likes to believe I am only my mistakes sometimes. I am *only* the idiot who left the kitchen light on overnight. I am *only* the doofus who dropped a pair of scissors while he was walking. I am *only* the gay kid who graduated from university and has no plan for his future. [*These are all recent examples to prove that I'm still a mess*].

Acknowledging my flaws, acknowledging the ways in which my brain fuels my anxiety, that didn't cure me. It was a fatal sort of optimism to think that some therapy would suddenly patch over everything, but having a therapist I trusted and could turn to for the support I needed, that was the path forward. I just shouldn't have worn rollerblades.

2. D.I.E, or Become Less Morbid

The head went first. Then, 2020 ended.

Throughout that year, I had still been slowly progressing through my university degree, although glancing back now it seems hazy. I only did a total of three units over the two semesters—two of those were Creative Writing Projects, where you were tasked to write six-thousand words or a suite of poetry of some length. Everything was online. I would read a handful of my peers' work and give them feedback, staring at their faces splayed out on my screen, secretly invested in exploring what was off in the background. I learned a lot about these people through what they kept in their homes. But also what they wrote about too. I'm curious now if I ever was too harsh in my critiques—going through the things I was going through, the uncertainty of so many things, was I ever taking it out on people who just wanted to know if they were on the right track?

I like to hope I was fair. The folders that should be labelled Semester 1, 2020, and Semester 2, 2020, are nowhere to be seen on my hard drive. Like most of that year, they have been forgotten. I still hold memories of the sorts of stories I was reading, the ones I loved and the ones I did not, and of course I remember what I wrote and submitted for assessing. Funnily, I wrote a piece entitled *Belly Grumbling*. Ironic.

It was about an old drunkard and a *broomgirl* named Svey—she was basically a slave to the tavern owner. The two characters, sharp opposites of one another, come upon the washed-in corpse of a sea monster. They tangle with the decision to alert the town, who will likely slice the beast into pieces and devour it, or to bury it in the sands.

The other piece I wrote that year for the six-thousand-word assessment, part two, was about existing in a world during sleep, like a dreamland. It's very clear I was tired that year. Writing about dreams, sleeplessness, anxiety, all of that, is sort of a strange thing to both live in and somewhat predict, too. 2021 would be a strange year for me. But everything since 2020 has been strange.

I would only go on to complete one unit across the entirety of 2021. It was one of the units for my minor, which was involved a lot in studying film and analysing it. The minor unit was *Global Screen Studies*, and after wrapping it up, I only had two units left before I graduated. I ended up taking the second semester of that year off. And then I took another semester off. I wouldn't graduate until the middle of 2023. Life, it's complicated. I was the tortoise. In another time, maybe I'd have been a hair faster.

I changed doctors at the beginning of the new year, largely because my previous doctor moved practices. Having to find a new practitioner would become a running gag for me—for a multitude of reasons, it's been a struggle to keep hold of the same doctor. One moves away, another goes on maternity leave, another simply becomes too difficult to book in for an appointment. Over the past few years, I've gotten acquainted with how complex the medical industry can be in terms of appointment waiting times, and getting what I need out of those appointments, and just figuring out what's wrong with my body. I have to assume there is something wrong with it.

I can't remember when the stomach pains became more frequent, but they are a bit of a norm at this point. The head went first, then the stomach became a weight. When a doctor asks where the pain is, I gesture to the general region of my stomach. The pain spreads from left to right, right to left, centre beyond. There is no one inch to pinpoint. Like the headaches, I have been told there is a chance my anxiety is responsible for the stomach aches. I started to get really stressed, and frustrated, and overwhelmed by this build-up. I could handle when the anxiety was anxiety, but I didn't want to

believe my anxiety was barreling into new problems, without easy solutions. Therapy was working, in the sense that I was focusing on how to calm myself down when I needed, and being able to talk and unpack my entire life, if I needed, was something I'd previously never had. The upper half of my body ached. I was anxious all the time. I was depressed. Before therapy, I'd been fearful of ever labelling myself that—without that diagnosis, I worried other people were properly depressed and I was just depressed-lite. Over the last few years, I've accepted my depression more and more, but in accepting depression, and knowing how to identify it, I've sort of just...gotten more depressed.

My new doctor suggested we trial anti-depressants.

Over the new few months, I met three new versions of myself:

1. Does-Nothing-Antidepressant Keeley
2. Insomniac Keeley
3. Emotionally-Strange Mess Keeley

By now, I've mostly forgotten which antidepressants I was on, but there is really only one conclusion I could make after trialling three different variations: I wasn't improving. By no means do I think antidepressants don't work—but at that point in my life, I went from someone so desperately hopeful for them to accomplish something, to someone that struggled even further to fall asleep at night, and someone that was losing control over his emotions more and more by the minute.

I truly do not remember the first dosage changing much. Maybe I was spending too much energy waiting for change—at this point, I was still learning to properly come to terms with my depression, amongst other things, but I didn't want it in my body anymore. Being home, away from the world, hadn't dampened the overall sway of my depression too much. If anything, a whole suite of theatre shows getting canned because the theatres weren't open did more damage than losing the normal clunk of life. I adjusted to being alone, like I've adjusted to being lonely. Lonely, of course, is part of the depression. Here I was hoping the pills would strip back the curtains and hang up something with more of a glimmer, like curtains in the grand halls of the Emerald City.

I returned to my doctor with the news: no dice. We were giving things a reasonable go, of about six weeks, but Antidepressant #1 was clearly dissolving in my stomach to no change. I credit my improvement in swallowing tablets to these trials. Before then, I'd really struggle to swallow them down—I still struggle sometimes, but it mostly depends on the size of the TABLET.

[In case anyone was about to leap to the innuendo]

Antidepressant #2 kept me awake at night. Quite literally. For years, I have struggled with what I call a restless brain. It's not always easy for me to fall asleep. There's whatever is rattling around in my head, such as stresses from the day, thoughts about the next, or sudden ideas for my writing, plus how my body feels lying in bed. Whether one position is more comfortable than another. How my stomach feels. It's a restless feeling, trying to drift off to sleep. At one point, from advice from my therapist, I tried to alter my bedtime routine to see if adjustments made a difference. After a while I got tired of putting in the effort. I never said I was a persistent person.

Nevertheless, the trial of a second antidepressant caused me to stir in the middle of the night, often only a few hours after I fell asleep, and the last thing I wanted to put on my exhaustion was a second go at falling asleep. I binged a lot of *90 Day Fiancé*. Nowadays I can't watch the show without excessive cringing. I would love to have been documenting everything I watched back then, what late night cravings I had when having a distraction was much more sanity-inducing than trying to sleep again. It made me exhausted. I never felt like I got enough sleep. It's a sick combination, baggy eyes and foreigners moving to America with Pikachu-surprise-faces when life isn't freshly luxurious with their new fiancé.

From the 24th of June 2021 at 3:32am:

I hate being in pain everyday. Like I feel like I've lost who I really am, and I'm so bloody scared that if we figure out how to manage the pain, I won't recognise whoever starts being normal again...because for a while now all I've known is this pain and putting up with it and pretending I can do things and going to work feeling like I might pass out if I strain myself too much and waking up in the middle of the night and just...giving up.

...I just feel so different that if the headaches and the stomach pain and the aches in my body ever stop...I'm so worried it'll be my brain that keeps me from getting back up again.

There's a lot in the above that I still recognise in myself. I wonder, still, what the person underneath the different, constant pains looks like. I strain my brain to try and remember the person I was before I realised the headaches were here to stay. Like how can I possibly flash back to the me I was in 2019, before the world changed, before I did? When I had woes like getting out of a relationship that wasn't working. When I was adjusting to university, enjoying university. When I was weirdly comfortable being the third-wheel to two of my friends that had also started dating.

I've yet to pass out at work though, but I'm still waiting. I'm like a pig in truffle season when it comes to thinking I'll eventually pass out at work. My weakling tendencies. Maybe I like to imagine it would cause some sort of change in store and they would improve working conditions because one silly loser passed out in the carpark and got squashed into the bitumen by one of those oversized truck-cars.

Waning off Antidepressant #2 was for my wellbeing. I couldn't keep going with something that made sleeping even more difficult, so I returned to my doctor once more. I was recognising the process for what it was, what it is: you have to learn how your body operates. My body is cruel—that is how I saw it in that moment, sitting in the waiting room with far less confidence than when we began. My body is complicated—this is more in line with how I view it now.

Antidepressant #3 was Venlafaxine. I thankfully have proof of that one. I call this version of myself, Venlafaxine-inflicted me, the Emotionally-Strange Mess version because I began to lose control of the extent of my emotions. I would tear up, I would cry, at things that made me happy or even just slightly sad. I would get irrationally angry at nothing. My emotions were out of balance. I wasn't suicidal, but I thought about death a lot. And I mean, same, me too, 2021-me.

It was oftentimes just unexplainable why I fluctuated the way I did. The only thing I could blame was the antidepressant. It wasn't working, like the one before it, and the one before that. I was miserable. I was feeling more hopeless than before. I needed to be off the pills. I needed to stop toying with them, at least for a while, to see if I could find parts of myself again. They had been washed off out to sea, and I'd found this new raft I could float out on: positive thinking.

Positive thinking wasn't the sole reason I waned off antidepressants, and I should reiterate that antidepressants certainly do work for a lot of people, but I was turning twenty-one and had so little energy left in my body, I needed to try other options. Once I waned off the last antidepressant, I tried: positive thinking, dating a skinny twink, writing my feelings, delaying my creative writing degree, watching horror movies, buying lots of books, and dying my hair two different colours at once. My Cruella era is one for the books. I miss it.

When I shared a two-page confessional, if you will, about what had been going on in my life of late, I got a lot of replies that reassured me I had the support I needed. Friends and family were understanding of the struggles I had been going through, but I felt within a few months the post was already outdated, and when someone approached me to offer support about it by then, I felt like an imposter whose problems had morphed. The antidepressants were out of my system. But the pain wasn't.

I no longer wanted to talk about the person I had been in that time. I've grown to certainly acknowledge that I'm flexible in how I see myself over the years. The person I was before this change, or that change, that person is both distinctly me and also not. The Keeley that was struggling to understand himself in high school is still inside of me, but also, the physical remnants of him are gone with the wind. The embarrassment certainly clings. I wasn't a troubled teen, but I had my own troubles. Growing up and coming to terms with your sexuality is something gay teenagers reckon with in high school, some even later. But even now, far more comfortable with being blatantly gay, those pieces of me perform a ritual of sorts. A grand old game of tug-of-war, between inhabiting my body and being afraid of clogging up too much of it.

Maybe I have been worried I would become a walking reminder of my own trauma. I was worried, I have been worried, that talking too much about the pains, the struggles, in my own life would come across a certain way. That I would be labelled someone that complains, the serial whinger. I've spent a lot of my life trying to outrun this view of myself, that I just like to complain about things. To vent my stress recently I filled an entire blank page with an excess of things I wish I could openly complain about and never receive any sort of criticism or strange eye-contact for. *[There's nothing insane in there, don't worry]* I do mean fill too, really, truly, fill. You can wonderfully adjust the dimensions of the borders on a Word document and I adjusted it to the point that the words *almost* tumbled over the edges of the page. I'm terrified no one will ever read it or want to. I'm terrified most of what I complained about will never change. *[They aren't going to retroactively go back and nominate Greta Lee for Best Actress for Past Lives]*

I don't want to be labelled the sort of person that spends most of their existence finding something to complain about. I'm always trying to find the balance between talking about whatever is going on in my life, and just keeping to myself. People might be wondering what is going on in my head, or they might not. If I can present myself as the sort of person people can feel comfortable talking to about whatever is going on in their lives, then at least I'm getting somewhere. I don't need to be a comfort for everyone, though. Fuck, who has time to be everyone's best friend?

It's a complicated mess. Like me.

You do your best to not be the one with the issues. But I do have issues, and not in the hokey-joke sort of way of saying I need more therapy, more booze, or more sex. I have issues because I can't deny the headaches, or the stomach pain, or the sore limbs, or the sore throat. Somehow I haven't mentioned the sore throat yet.

I have anxiety and I have depression, too. Sometimes I deny those the airtime because I've got a whole past of being looked down upon or ignored for having them. Sometimes I joke I need a white sheet of paper with all my ailments glued to the back of my clothing, so you could spin me round and find out what's wrong with me. Then I think, would anyone take that seriously?

Sometimes it feels far less complicated to shut up, keep my head down, and do what needs to be done. To get through a shift without passing out. To try and figure out how to live my life with some unexplained mysteries along for the ride.

Sometimes it feels far less complicated to remember being a silly sixteen-year-old.

3. Romance Novelist

Finley waited in the rain. Hair a mess, clinging to his scalp. It was like he'd re-awoken before he walked out the door, like his head had picked itself up off the pillow again, twice in one day. Teasing, instead, fingers had swept through the strands of his brown-ish hair. Their noses almost touching. They had just kissed for the first time, and it was almost a delusion. Finley had to remind himself it wasn't, that something like this could happen to a person like him. The cliché of that. Sometimes he wanted to see himself as just frustrating, just annoying, just on-the-spot and being the distraction for all things. Now, he felt like a distraction, but the right one. He didn't care if the rain fogged up the pores of his skin, or drenched him from head to toe. He wanted this. He wanted to kiss again.

A crush could last for years and years and then suddenly, he found the confidence to speak up and say something. Squash down the chance the other boy could be safe from having feelings too.

Finley had this exact idea in his head: love is possible for me.

Sometime after I graduated high school, I dug around the memories of that time and thought about crafting an idealised version of what I'd wanted to happen. It was like writing twenty-first century fairytales. The boy gets the boy. Requited feelings. I'd spent the final year or so of my high school experience having intense, depressing feelings for two of my close friends. I was still trying to understand my sexuality, and be comfortable in it, but I had plenty of supportive friends who just understood me. It was obvious I confused myself a little—there weren't really too many other gay teenagers in school with me, so I conflated the growing friendships I had with those two friends for *potential*. Potential for them to like me back. Potential for me to justify my sexuality.

They are both straight, from my understanding. One of them had a girlfriend at the time. [*I never said anything to him, because as much as I was a romance-seeking teenage boy, I also have a moral compass*] They were both close friends with each other, actually. At this point in my life I don't really give a fuck if they know about this messy little love-triangle I was concocting entirely in my mind. I was just attracted to them both. I wanted them to hold me and tell me being gay wasn't something to be ashamed about.

At this point in my life, it could be in the same bed, the three of us snuggled up beside one another. But the ship truly has sailed so far past this dock I don't think the trading route is really accepting of their offers. To be less confusing, time has passed. I've moved on.

In high school, though, I liked them both. Somehow a few of my friends squeezed this information out of me, and I made a series of weird choices while I girlishly talked about *potential*. I once made a joke that I would 'never wash my hand' after I held one of theirs during some dumb activity on the school oval. It's the sort of thing I remember from people describing the time they met a famous celebrity. My friends just sort of glared at me like I was a psychopath. Teenage crushes sort of do turn you into a psychopath sometimes.

To make things less confusing, I will be referring to the two friends I had silly little feelings for with random names that I can slightly explain. It's so boring to refer to people as Person A, or Person B. The one with a girlfriend will be Yukon. The one I wrote an extensive note to, explaining that I had feelings for him, will be Branch.

I first met Yukon sometime in high school, Year 9 if my memory is correct. We sat near each other in English, and my gay little heart found him both attractive and also a complete and utter dork. I like

dorks. Over the next few years, our friendship would grow, but truthfully I think we stayed friends more because of my blossoming friendship with his girlfriend. Fuck, I need a name for other people too! *[It's not like this is a legal thing, more a...I respect that my memory isn't perfect, so if I start here with strange, bizarre names, I hopefully won't offend anyone in the future. I want to be able to talk about my life, my experiences, but also make sure people can retain a sense of anonymity]*

Evelyn was Yukon's girlfriend at the time. Our friendship made me feel a lot more comforted in a world I was unsure of, and I would oftentimes spend break time with her, and with Yukon and Branch. *[I'm going to eventually make myself cackle with laughter writing some of these names, but I'm nothing if not creative.]* Evelyn and I are still friends, although we don't see each other too often. When she and Yukon broke up, I split off the last part of myself that still had any feelings for him. Funny what a break-up can do for the soul. Not even your own break-up, either.

In high school, I would cling to the little things. Once, he told me he would date me if *he were gay*, and I think I clung to that for at least a few weeks. It was the sort of thing to ruin the spirits of a queer person that couldn't understand why the future of romance looked bleaker for him. Why people were more likely to be born heterosexual, or overlook him anyway. I was a teenager. It was my mindset that wanted to stare him dead in the eyes and say, 'Why would you say something like that if you had no intention at all of following through on it? If you're not gay, stomp on my heart already.'

I used to get so much serotonin from hugging him. His smile drove me insane. In one of my worse moods, I thought it surreal that someone else got to date him and I didn't. I was furious with Evelyn for one morning out of pure jealousy. I think by now she'd probably laugh and say, 'let's find you a time machine, travel back, and you can have him for yourself.' Then we would make intense eye contact and know it was for the best that all of the Yukon had gone barren.

Branch and I were in a few classes together over the years and I liked him for everything that I wasn't. He fit in with everyone. I had a more difficult time getting along with other boys—there were exceptions, like Yukon, Branch, another guy I had specifically very sexual feelings for—but Branch just belonged. He was hilarious in such an ordinary way, which feels like a back-handed compliment, but shouldn't be. Branch made me feel accepted.

Even when I confessed I had feelings for him, he accepted it.

For a split second, he even considered it.

In high school, I suppose I figure my type was *ordinary boy*. A few of the other homosexual boys in school were and still aren't the sort of guy I would go for. Explanation: they are bottoms. High-kicking, queer slang-slinging, beautiful bottoms. I wish I could've been a little less homophobic about how I saw them. I think I was just aware of how comfortable in their skin they were back then, and it was a confrontation of sorts. Here were teenagers that understood being gay could mean being proud of yourself. I can't retrace my steps and change the person I was in high school, but if I'd been different, and probably had far more confidence, maybe I could have been real good friends with the beautiful bottoms.

Branch was not like them. He was beautiful (for a teenager, I guess), but I was drawn to him because I thought I could blend in with him. The frightening thing about being a teenager is having to retaliate to your thoughts. Although, truthfully, I'll be battling with my thoughts until the day I die. In high school, all I ever wanted was to belong. I thought I needed the basic building blocks of *belonging*: a group of friends that liked me, good grades, a less annoying personality, and a boyfriend. I'd already realised I wouldn't be successful in performing as a straight man, so I could pretend to be a girl instead.

I was such a massive people-pleaser. Nobody likes being told they're annoying; nobody likes saying something to be met with dead silence. Being a teenager to me was always about trying to sculpt

myself into the right sort of person. I admired Branch so much for being himself, and well-liked for it. [*This is all in retrospective. I probably just loved the attention from him back then.*]

Time passed. I made little attempts at treating life like it was a romance movie. Obviously, nothing worked. Nothing happened. I was conflicted, and likely very miserable pushing trolleys in the Woolworths carpark at night, and I decided I would do something about my feelings: I would send him a message. Literally, a message. Although I do remember it being quite a lengthy one.

My entire body froze when I suggested to myself that I try searching through our old messages to find the confession. It's strange. Not wanting to face 2017 me. The foolish impression of Keeley, taking these strides to become more comfortable in my sexuality, just with the wrong people.

Branch handled it incredibly well, better than I could have asked for. He responded the morning after—I'd sent my lengthy missive at like, 9pm—and told me perhaps we should talk it through sometime. I can't remember his exact wording, but I spent that entire day on a strange high. There was no expected *I'm not gay*. There was no *you dumb fag*. I replay those memories, though, and think maybe my brain could sense the impending. By the afternoon, he'd changed his mind.

At the time, I was in the habit of occasionally writing journal entries, but I had a strange sense of confidence about them, in which I would give them to my friends so they could understand whatever was on my mind without needing to grill me about it. It's the oversharing that's always been there, see. In the entry talking about these new events with Branch, I wrote:

“At least now I can tick off being friendzoned, because that happened on Wednesday. If I hadn't felt so giddy with joy that my silly confession was progress, I wouldn't have felt so stupid and so gloomy when he inevitably changed his mind.”

I continued on for a while, playing the heartsick teenager, moping on and on. I can laugh at myself now. I was an overdramatic seventeen-year-old that had been brave once and got knocked down for it. There was no certainty of anything, and I'd even written that I was waiting for him to turn me down—but at that age, how deep had I rooted that belief? Seventeen-year-olds just want to be in love without being told it won't work out. They just want to be romanced. They don't know how quickly everything changes and shifts as you graduate high school, and become young adults, and realise how specific being in love looks for you now.

I'm grateful documentation like that still exists—these glimpses into who I was when I was seventeen, still high on the promise of love, but still grappling with how to be a fully-fledged human being. I was gay but still terrified I wouldn't be accepted for it. I came out to friends first. It was a half-reveal, sort of like when a drag queen tears away part of their outfit on the runway but underneath is sort of just the same thing but slightly shorter. I stumbled through my words and one of my friends reassured me they already knew I was gay. I remember another friend came up to me randomly one day, in front of a classroom, and posed that question: are you gay? I blurted out a yes and knew I would be comfortable with her knowing, with her supporting me. Years later, I'd be on a mountain climb with her and vomit on a black rock.

The idea for *Love and Other Non-Existent Things* probably came from my undiagnosed depression. I'd been miserable at having a high school experience that was largely in my head, and my heart, so I wanted to write something that was flashier. Brighter. Had more love-triangles. It began first as a film script idea called *Told You So*, about a teenager named Finley who leans on his two male friends while he battles his undiagnosed *depression*. [In the description, it is called *becoming lonelier and struggling to cope*]. The two friends, Alfie and Noah, fail to realise they are leading him on and he's getting hornier and hornier for their COMPANY, NOT SEX. Truly, the writing has been on the wall about my asexuality.

I was in my scriptwriting era, even though I have only ever finished writing one feature-length film script, about a psychotic purple-haired woman who wants to murder her rich cousin for having her kidnapped as a teenager. I've always been the pillar of sanity. That's why I'm in therapy!

Told You So eventually shifted into *Love and Other Non-Existent Things*, a bold reimagining of my life as a gay teenager told on your television screens. I have generally little faith about most of my television ideas being made into tv shows, but out of all of them, this one seems least likely. I am dredging up my past to patch over the boring parts. Not the depressing parts so much, just the truly unexciting moments when two boys fighting over me would have been far more enjoyable from a viewing podium's perspective. I took episode titles from that document where I poured out my feelings. I invented fake names for my friends. It was like I was turning my high school life into something more interesting for God to watch. I'm sure he's fucking tired of me.

[I actually don't believe he exists]

Sometimes I fear my art, my writing, fails if I have less and less life to draw from. Writing poetry spikes whenever I'm going through a breakup with a guy, or at least it did when I split from my first boyfriend, Eggnog. *[I collapse to the floor, laughing at my own idiocy]*

I worry that without the basic building blocks of missed opportunities, and sliding doors, I will start to write with more hesitancy. *Love and Other Non-Existent Things* was going to be an attempt to show that having those feelings wasn't for nothing. Wasting time liking those boys, it wasn't going to be a waste of energy, because in fiction they would live on, and they would react. Branch would become Alfie and he would kiss me, dammit! It was more insanity from me. It was more undiagnosed depression, and anxiety, and the fear that falling in love was just a fiction.

In late 2018, I met Eggnog. It works, because we started talking around Christmas time, and for a while, our relationship smelled like cinnamon. I thought he could solve every problem. I was glued to him, and it was unhealthy to be so glued to a person. This was a new experience for me: dating someone, truly dating someone. I really do not count the relationship I had in primary school with a girl I can barely remember. With Eggnog, I was smitten. For eight months, I was in his arms, and he was in mine, and I thought I could live forever like that. To break away from him, I had to become a monster, a little. I had to break his heart.

Having never been in a relationship before, I made mistakes from start to finish. I invited him over too often, and let him stay for too long. I think I have to take partial blame for how our relationship eventually made me feel—like I was getting suffocated from all the attention. Despite dating him for eight months, I don't remember enough from the wonderful times. I remember him texting me in frustration because I went to something he would have loved to go to with me, despite how last-minute the plans had been, and I'd only been invited because I was there at the time. It was such a pre-pandemic concept too—interactive theatre set in a fantasy realm, where you created your own character and completed tasks. Had an anxiety attack in a hallway, panicked about getting home from somewhere called Morningside (?). Eggnog really would have loved the theatre, not the panic attack. I remember spammed messages from him wondering if my silence meant I didn't love him anymore. First relationships are perfect ground for figuring out what you want from being one half of a couple—or more, if you're polyamorous. Eggnog, we weren't perfect for one another, but I remember when our time together was wonderful, it was wonderful. We had so much in common. You helped me find parts of myself I hadn't known. I couldn't love you forever, though.

I would like to apologise though, although who knows if you will ever read this. I was honestly a bit emotionally-manipulative when we broke up, because I didn't know how to break up with someone. I tried to keep intact parts of our relationship that needed to disappear for both of us to heal. I

am grateful I can still talk to you sometimes, on the rare occasion we remember each other's existence. I am grateful you could be happier without me.

I wrote a lot of poetry about my split from him. I had wanted an escape route, but not one that damaged him the way it did. His story is his to tell, but my involvement in it is a deep regret. How I hurt him. I like to hope he has healed from everything, because we were two young teenagers trying to stay in love each other. Two people that just completely understood one another. Until we didn't.

My relationship with Egnog was no more in tatters, it was completely dismantled. That had been my intention—my brain intention, at least. The heart is built of strength. The strength of being clingy, so maybe sometimes we were just as bad as each other. Teenagers in love.

I hate to imagine the sort of person I would be if my heart finally collapsed inside my chest. If it frantically beat against my chest, making its daily attempt to leap out of my body. I hate to imagine who I would be if I no longer had the capacity to believe in romance, or even just pure love. It's so important to me to know what love is—how different love can look and still be called love.

I don't think the right decision is to write romance novels that are thinly-layered rewrites of my history. Sometimes I will have an idea, a what-if, but I'm always looking for a way to make sure it isn't just me taking that easy route of positioning myself in the main character role. *[Sometimes I cave.]* The older I get, the more comfortable I become with the idea of finding the right relationship for me. No rewrite of the past, nothing forced, no trying to bait a straight guy who gives me attention into loving me like anything more than a brother. I could write endless fictional stories about the tricky situations of my love life, but for now, in my progress era, I'll write about them for the senile version of Keeley. This greying, decrepit me will want something to laugh over. I am sure by then I won't have much movement in my joints, and the diagnosed depression will have poisoned every blood cell.

I will find a printed-out copy of this here document and read about how I once thought I had a chance with my friend's boyfriend, if only he were gay.

----- an interlude -----

When I was sixteen or so, I had to confess to myself of one truth: I was split at the brain and the heart on being attracted to two different boys. Teenagers like me, but undeniably boys I stood no chance with. Standards at that age are lower, but I lacked one thing it was certain they wanted: the female reproductive system. Or boobs, I guess.

When I was twenty-three-and-however-months (this afternoon), I had to confess something else: I'm split all up inside again, but the feelings are varied, and they frustrate me. Two more men, this time men at this age, where I feel my brain sagging too young, my heart quivering too early, and my eyes averting. I looked at one of them today with fresh perspective—you know how you suddenly become a god-chaser for embodiment-of-the-sun Apollo when you see a beautiful man? He was set in slow-motion. I realised nothing could happen between us, the same for every morning, or evening, any moment I see him. He'd crave everything I am not: the sex-drive, the stamina, the body that I do not possess. I have to assume he's straight (he is) to feel slightly protected. *You won't hurt yourself like that again.* Crushes on straight men were supposed to end at twenty.

So I cast him aside for the obvious (or I attempt to): I'll never be the *girl* he could have everything with because I'm a depressed gay man whose most exciting wish-list item for grand romance is *when he and I cuddle up in bed*. Stripped of any euphemism. So I cast him aside, or attempt to. Focus on the half of the duo with less risk. A queer man I get to be friends with and I catch myself looking at him to make sure I'm holding eye-contact, but also to make sure I'm *looking at him*. Not losing those moments if I don't. I don't know what I find most attractive. I hope not the traffic jam of his life, after a recent breakup from a relationship that suffered from life and its distractions. Although to call myself a priority feels narcissistic.

I...I keep myself from making any form of confession because I worry. Cut the sentence there, leave no traces of *help-me-find-an-excuse*. I worry he will reject it, or else reject me entirely. Blanket silence from him forever. I worry he will share these uncertain feelings, but he'll be there waiting for more, for all the things someone with *harboured feelings* should offer from their hand. I always worry about him wanting sex. An entire complex brought to ruin because I flinch at the topic of conversation and you have to wonder why I bother having *feelings* to begin with, if I was only planning on setting them partway in motion? I worry. Inevitably. I think, as much as I desire for more, want him to hold me in his arms and kiss him and do all the romantic daydreamings I think must be borrowed from PG-13 love stories...I think about losing a friendship too. Again. Like I did when I was sixteen, terrified I would shove a boy away for placing my homosexuality to the forefront, making him think it was all stereotypical. *The gay psycho has caught feelings for me*, disrupting the order. It's not healthy to be terrified of everything, yet I don't know how to be unafraid of hurting *them*. The beautiful boys who corner facets of my attention. Normalcy, affection, a distraction at work, another sign I don't have to be sexualised. History repeats on itself not because it becomes lazy but because there's only so many alternations to a story that can be told. You feel hopeless in your feelings for two boys again eventually. I had an ounce of bravery back then. Confessed to one, never said a word to the other.

Can't repeat the past?

Why, of course you can.

4. A List of Men With Their Names Redacted [Unserious]

I once went on a date with a guy who tried to force me to kiss him. It's difficult to even call it a date because I didn't find him very attractive and he suggested we get KFC for dinner. But I always think of that moment like a trigger, him leaning in close, responding to my awkward silence with 'where's my kiss?' I didn't want to kiss him. I didn't kiss him, but it left a sour taste in my mouth, the way he reacted coldly to not only a rejection, but a rejection to the typical order of things. I think he expected we would end up in bed with each other. At the time, I couldn't put to words what I wanted.

It just wasn't him.

Relationships are complicated things. Without a need to be technical, relationships are beasts that are difficult to be tamed, and no relationship is ever perfect. Perfection, at the end, isn't a goal to be hunted, either. I joke often that one of my previous relationships was a fraudulent species, I joke I was body-snatched by aliens, I joke that my need for attention polluted my head. All of these little sprinkles of humour and mindset are a little harmful to the person I dated back then, but I don't know if we ever thought we would be right for one another. Being with him was like accepting that a relationship should be temporary. I was so distracted by other people back then, so attracted to other people. I accidentally developed feelings for one of his friends and that was not the sort of path you should follow in a relationship. Nothing would have ever happened—straight people in relationships don't fool around with gay people in relationships unless the gay person is really quite beautiful and there's some insane chemistry between them. Unhealthy rhetoric!

At that point in my life, I only had insane chemistry with my depression.

I've told the story a plethora of ways: in the middle of 2021, in the age of an alien invasion, I attended a wedding, got one semi-unattractive dance photograph taken of myself, and finished dessert off with a bout of depression that lasted four days. The modern, I'm-not-like-regular-officiants spouted the typicals anyway—love is forever, marriage is a binding contract of union, you are with the person you are meant to be with for the rest of time and you will be buried beside them and your ghosts will orgasm with one another for all of eternity. I was too busy wiping the tears from my face, proud of my cousin and his new wife for such a beautiful ceremony, to realise I didn't really want to date Silenus.

[Silenus was the god of drunkenness, you get it.]

In a humorous sort of irony, I watched a film called *We Broke Up* four days after the wedding. It's interesting to continue to document myself in terms of the films I watch, on which day, because I think in many ways it gives me perspective on not only the types of things I was interested in at the time, but the state of my mood. The day after the wedding I watched *Water*, an Indian film about a child bride banished to an ashram after the death of her husband, an old man. I watched *Water* for a unit for university, and it was fascinating, and depressing, and I was already in the trenches of playing through an entire relationship I was likely coming to the end of.

Relationships are complicated things. My memory of that particular relationship is topsy-turvy—it feels altogether longer than it was, but when I try to reconstruct a timeline, it was really quite short. I ran through a series of almost-relationships at the end of 2020 to the beginning of 2021, but by June of 2021 I was trying to find new sanctuary. I reunited with one of the almost-relationships, but there is proof nothing was ever going to happen between us. I had a brief friends-with-benefits relationship with someone who would pick me up, drive the two of us to somewhere dark and private, and make-out with me in the backseat of his car. I disappointed him by denying him what he wanted—sex. Sometimes I make things more complicated. Often enough, I am the thing that cannot be tamed.

[because I have some nasty anxiety and depression and I'm still figuring out my exact sexuality!!]

Sometimes I like thinking about the *why*. Why a relationship ended, why a relationship never existed, why someone ghosted me. It feels important to me sometimes to unpack the failures and the escapes, like a magician sharpening his tricks. The next time the trick is performed, it should be more successful—etc, etc.

I have had a million and one crushes over the years. Sometimes the word *crush* feels too childish, but sometimes there is no realistic way to culminate a feeling, or entire plethora of feelings, down to just one word. *Crush* as the potency of being young and free and excited about your feelings. Nowadays, that thing, or things, rattling around in your heart can just be an aching burden sometimes.

These are the men of my love life that have had their impact, beyond a passing crush. These are those men, and the reasons why they're in the past.

- Yukon – presumably straight, was in a relationship.
- Branch – presumably straight, friendzoned me.
- Gavia – wouldn't obviously turn me down, I was oblivious.
- Frying Pan – thought it would never work between us.
- Eggnog – made me feel claustrophobic in the relationship.
- Lentils – didn't want anything serious.
- Magpie – hated everything so probably hated me too.
- Tenrec – always had an excuse for bailing on me, was not right for me.
- Silenus – made me feel like an imposter in my body.
- Platsa – wanted too much from me, was not right for me.
- Boatman – was just a distraction from working on my issues.
- Callistemon – would have driven me mad if I dated him.
- Port Augusta – came at the wrong time, lived too far away.
- Hourhand – literally wanted me to unfriend anyone I had ever met on any dating app.
- Fragiferum – made me believe I could be loved again. Got swept up in life.

In some sort of vivid imagination fantasy, I would get to talk to each of them again in the same day. Some of them I would feel uncertain to speak to—at least two of them no longer want to speak to me, although I wonder if time could bridge the abyss somehow, for one of them. I imagine many of them see my existence as entirely separate from theirs. I am a wandering spirit in the halls. Sometimes they think of me, send me something, like a picture of a beautiful sunset, but without a message like *thinking of how this reminds me of you*. I wonder if I truly sat and pondered, I could come up with a list of these names that I would flush with actual interest if they sent that to me. A message of remembering, of thinking about how in another universe humans could torture each other less with how complicated we all are.

I think about that—I imagine a universe where I could reunite with all of these men and not feel embarrassed with the image they would project onto me. I'm not ashamed if some of them find me repulsive now, or at least frustrating, annoying, idiotic. In some other more progressive universe, I could reunite with all of them, makeout with some of them again, and feel like less of a failure because of the regrets I have.

Actually, the straight ones probably won't want to make-out with me. But that's actually not a problem!! I don't have any leftover feelings for y'all.

I think it could come across wrong with the implication—these relationships, or non-relationships, passed by for their reasons. I'm grateful for that, but I think envisioning some universe where there is confirmation my past isn't littered with mistakes makes me feel more comfortable about existing. I am supposed to be excited about my future, but I'm mostly just excited for two fifths of it.

Such an awkward, atrocious fraction. Maybe I'm an awkward, atrocious fraction.

I am aware to the obvious—I can be the positivity-streaked type of person that wishes we could all just hug and eat cakes made out of rainbows and just be happy. I'm of two strands as a person, both deeply depressed and uncannily optimistic. It depends on the day you catch me. Maybe that complicates me as a person, or maybe it makes me just like everyone else, toying with two different moods to establish one stable platform somewhere in the middle. There's an importance to acknowledging that my anxiety and depression are not necessarily unique, or fresh to the examiner. The very specific struggles are my own, of course, because there aren't even several other people living my exact life. There's not two. I like being a unique entity, but sometimes it is lonely and confusing.

I've taken to turning to my love life, to boys and men, for the hope that romance will make things less lonely, and therefore less confusing.

The concept of polyamory is something I continue to think about, but there is an uncertainty to how someone like me would ever be able to replicate it in their own life. Polyamory begets a sort of communal aspect in romance, and I imagine until the day I die I'll be the first one to run and hide in a corner to protect my breakable heart. The notion of maintaining a polyamorous relationship strikes me as almost the same as trying to wrangle a herd of sheep unsettled by an overwhelming thunderstorm. As an asexual person, or at least as someone who likes the way the term feels, what I couldn't offer any sort of polyamory is sex. An asexual, kisses-and-cuddles-focused polyamorous relationship sounds entrancing to me. Like a no-sex cult. I think I could be quite comfortable with an array of partners to turn to for my different moods. I think a polyamorous relationship would also help me feel less frightened about the startling future of only loving one person.

In two past relationships, I've hesitated, torn the skin around my fingernails away, but finally asked them if they were comfortable with an open relationship. I never seemed to get any sort of chance to act on these perimeters. In those relationships, asking for any feelings of jealousy to be stripped away was more of a realisation that the relationships weren't going to last, because I was uncertain about my position in them. In one relationship, the relationship with Silenus, it was certainly an unhappiness, too. As I continue to come to terms with myself, with my emotions, and how I view and judge the world, I start to predict the same patterns for myself. I'll be comfortable in a relationship for a while, until I go through a spout of depression and neediness and want more out of life. Paired with the need to be able to talk to someone whenever I want to, I'll start to see the best upside in how it was when I was single—I could talk to anyone, flirt with anyone, hypothetically be with anyone. The way I've come to understand my depression is that it doesn't necessarily present itself in the same way every time. Sometimes I am moody and prefer the company of the shadows and the dust accumulating in my bedroom. Other times, I just want someone to tell me I'm beautiful and worthy and have their arms wrap around my body.

There are so many dreadful downsides to being single that I never want to sabotage a relationship unless I'm absolutely miserable in it. Yet...the more I understand myself as a person, I question why I *can't* have my cake and eat it too. *[A phrase that makes very little sense—if you have cake, can you not just lift a spoon and dig right into it, all ladylike and polite?]*

The further I see how complicated and overwhelming the world around me is, the further I see the cadences to how unhappy I think I will be if I have to be further and further pigeonholed. Because of the various undiagnosed pains in my body, working laborious hours makes me overworked, exhausted, and too unfocused to do the sorts of things that make me happy, like writing. Because I don't drive because of my anxiety, and the pains in my body, certain things take longer than if I did—one appointment can end up being an entire half-day event. Because of my depression, I worry trying to squeeze spare time out of a partner will only put strain on the relationship.

The cake-and-eat-it-too of it all circles back to the way in which I think society as a whole has conditioned relationships and general life. Work is the first priority, because people need money. We need money to survive in society—homelessness continues to surge, prices skyrocket to combat population growth, it's really not cheap to go see theatre and I need to continue to see live theatre. If you consider it, a typical work-week is the majority of the normal calendar week, and we're grownups now, we don't get school holidays. Being in a serious relationship with a person means carving out time in your schedule for that person. I give myself migraines trying to picture myself in a life similar to my parents, or to certain other people my age. Some people are really out there trying to cram everything exciting and fun about their lives into the two days at the end of the week, while also cleaning the house, buying groceries, and oftentimes doing meal-prep. I had no intention of turning this into a sort of younger-generation-complains-at-the-legacy-left-to-them spiel, but this central focus on providing for yourself, on making enough money to be sustainable, means sometimes I go quite some time without seeing my partner. Or I only get to talk to him here and there across the week, because our work schedules bump awkwardly against one another. The more I attempt to adjust to being an adult—and frankly I'm probably doing a terrible job, because I feel like I am—the more I realise the world does not *want* me to have my cake and eat it too. Because then everyone else would claw at my face and demand to know why they can't have this too, this life. Because, in many ways, they already do.

I try to not take the way I have been treated by men in the past personally. When Hare confessed to me he did not feel comfortable with me talking to the friends I have made on dating apps, I tried to not take it personally. At first, I mostly just misunderstood him, or told myself I misunderstood. When Tenrec bailed on me to hang out with friends, who he had seen at least four times that week, I tried to not take it personally. I was just some dorky gay dude he could potentially date, but they were *his friends*.

I think it's pretty standard for anyone to be treated like shit every now and then when it comes to dating. When it comes to life, really, and dealing with other people. We are a cruel, harsh breed. Sometimes we are lovely. I have been insulted, I have been unfriended and blocked and forgotten, but I am no saint myself. If I try to avoid taking it personally, maybe they will too.

In an attempt to understand my sexuality and my wants for a relationship, there have been many instances in my romantic history that I am not the proudest of. I once stood someone up who had booked a hotel room for the two of us on his birthday so that we could have a romantic getaway [*Platsa*]. I was last-minute terrified and like many of my experiences, realised I didn't really want to have sex. I once cancelled on someone because I thought it was easier to just avoid meeting them in person. Avoid letting them see in person what a mistake it was to attempt to get too close to me. Actually, that happened multiple times. I have a bad habit of avoidance. I like my little bubble.

Romantic relationships are complicated. I take responsibility for the way I have acted in them in the past, because an important part of growing is realising that no matter the looming presence of my anxiety and depression, those are still my choices. It was my choice to be cheekily-flirty with someone in the past; it was therefore also my choice when I was avoidant and told them I was too busy to meet in person. Sometimes I just don't want to explain why I'm more annoying and less self-assured in person.

Sometimes I think about dying because trying to balance everything seems exhausting.

At least in hell, I can stew with my decisions, and in between getting my eyeballs plucked out of their sockets and getting slowly devoured by flesh-eating spiders, I can picture that silly little idea of a fantasy where I don't disappoint anyone, not even myself. I reunite with the list of men, previously given silly little names, and I don't feel the weight of shame for ever having been attracted to them. Ever having wanted even a brief romantic life with them. Because, of course, I eventually give up.

5. The Patron Saint of Giving Up

There was a period of my life when I was often found doomscrolling on Facebook and I would inevitably end up doing BuzzFeed quiz after BuzzFeed quiz, determined to find out what breakfast food I was, or which *Sesame Street* character I was, or what my birth month was from which classic 90s movies I chose to watch in a hypothetical movie marathon. If there was a BuzzFeed quiz I saw now, and it was there to determine which patron saint you were, I would be the Patron Saint of Giving Up.

I think many things are at fault for this attitude I inflict upon myself. Sometime during the pandemic, I first lost some motivation, then witnessed the beginning of the downfall of how my body once felt. How it once felt to inhabit this body. The head went first, and then the stomach reminded me it was the technical first problem, it just went on hiatus. The head went first, then the stomach, then the throat. It was Christmas week—the chaotic lead-up to Christmas Day, where working in retail is the equivalent of being walked to the electric chair, but in slow motion. Perhaps this sort of overdramatic, morbid metaphor is just a quality of my queerness, but I have often rehashed how depressingly exhausting the race to the finish line that week is. There was a pain in my throat. I ignored it all week—despite the looming existence of the coronavirus, I had larger monsters to reckon with than being any sort of sick. There were \$700 trolley loads to scan through at the register. I powered through a hellish week, spent Christmas Day with the family on my father's side, and thought the throat pain would eventually subside and maybe like one other person would suffer through the gross illness like I did. All because I refused to piss anyone off by calling in sick during Hell Week.

The throat pain persevered, too. For a while, I accepted it like I accepted all the other discomfort in my body—it was evident at this point that I was decomposing, and the doctors were unsure how to revive me. Over-exaggeration again, of course, but it was true the doctors trialled many ideas and only came up short. When I finally approached a doctor about the throat pain, I believe I mistakenly also referred to it as 'neck pain', and coupled with the headaches I frequently whined about, I was referred to a place called the Head, Neck, and Jaw Clinic. They unfortunately did not crack my skull open.

I loved going to the Head, Neck, and Jaw Clinic. The physio man regularly...I am struggling to write what he did without making it sound sexual, because I do not know the terminology, at all. He would try to relax my body, that was his job. Try to iron out the creases and untie the knots of my muscles. The *homework* I was set was distracting and reminded me of why I wasn't a gym-goer. I would have to stretch with colourful bands, and put a paddlepop stick between my teeth and inch my teeth side to side on the stick. Frankly, the more I discuss this, the more sexual it sounds. The physio man, again, I don't know, he did his job...and he wasn't bad to look at either. But despite my slight attraction to the medical professional, and my desperate attempts to do better for my body and for my mind, I was still noticing no differences.

Eventually, the physio would sit me down and tell me he didn't believe the pain in my head or my neck/throat was something he thought he could fix. I understood—I was clutching at straws for some semblance of a fix, of an answer, but I couldn't contort my body to the point that it forced a resolution. Like any good patron saint, I bucked off on the journey of what I honoured the most—giving up. I stopped going to those appointments, I stopped bothering with the exercises I had been set, and I stopped having the mentality that there was light at the end of the tunnel for these aches that were spreading through my body.

At this point I was giving up on myself a little bit. I waded through four or so weeks of a film studio project at university that I felt like a complete outsider in. My frustration with how QUT

markets their units aside, I spent another semester in university limbo. All I had left were two Situated Creative Practice units, because I would first rather traipse around hell than do any sort of internship that I wasn't going to be paid for. There is a lot of creative freedom in the Situated Creative Practice units—there's an assortment of industry-broad choices, but it's the illusion of choice for someone like me that only really has the one skillset and sometimes-overdramatic anxiety. Film Studio had excited me as an overeager film nerd that revelled in the idea of working on short films and flexing my creativity beyond writing short stories. But I realised very, very quickly anything that needed *writing* had been done in the year before, and my options were...stand here and hold this thing that is supposed to block some of the light, or stand at the top of a staircase and do the job of a damn sign. I spent one mandatory Thursday doing exactly that—standing at the top of a staircase near QUT Kelvin Grove's Z2 block, repeatedly telling people they had to find an alternative route while drama kids performed for the cameras. I was a glorified sign, but at least I was participating. In a few ways, that Thursday broke my spirits. I was exhausted, having woken up at something like four o'clock to get into the city for an early start, only to stand in one position for most of the day and realise this would be my entire semester. Glorified set dressing, out of the shot.

Film Studio's grading rubric hinged on earning points by filling various roles, like camera operating, directing, producing, holding things to block the light, etc. There was an overwhelming Excel spreadsheet I felt extraordinarily underqualified to be looking at, but in all of my indecision I'd left it too late to squeeze into another of the situated creative practices—like for example, the fucking creative writing-focused one! I curled into a ball and accepted my flustered mistake. I had been so excited. So enthused to do something different. I didn't expect to feel so completely like an outcast.

Giving up is not necessarily the evil it's claimed to be. There's strength in realising you need to exit out of a situation, strength like realising being in a relationship with someone has a very high chance of not working out for me. That's a complicated story though.

I don't see my twin university delays as *giving up*—despite my frequent thoughts of dropping out, of just resigning into a state of nothing, I have persevered, I graduated with a degree, and most importantly, I made sure to realise how to make the tail end of my time at QUT feel important and worthwhile. There's no dignity in struggling through a semester being a glorified sign, or feeling hopeless at your prospects. There's dignity in finding community.

My body like my heart like my brain is complicated. I strangely value that. I place value in my ability to persevere, not merely because I think any sort of life-ending escape means I won't live to see the next big film adaption of a musical, or the next season of *Hacks*. I find the pocket of the universe I can live in where I have my comforts, but I have my challenges too. My body aches after a tiring shift, or after a non-stop week of travelling around Melbourne seeing the sights. My heart aches after a boy I love starts to drift away from me, and we agree to break up, and I sit in a strange neutral zone of being devastated but okay with it, because it means I can go back to flirting with other boys. My brain aches because I feel as though the headaches make it more difficult for me to remember things, so I feel more idiotic than usual, and I feel like giving up more than usual.

I sometimes feel very unsettled when I tell a person about my 'health struggles', or whatever feels more accurate to call them. Body pains. Daily pains. I start to worry a person will see me differently because of them, because I can't *just* say I have headaches, I have to add something else, and something else, until I sound like the sort of person that enjoys being a burden. I don't. Nevertheless, I feel like one frequently—if I'm not driving myself with the fear of appearing out of focus, I'm thinking about how other limitations make me feel like a lesser person. Because I don't drive, when I make plans I think about how best to least inconvenience someone. When I ask for a ride, I think about whether

this is the fortieth time asking for a ride from this person, and whether I should offer to pay for their petrol, or their meal, or something, just to feel like I'm doing more to offset the balance. Then, I think about my bank account, because I don't work crazy amounts at my casual-employment job because of the headaches, and the other pain, and the general disdain for working that has come from years of being uncomfortable during it. I will always try to make plans that divert attention away from my flaws, or at least the perceivable ones. My absolute favourite type of plans is 'watching something on the couch, but with company and snacks' because at least the attention is off me, and I can zone out when I need to. I tend to warn new people that there will always be the possibility I lose focus. Or make eye-contact maybe less than expected. I have to think about keeping myself comfortable, which can mean I sometimes forget about presenting myself as completely in the moment. It can get exhausting, stumbling forward with this pain of mine—but, despite embracing the parts of myself that love giving up, I have my own forms of resilience. Every day is its own milestone in a journey that tilted course in 2020. There are so many things in this world that scare the hell out of me, but so many things that make me so grateful to be twenty-three and alive and functioning well enough to be able to get out of bed in the morning, and leave the house, and meet boys for cute dates, or whatever the important objective is.

ScratchThat is a student-run literature and arts magazine based out of QUT's Kelvin Grove campus. I was fortunate enough to spend two semesters as its unofficial-but-official Content Team leader, two semesters I think in many ways felt like the proper way to close out my degree. Within the Content Team, four other members and I created weekly written works for the website, on any topic, in any style, really. There was a lot more freedom in the first semester, but the second semester's structure felt like more of a creative challenge that I came around to appreciating. I made some fantastic friendships out of my time in *ScratchThat*, which replaced what I'd been attempting with the Film Studio debacle. I wrote pieces I am wonderfully proud of, got feedback that made me feel valued as a writer, and got the experience of working alongside a complete organism of a magazine, no matter its roots in being a part of a university course. I wrote about fantasy demons of war, a robot companion named OVELL-7, horny Zeus, a dinosaur exhibit at the museum, and trans rights. Across those two semesters, I escaped out of the frame of mind that I was doomed for failure—it's cheesy, sure, to say I believed in myself more and genuinely felt a surge of positivity for my future, but I did. If only I could have lived in those moments forever. Being a part of team I genuinely rooted for, not shirking my responsibility to lead, wanting to produce the absolute best art I could, and see the exact same from the people who saw so much potential in me. The second of the two semesters I think genuinely altered my perspective on teamwork, despite how fucking stressful it was and how unhinged the first week or so of the semester was for my anxiety.

As someone with a lot of introverted tendencies, but an obsessive need to do everything on time, stepping into the leadership role within my specific sub-team was a trapeze act. I liked the organisation. I could set plans in motion and make sure I was doing my part. I always had to be the patient but fuming bad guy when people didn't explain their silences, or their late submissions, properly. In a twisted way, the team bonded over the troubles and the woes, just as significantly as the highs and the successes. It was a rollercoaster of a semester, the second of my interims within *ScratchThat*. It was becoming mere weeks and days away from my graduation.

The idea that I would be graduating with a Bachelor in anything was thrilling. At the time, it purely spelled opportunity—soon, I would be *through with university* and I could comfortably look in the rearview mirror to see those times getting exhausted over assessment, or praying for a decent grade, or...those times I just wanted to drop out, or cry. My brother had graduated during the pandemic, so I

was the first of my parents' kids to get the university graduation ceremony. To a certain extent, the whole thing would be for him at least a chance to experience it from afar. Wear the robe with a perception filter. There's an odd kind of cruelty in allowing the nervous freak to get the graduation ceremony, the rapturous applause, the I'm-going-to-piss-my-pants feeling I had while we all waited backstage to follow direction perfectly. You cross the stage, don't shake hands, doff the cap, pause for a photograph. In all the fluster, I misjudged where my hand would take itself and didn't doff the cap correctly, but what haven't I screwed up at this point? I'm a clumsy boy. I want to do everything quickly, or else I move too slowly. I thought about that recently—there are two speeds to someone like me. A rushed panic, an attempt to get things done to flit away from every possible embarrassment, or else just live through it in haste. That's speed number one. Then, speed two, with no true in between, you have: slow, heaving body, eyes drifting closed and open. It makes sense. One setting is anxiety, the other depression. I don't know how to properly exist without one or the other.

The ceremony had been in the evening, so I spent the late-night drive home in the backseat of the car thinking of everything. It sounds overwhelming, and I think there's a truth to my brain existing on a high after having just graduated, but...I have to think about the future sometime. Maybe I thought, why not now, while I reflect on *everything*. I wasn't a university student anymore. I couldn't claim that. I couldn't say *this is what I'm doing while I study*. The only thing I was left to study was how I would operate moving forward. New upgrade: does not need more educating. Or, *cannot become more educated without more debt*. I suppose that was how I saw things. I was moving on from university, from that extensive period of my life, and there was new independence. New independence that was lowkey terrifying.

I set to adjusting: I went on my first proper solo vacation; I gave myself more time to write; and I stopped working weekends. In July, I went to Sydney alone. This was freedom: university had been a distraction from going anywhere during the breaks between semesters. I had thought, the way to rid myself of a semester was by staying home, or working more, or making plans with friends, but never did I really *consider* going somewhere else. By myself. Now I was flying alone, going to Taronga Zoo—one of my happy places—alone, and finding out new things about myself in the process. Truly. Since the Sydney trip, I've been to Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth by myself. Each capital city means another chance to find out something new about myself. Each place means a chance for me to uncover new favourites, new loves. Piece by piece, I'm exploring this country, or at least the parts of it that are easily-accessible via public transport. I was through with finding excuses for not taking these opportunities—I could be the patron saint of giving up elsewhere.

The Gentoo Project is a special little child of mine. I set myself the task of writing the opening 5000-6000 words of ten novel ideas...although a few of the inclusions were reworked unfinished pieces. This was how I wanted to spend the rest of 2023—writing opening chapters to novels I had no real intention of continuing. Sometimes I got attached, sometimes I considered writing another five thousand more. Sometimes I never wanted to step foot in that character's world again. (Yes, I'm talking about you, *Spawn of the Devil*.) I was finding creative expression like never before. I just had to ignore the casual-employment-at-Woolworths of it all.

This is where I find myself wanting to give it all up. I was talked out of quitting my job to focus entirely on my writing, and my travelling, exploring, etc etc. It was the right decision—money is an important thing to have, and at least I didn't look like a bum of an artist living off his savings. I have a complicated relationship with working, though. I find myself wishing I could find some way of making money that didn't involve being absolutely miserable at a job I had no real interest in...but it's not so simple for someone like me. I could consider something like making a fortune on OnlyFans until I

realised I would become too self-conscious and too uncertain about what I would actually feel *right* about advertising. It wasn't like I would be getting fucked on camera anytime soon.

I have this ideal dream of a life where I worked in a secluded office in the back of a building, with a window out to the world, maybe some trees and some grass and the occasional bird. My office would be a small room I would operate in alone, and there wouldn't be phone calls, or meetings of any sort. Each morning, I would lock myself into the room and get whatever work I was responsible for done—maybe it would simply just be typing information into a database in the computer. I'm certain I don't need a career made out of my ability to write, although I do literally have a degree in creative writing...how fucking cool is that, man.

I would make enough money in this lone-wolf job to afford the things I love: books, vacations around the country, streaming service subscriptions, food. The latter, of course, is a necessity to survive but I am not hoping to merely *survive*.

Resolutions are not realistic for me, but I set myself a goal of sorts coming into 2024. I would find a new job. Woolworths was becoming miserable, because I had no university as a helpful distraction from it. I was wearing myself out pushing trolleys around or avoiding making one of the supervisors unhappy simply by existing. Although, of course, it was also because I am exhausted, and it is becoming more difficult to remember things. Things like which key goes where. Is it not impossible to want keys to be labelled? Fuck potential break-ins or writing being illegible. What's the point of compounding all these keys onto one keychain if I have no idea anymore which one I'm looking for? Ninety percent of them are silver.

I am the patron saint of giving up. I want to throw away everything and trade my corpse in for another model. The headaches, the stomach pain, the throat pain—these are a few of my least favourite things. These things prohibit me from thinking positively about a future in the workforce, although let's be frank, I don't want to *work*. I could be an interesting example of a househusband. I might go insane without my own source of income, but maybe if I'm less depressed, I'll make a little profit off pictures of myself naked, or videos of me jerking myself off. [*just kidding...*]

Working a typical nine-to-five would mean I would come home exhausted, without any possible energy for anything. That's eight hours of dealing with the headaches. Dealing with the throat pain, constantly reaching for a water bottle, constantly clearing my throat. Eight hours for five days a week navigating myself to hopefully avoid the stomach pain, but knowing it'll come eventually. How do I navigate the anxiety of trying to respond correctly, or doing the job to the best of my ability? How do I escape the depression of doing the same thing over and over, an untidy repetition, where I long each week for the days to be over, for the weekend to rescue me? I am the patron saint of wanting to give up on everything and be the uninteresting failure I can see of myself.

It's only becoming more difficult to know what to do with myself.

There is no dream career now. There is no dream future. If anything, I am almost living in the dream: I don't have to work too much, I can go on holidays because I can afford them, I don't have to pay for every little bill imaginable. I make another mistake at work, get flustered, and think, *I can't even do this right*. I push another person away, or else a relationship comes to an end, and I think, *people are just going to keep deserting you for all the myriads of problems you possess*.

I am the patron saint of giving up. Love a good *giving up*. I do it daily.
Underneath the surface.

6. Twenty-Twenty-Four

I was born on the 24th of September 2000. For years, the numbers 24, 2, and 4 have held significant importance to me. Every time I fly to a new destination, I hope I can select a seat in the 24th row. These numbers are really what I would call my favourites. These, and the number eight, for some reason.

I guess it is four plus four.

2024, therefore, felt like the perfect opportunity for a year to be *mine*. I would change my life, bit by bit, until I was happier with how I could present myself. At the end of last year, 2023, I'd gotten into a relationship with a lovely man. I hadn't been looking for anything, but we started talking on Bumble and naturally formed a strong connection. After repeatedly telling myself *this is not a date*, I started to see a future forming with him. Spending time with him may not have been officially a date, but I looked forward to every moment with him.

In November, we officially named our relationship a *relationship*, after six or so weeks of him being in Europe, and our connection only growing stronger while we were only able to message each other against the difference in time zones. I was in a relationship for the first time that felt *mid-20s mature*—I wasn't calling him my boyfriend, he wasn't disregarding the things I told him made me uncomfortable (the sex stuff), and we were properly communicating. I didn't really think it possible to find someone I could have a genuine connection with and also not have to worry about when they would want sex from me. He felt like a step in the right direction.

In February of 2024, this grand year of *me*, we went to Sydney together. Sure, I struggled to fall asleep with someone in the bed beside me, and sure, I had to slow myself down to make sure he could enjoy everything without the trigger of my anxiety speed setting. But. Our Sydney trip reminded me how incredible being in love could be. We made new memories in places I was already in love with. WE SPENT THE NIGHT AT TARONGA ZOO. I awoke on a Tuesday morning to the sounds of lions roaring, and I fed a giraffe a carrot at like 7:15am. The slimy tongue surely thought one of my fingers tasted like a carrot too, but alas, thankfully no biting. Tigers are my favourite animal, and it was sometime during the evening before, the zoo blanketed in darkness, and I stood in front of the glass staring down at a half-asleep tiger bathed in the red light of the tour guide's torch. And I was experiencing all of this with a man who was making me feel more confident about the whole being-in-love-while-in-pain-and-a-pain thing.

In May, we broke up. I wanted to throw up.

April was like slowly tearing myself in two. While my partner dealt with family emergencies, and an exhausting work life, I invalidated my feelings and spiralled out of control. Convincing yourself your own feelings don't matter because other people are dealing with worse really is quite simple. Step one: shut your feelings into an empty room in your head. Step two: lock the door and throw away the key. Step three: notice the feelings creeping their way out from underneath the door and start having mental breakdowns, spew out your emotions to your friends, almost cry in a Momo Chicken. Step four: get your money's worth at therapy.

My therapist said it was helping no one to be sitting in my own misery while I waited around for my partner to *no longer be in over his head with family emergencies and exhausting work hours*. I spent a weekend trying to think of the best way to communicate my feelings. I hesitated on a Sunday morning, worried it would be insensitive to *feel things* while he was *feelings worse things*.

Communicating how I felt in the moment, over the course of a month, felt incredibly important to me. I poured over the message, rewrote parts of it—I was told it was too void of my emotions at first, from a friend who read over it for me—and then finally sent it to him at some stage. Certain of one of four outcomes: we break up; we continue to be together, communicating through this; we continue to be together, but make adjustments to how our relationship will work; or we continue to be together, but torture ourselves with silences and question marks and scorn.

We'd agreed to see each other again, for the first time in more than a month, on May the Fourth. As massive *Star Wars* fans, it's a little bleak to know we broke up on such a day. But you don't choose when important conversations need to be had, or you do, and you regret later waiting it out for however long. I spent the week in preparation thinking of all the things I could say to him. I thought at length about the decisions that would make me happy, or happier. Pondered whether our exclusivity was part of why I was becoming more miserable: maybe if I had the opportunity to flirt with other people, talk freely with other men, maybe I wouldn't be so lonely while I waited for him to find the time to message me, to see me. I hold no ill will for him being understandably busier than I ever am, but I can recognise my depression was feasting on my loneliness. As usual.

It didn't take long for him to confess we should break up, and I crumbled into a heap of tears and red cheeks and the inability to form sentences. There was a realisation—I couldn't say anything to patch our romantic relationship up, because he'd decided it was over. I accepted it, because I accepted his decisions. Supported them. Will always support him. Probably even if he decided to burn down a building or go on a killing spree. I'd decide if he saw reason, I believed in the reason...

Now what the hell am I saying? (I don't condone arson or murder, I'm just insane.)

Instead of rewatching any of the *Star Wars* films in a comfortable sadness, I watched *From Up on Poppy Hill*, overthinking things, and rewatched *All About Eve*, reconnecting with my love for Bette Davis.

So, it was May, and I was single again. So much for the year of *everything is looking up*.

I am writing this in July, and I've been single for two-and-a-bit months now. The single life is not a life I trample upon, like crushing a bed of beautiful roses into the dirt. I can go through periods of solitude without having to worry about my partner. I can flirt with cute boys and be terrified one will ask me to come over and climb under the covers with him and you know...do all of the things I am terrified of being asked to do. Maybe sex isn't terrifying, or boring, but just not for me.

My recent ex and I still have a good relationship, despite the break-up. We still hang-out, or talk about hanging out, and his company still makes me smile, and laugh, and have those strange, complicated feelings that come from being a human. Go through the routine questions: am I still attracted to him? I'm still attracted to most of my exes. Do I still think we could be together? No.

I'm not the same person I was in the first three months of the year.

You can blame April.

And May.

And definitely parts of June.

There are semblances of hope for the future, scattered around like hay. I want a better life for myself. Recently, my doctor had me trialling a blood pressure medication, candesartan, because there have been studies that revealed this specific medication also helped with patients' headaches. I am willing to try new things. After quite a time being overlooked for an MRI, they finally scanned my brain and found out one new fact: there's sinusitis in them there hills! [*I'm so fucking stupid*] By hills, I do mean my head region, I don't actually know much about sinusitis, but I had to take steroids, and squirt Nasonex up my nostrils for two weeks to see if that did anything, which made for a change. Sinusitis, however, is

not the cause of my constant headaches, or at least not obviously so. I also have a confirmed moderate allergy to dust mites. Nevertheless, we persist. I'm going to keep trying my options. I don't want to give up on everything. [*We gave up on candesartan because it did nothing over the course of just over a month. Next!*]

Things keep me awake at night. Trying to find a new job and talking myself out of applying because I feel unqualified/incomplete/too anxious/too depressed. Is there a simulation where I can completely forget my true surroundings and instead believe myself to be doing a trial shift in all of these jobs I can only flee away from in fear? I lie awake in bed picturing all the ways I can push away someone I can feel myself making a genuine connection with. Does he think I'm just a friend and if I flirt even once will he stop responding to my messages? Will I flirt, will he get the wrong message, think I am asking for sex? It will shove him away when I mention I'm not like most of the population on this earth, when I say I want cuddles I really mean I just want to be cuddled. Don't strip me down with your eyes unless I say you can, and then only do so briefly, lest you get the idea to pursue me sexually. Bad idea.

I lie awake in bed picturing myself in this exact position in another five years and I'm terrified. Terrified I don't have the backbone to do something with myself. Terrified I will always find the opportunity to blame my pain, my trauma, my mental health, for whatever I seek to blame it for. Inherently I know there's a danger to being in tune with your *everything*. If you just ignored it all, Keeley, maybe you'd already be working some job you don't love, but it might be more tolerable for the men to hear on the dating apps. Maybe you'd already be able to say you live out of home, with a roommate who you assume doesn't like you very much at all. But how many more times would you think about killing yourself, Keeley?

I know that isn't healthy!!

Thinking about all the what-ifs like this. I just got done writing a piece, entitled *Magical Feelism*, about how tempting it is to imagine your life populated with a little more excitement, a little more company. All I do sometimes is imagine how much more potential I could have if I wasn't so drained of the excitement. When they decided back then, to award me with the QUT Student With Potential Award (or something of the sort), they couldn't possibly have seen the future. I was what, fifteen? Someone saw something in me. Potential.

Scary, to think about potential. People make snide remarks about how an aborted fertilised egg could have been the one to cure cancer. There's nothing to that, no element of fact, nothing but the essence of potential. Let people focus on their own potential. This didn't need to turn into a debate about the right to have an abortion, but I made references to my own suicidal thoughts further up the page, so...I don't know. I'm grateful to be alive. But I'm terrified of figuring out how I'm supposed to continue living.

It's Twenty-Twenty-Four. A whole lot of twos and fours. I turn 24 on the 24th of September in the year of 2024. 24 24 24.

This should be *my year*. I have to wonder if I'm putting too much pressure on it.

A TRIP TO PERTH.

day one:

- flew for six hours to get here
- dry-retched when I got off the train, thought I would definitely vomit on the platform, had a minor anxiety attack but we persevered (okay for clarity this was because I didn't eat for six hours)
- checked into the hotel, was greeted by the worst room imaginable (well, almost) ...trash everywhere, everything unmade, a hardhat on the table.
Thankfully, they moved me to another room.
- had a splitting headache for most of the afternoon

day two:

Perth Zoo! It's quite a lovely zoo. Here are some of the highlights:

- I saw an agouti! [Think: a small rodent-like creature that is somewhere between the size of a guinea pig and a capybara] My photographs of it were shoddy and unusable, but agoutis are adorable.
- I watched a capuchin eat right in front of me. While I was taking some pictures, I thought I startled it away, but the cute little monkey just moved closer to the glass [you have to wonder if someone trained it like that?]
- a bull elephant lined up tires in a row, with spaces in between, then proceeded to walk backwards, weaving between them. He had the proudest grin on his face, imagine that for an elephant.
- a small child tried to tell me I wasn't supposed to take any pictures of the lions because "there is a sign over there" ...the sign was actually talking about not approaching lions in the wild for a selfie. But go off, little girl.

day three:

- I spent the morning walking around Kings Park, taking in the gorgeous views. Kings Park is sort of up on a cliff-face overlooking the river, it's the perfect spot for a botanical garden and parklands like that.
- The Nostalgia Box Museum was all vibes—it's a retro gaming museum where I got to play Duck Hunt, Ms Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Pong, etc. Really cool, made me feel like a child that was born earlier. Playing Pong against yourself just reminds you how lonely those solo trips can sometimes get.
- okay so in Perth there's this strip of stores that basically look like they're ripped from Medieval Europe and I was so obsessed with them.

day four:

- Rottneest Island! First began a ferry ride, ninety or so minutes, with some added history about everything along the Swan River [incredibly grateful they shut up for the ferry home]
- the island itself is just gorgeous. I quickly jumped on the bus and rode it all the way to the furthest point of the island, where I saw a whale, some lazy seals (relatable), and some birds here and there.
- no trip to Rottneest would be complete without at least seeing a handful of quokkas. I think I counted at least thirty-four over the course of the day, predominately in the main area of the island where you dock with the ferry. The very first quokka I saw was completely by chance, the little cutie was sitting in the middle of the path in the middle of nowhere on the island, just minding his business. I got some beautiful shots of the quokka whose gender I'm assuming.
- it was day four that I realised I'd been seeing this one couple EVERYWHERE. Well, maybe not everywhere, but we were certainly both tourists with similar schedules. I was obviously the weird one because I was alone and they were being cute doing touristy things with each other.

day five:

- no one warned me the "gift shop" for the Perth Mint is basically just a glorified high-end jeweller. I couldn't willingly afford anything there. I spent like four minutes there.
- PICA, or the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, was much smaller than I expected. I...was confused by what I was looking at most of the time. The main exhibition was sparsely-decorated and included several performers moving around the space. One of them gave me a side-eye glance, which I'm choosing to believe was in-character, because I was the only person in the gallery and there was so much empty space for him to move through rather than be pissed I was standing where he wanted to go.
- I rode the train down to Fremantle and wandered around. Ate duck loaded fries from a small vendor in the Fremantle Markets. Very delicious by the way. Bought some cookies and cream white chocolate rocky road too.
- for some reason I thought Fremantle gave me like, *Australia's answer to New Orleans* vibes.
- everyone seems to wreck their ships off the coast of Western Australia!

so, what did I learn from Perth?

I realised I could spend a lifetime running away from everything.

7. The God-Why-Don't-You-Just-Love-Yourself Blues

In 1971, Stephen Sondheim's *Follies* opened on Broadway. With a book by James Goldman, and music and lyrics of course by Sondheim, *Follies* is about the reunion of former showgirls, in particular Sally Durant Plummer and Phyllis Rogers Stone and their respective husbands. The musical is a series of rehashes of the past—old numbers performed again, old loves uncovered, old insecurities realised to have been marked what was once the future but is now the past. Sometime recently I picked up a physical copy of the book, singing a handful of the songs along in my head as I read. There's a proshot of the 2017 revival starring Imelda Staunton, Janie Dee, Peter Forbes, etc. etc. I always found it fascinating, immediately drawn into the world a song like *Losing My Mind* inhabits. It's Sally Durant Plummer's *showstopping* number—transported to a world of desire, Sally laments of the love she possesses for a man who isn't her husband—Phyllis' husband Ben.

I dim the lights // and think about you // spend sleepless nights // to think about you.

I'm too adolescent to completely sit in the ideas of *Losing My Mind*, or *Could I Leave You?* —a song about the thought of leaving behind a marriage that feels like it has ended already—or *Follies* as a whole, but my age does not stop me from admiring the work Sondheim and Goldman did together a few years even from the birth of my parents.

Follies, to me, represents a fondness for being young and careless. It represents the insanity of love, the hopelessness to staying together. It represents looking down at yourself in the mirror and seeing a different person to the one you'd been sometime in the past—for these former showgirls, they're reflecting on the women they were decades earlier, but for me, I only need to look back five or so years. Change is expected. If we could all forever remain our beautiful, young selves, there would be no reason to sing *I'm Still Here*. Or, at least, a part of the wistfulness would be gone. Carlotta is a woman reflecting on all her life from the stage of a theatre that was once her home but will now be torn down to be replaced with a parking lot. She's an actress, she commands attention, but her life hasn't been without its trials and tribulations. I think perseverance will make me stronger, always. It's the never-truly-giving-up of things that makes us our resilient selves...unfortunately for our central players in *Follies*, our Sally, Phyllis, Buddy, and Ben, being resilient means being sharpened until they snap.

And then you're left with the follies. A string of drunk-on-desire vaudeville numbers where the central four characters unravel their deepest desires. Sally wants Ben to love her. Phyllis wants to trade places with her younger self. Buddy wants to figure out how to manage the push-and-pull of loving his wife and being loved by the woman he's having an affair with. Ben genuinely, I kid you not, wants to live by the philosophy of Live, Laugh, Love. His song is called *Live, Laugh, Love*.

The title of this section is taken as a nod to Buddy's number, *The God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me-Blues*. It's likely unhinged for me to demand of anyone to love me. Except myself, really. I spend hours on end wondering how to settle my own thoughts, settle my love for myself. *Sometimes I stand in the middle of the floor // not going left // not going right*. Those are lyrics from *Losing My Mind*. I'm frankly obsessed with them. The terror of abandoning your momentum.

What follows is a little like the end of *Follies*, when the characters go a little crazy out of the desire...
for something...

It's a log cabin in the woods and there I am on the porch in a rocking chair with all of my senses. There's the whiff of pine, or what I assume to be pine, I'm no wood expert, not even an expert of my own. As far as the eyes can see, there's nothing to disturb me. I have all the numbers I need on speed-dial. The typicals, if I hurt myself, feel threatened, accidentally set fire to whatever I'm cooking. The atypicals, too, someone to remind me how to function properly when I move an arm, move a leg, sense around with my fingers to find the grooves of adulthood. There's an oblong glass vial with a pacifier floating in formaldehyde. A reminder of my youth, a little plaque might read. I am quick on the upturn of realising this is all a time loop, keeping me alive with each repeating day—I find some way of killing myself accidentally in the evening, sick and cruel and twisted and purely idiotic. This is actually a snow globe. Perched on a god's shelf. Yet I'm too dumb to realise this isn't the blissful, sheltered life I dream of. I wake in the mornings only half-registering brutal murder. Oh, it was all a dream. I have those, that makes sense, they're always weird and confusing and confronting. Quite frequent, huh.

**

I don't drink coffee so instead I sit down at the desk in the small-but-comfortable back office with a freshly-squeezed travel cup of orange juice. Sometime in the morning, the cliché of a bright new dawn. It's just another Monday. About to type in new data, my fingers amble on the keyboard, the gymnastics of it all. I overstressed myself in the past, thinking I would not be capable of typing so quickly and so proficiently all at once. It helps when I can remember how to spell words on the fly, like proficiently. Flashing red light on the blocky console no one ever rings. I hesitate, I answer, oh, it's a call from the Vatican. I laugh—it isn't, although the woman on the other end does sound a little like Jane Krakowski. Perhaps I could adore office-living-core if there were a woman I cohabited an office environment with that was just some alternate universe's Jane Krakowski, one who never made a name for herself in show business. I would say 'Jenna Maroney?' and she'd just tilt her head comically. Sorry, I've started to bore myself even talking about all of this. I love Jane Krakowski but she is not enough for me to buy this vision and I haven't even gotten to the part where the office is basically a front for targeted, corporate serial killing. I did the books.

**

Eyes flutter open. In the recovery suite, they have me wrapped in bandages, warm and snug. Perfect for this wintery weather, with one of the windows opened at the back of the room. One of those windows that is just a gaping hole in the wall, subject to predators if I were to discover the recovery suite was in the middle of nowhere, halfway up a mountain, surrounded by mountain lions. The pain is gone. Unreliably so, that is how it feels—sometimes I will wake up, very rarely, and go about the beginning of my day without thinking about the invisible vampire fused with the flesh of my neck. Somehow my consciousness has been successfully transferred into another body, a replica of the genetically-made one I grew up in. Instead of questioning the science, I signed the papers. Here's a little story that won't make you cry about two messy boys: let us call them Leon X and Jamie Y, which are not their real names. Leon is abundantly excited for life, but terribly annoying. Jamie is *working on himself*, but terribly exhausted. The body rejects its host. There are mountain lions and they're hungry.

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I couldn't sleep last night.

Or, I struggled to fall asleep with everything inside my head.

I picked up my phone at two separate points, to write two separate things, yet I kept them in the same note, intertwined, interconnected.

1) *Yes, hello, hi. Room service? I'd like to kill myself now. Yeah. I think it's time.*

2) *been waving a white flag for a couple years now,*

half-hidden in the trees.

trying to keep some of the attention off my back,

in case you think I'm doing this all just for the attention.

Yesterday, I saw my ex again, the second time since our break-up. We reconnected like good friends do, talked of our lives, saw an art exhibit we both awed over. It was comfortable, and I let my guard down. Then, he told me he'd been seeing someone for a while now, and later I'd do the math and realise, what, he waited a month to move on from a relationship that only ended because he had been too busy. Or, I guess not, I suppose. Immediately you assume the problem was you: the relationship didn't end because he was too busy, it ended because I was too needy. I wanted more from him than a handful of messages over the course of a week. This was all an egregious problem for him, for anyone—we've known for some time now that you're the problem with everything, Keeley Benjamin Young. *Just do what you do best and give up.*

I wasn't angry at him for moving on: I was happy his life was smoothening out, and surely some other more stable person could give him a relationship less complicated. Began to assume his new partner didn't have the self-esteem issues I have, or the headaches, the stomach pain, the inability to drive a car, the depression. Unhealthy thoughts. The common denominator of every problem is the person sitting at their computer writing out the anguish.

I kept myself awake pissed at myself. How do you cause a problem like Keeley? Even someone moving on was somehow a skirmish against me. I assumed the speed of things, him finding someone else even after telling me he wasn't going to be looking, was because he'd realised how *easy* a different relationship could be. Oh how romantic someone else could be. There's no ill will for him wanting to be happy, for him to have a life he deserves. And I'd thought after the initial pang, I was okay. Hell, I think an unhealthy thing for me right now would be to be back with him, or in any relationship, but it's impossible for my brain to not assume the **issue** actually was me. That some other partner would have been successful in convincing him to give the relationship more of a chance, but it was the last straw for me to say "hey, I actually can't deal with how chaotic your life is." I'd known there were drawbacks to honesty.

The centre of my anger, my sleeplessness, was always built to be internal. I wasn't tossing and turning because of *people*—it was because, internally, I was furious I couldn't be heartless. Let's get rid of the feelings we have for boys who won't even openly flirt with me, shall we? You're not a fucking high-schooler anymore and yet you feel like one because your life is chaos in the things you control. Okay, you want to kiss someone but you can't? Heartless, I could forget about it. Heartless, I could delete all of this *creative prose* and write about...being dead instead.

+

There's a sort of irony in writing this and assuming no one will ever read it. Like penning journal entries, like sitting down in the corner of a room with a diary in my lap being seclusive and guarded. I make jokes that if anyone was to read this, it would shutter them from me, completely repulse them from talking to me. If you crack open a skull and you find more than brain, blood, and whatever else goes into biology, aren't you likely to be disgusted? Unhealthy thoughts. Unhealthy feelings. I was spurred on to reread parts of *When You Lie in Bed, You Think of Him* in bed. A piece I wrote sometime last year about my asexuality, or trying to understand it, and the sexual fantasies that come with not feeling comfortable to enact them. It's something I'm quite proud of, but the worry was there too, that people would enter through one chamber into my brain and self-destruct their connection to me in the process. In fiction, it's easier to hide when you make personal-reflection decisions. You can blame your characters for what they say, do, think. You can't do that when you present a work as an extension of your head. The one that is throbbing as I type, because I didn't get enough sleep last night, and because I'm highly-anxious thinking all I do is shoot myself in the foot with my connections. I get a kick out of talking to people. But maybe too much so. Inside my head, the factory is overheating. Metal burning red, something out of an animated movie about a steampunk world, or else those scenes from Jennifer Lopez's panned music video film *This Is Me...Now*. For something I thought was overdramatically in-your-face, I sure do think about those your-heart-is-a-machine-needing-repairing scenes. But I apply it more to my brain, because my heart doesn't have the operating function to *think*.

It's always *fuck I need to apologise for being too eager*.

As a self-described loner, I sure am talkative.

Because I'm a crazy motherfucker with a slipping filter, I say the wrong thing and weird the situation out. I make bad jokes they don't find funny or come on too strong. Over time, I've slowly lost some people I've really cared for. Life, and this is cheesy, but life is going to be made of people you will lose. We all die someday, sure, but it's impossible to imagine the same people for every stage of your life. I just assume I'll eventually run out of people I care for to push away. Maybe I think about Jennifer Lopez's *This Is Me...Now* because we're both so desperate to stop alienating ourselves. Although I in no way want to tie myself to Jennifer Lopez, I think there's a semblance of truth to my connection to two of the songs from the album. Maybe we're both destined to piss people off just because we want to be happy. She wanted to fund a tour and then no one was buying tickets so she cancelled it. I want to find more people that accept my freak but I get in my own way so maybe I should cancel it.

So many suicide jokes in this piece. It's insensitive, but considering I thought about killing myself last night, it's not irrelevant. Maybe we'll take a brief intermission (again) to list out some reasons why I shouldn't kill myself:

- art. I'm obsessed with media. Surviving at this point for the *Wicked* films.
- I don't have unrequited feelings for everyone on earth so you could definitely say I'm persisting for the friends and family I do very much love.
- we'll get to it eventually but I think I was put on this earth to write creatively (*see: proof on page 36*)
- someone has to do something with this body (take cute selfies) before it goes back to the earth for the little worms to devour
- I am genuinely so terrified of dying, what do you mean I stop existing?
In a cruel twist of fate, I actually love being alive. I just need to renovate.

closing statements

I could treat this like a courtroom scene. All the evidence laid out in exhibits, a performative show of not just narcissism, twisted and uncomfortably-tearing-at-seams, but plain old depression. When I was in high school, I sometimes entertained the idea of being an actor. Blinded by my own wishes to find a dream, to cling on to it, despite all of the flaws with it. Actor: I don't have the confidence, I have diagnosed anxiety (undiagnosed at the time), auditions are scary, I hate how I sound when recorded. Although I suppose sound editing exists. Writer: I don't have the confidence, there's only money in writing if you can pull off the being-successful thing. Disappointment: practically all I need to do is wake up in the morning.

No, the actual point of why I decided to write this extra page on an already annoying piece of self-indulgent writing (upside-down smiley face) was because I wanted to make it **EXTRA** clear I didn't just write an overly-long suicide note. I'm not fearful of mentioning suicide—the idea of ending it all comes with the territory of being depressed. In short, I've wanted to kill myself before. A lot. This is not a siren call for attention: I have never expected to say something like that and get flooded with messages of support like *you're too adorable to kill yourself*, or *but think of everything you could still accomplish*. When I talk about my suicidal thoughts—because they never graduate to attempts, thank you fear-of-missing-art—I just want to be heard. You might say, *same, me too*, but what I want is you to know I'm still technically alive. The heart still works, as much as the other various ticking parts of my body are threatening to start a union without me. The heart still beats, which is cringe, but accurate.

I look back over this work like it is some type of autobiography for the last five years. It is terrifying to me to think of the time I've lost, or I consider lost, because I have been adjusting to myself all over ever since 2020. I am a slow-moving tortoise now, although I cannot say for certain eighteen-year-old me was the hare. This job I currently have is the same one I have worked for many, many years, because I have lost the energy to carefully consider what my future holds. The notion of working until I croak seems to shorten my life year by year the more I think about it. Maybe I'm a disillusioned youngster with too many hobbies and too much of a vigour for self-care. I lost a partner I cared deeply for because he had become too busy for me. That makes it sound like he perished—yikes. He simply moved on. Good for him.

I'm terrified of becoming too exhausted from life to actually enjoy it.

And I wake up with a headache, throat pain, and it's a roulette whether I end up with stomach pain during the day. Still with no idea how to properly soothe any of them.

But I don't want to just complain, complain, complain.

I'm advantageous and lucky to be afforded the things I have.

When I was in Perth, and I wandered around Rottnest Island alone, I let myself get a little lost. I was following the path until I wasn't, confused about how I could misread a sign with one arrow. I could be real fucking annoying right now and make this an introspective about how everything rights in the end, but my actual point is that I went to a small, beautiful island off the coast of Western Australia and somehow still managed to make that about a boy I have feelings for. I'm a trainwreck dressed in a black turtleneck and the Glee Cast is always my Top Artist on Spotify every year. My biggest ambition in life is to someday go to Iceland, but if I went alone I might have an anxiety attack at the airport (and everywhere else). I'm helplessly worried every single person in my life will eventually fucking HATE MY GUTS, but I still bug them like I have incredibly important things to say on the regular.

Maybe it's soothing to the depression to say the potential has been sapped out of me.

If you've read this far, thank you. Like the end of a report in high school, thanks for listening.

I hope I haven't taken up too much of your time—that's what Amos says in *Chicago* after he sings *Mister Cellophane*.

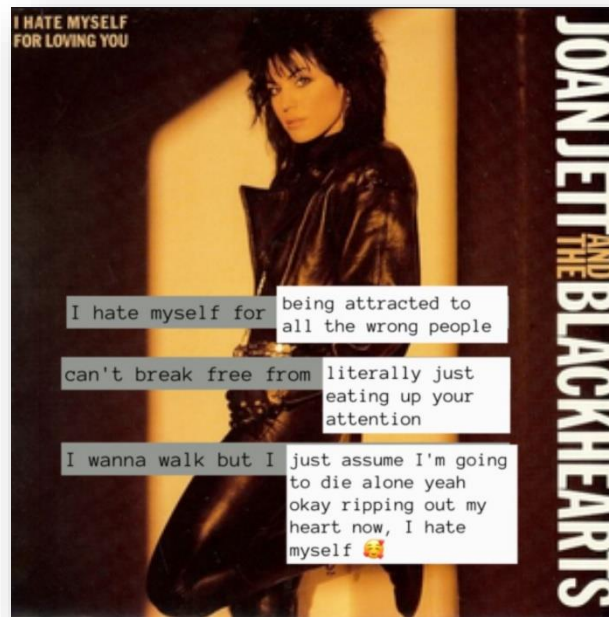
Love, Keeley.

*what is adulthood if
not feeling
inadequately like a
child*

a list of things I've written since 2020 [incomplete]:

- a fictional tale about a drunken old man and a broomsweeper who discover the corpse of a sea monster
 - one (1) chapter of an incomplete novel about escaping into your dreams
- a lockdown-inspired piece wherein an isolated gay man attempts to escape via the people who come to visit him
- a tale of two sisters with weather-related supernatural powers, and the man who seeks out gods
 - a series of short stories about the Garvey *orphans*—three grown adults coping with their trauma, and the anxiety of being adults
 - the origin story of a vampiric queen (she's been rattling around my brain for years)
 - a demonic war-god being summoned by a handmaid
 - a robot companion named OVELL-7
 - a horror story about an ice-cream truck driver chased by zombies
 - a modern-day revision of Zeus having an affair on Hera
 - several (more than seven) pieces of poetry about my love life
 - a review of the *Dinosaurs of Patagonia* exhibition at the museum, told through the lens of someone terrified of becoming extinct
 - a piece on how important it is to protect and defend transgender people and drag queens
 - a bizarro-tale about aliens studying the internalised fears of human beings in order to better navigate assimilating with them when they abandon their dying planet
 - twenty mini character profiles posted online
 - a second-person published-in-a-zine-piece called Killer about a murderous end (a breakup)
 - a very personal reflection on how I have come to understand my sexuality over the years, which is also incredibly horny. Just a horny asexual thing.
 - a piece in which the main character is so incredibly curious about finding out the story behind the pottery studio in the yard of his partner's parents' home, it just might kill him
 - the story of Kirin and James, an asexual and a bisexual man who had sex when they were teenagers because they were trying to understand themselves, reimagined for prose (they're characters I have for a tv series idea that won't ever be made)
 - a group of friends go on vacation three hours north of here and the two men realise life is better if they can makeout and shower together.
 - The Gentoo Project, my baby. Ten novel openings for a document that is over 50,000 words long. I wrote about competitive reality television shows, teenage devils, the afterlife, hellish university groupwork, a shapeshifting ex-camboy, a community theatre production of *Into the Woods* and more.
 - a behind-the-courtroom back-and-forth between Zeus and Demeter while they fight for custody of their daughter, Persephone (and a handful of other Persephone-related pieces, I'm in the middle of putting together a project set around her)
 - *wish you were here*, a play in which the memories of a love life torment a gay man trying to move on and find love again. experimental technology included.
 - *Open House*, a series of monologues inspired by the rooms in my head.
 - and many, many unfinished projects...
 - and this!

wanna see a terribly self-destructive meme I made on the train ride home one night?



I Hate Myself For Loving You by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts is an incredible song but I decided to deface it because I don't actually have anyone to hate-love, I just have frustrating unrequited feelings a lot of the time—like right now. It was going to just sit untouched until I could successfully laugh about it in a few months, but I figured if it was going to go anywhere, it should go at the end of *People Once Thought I Had Potential* to show I'm now wasting my potential making dumb memes.

please enjoy something else on the next page:

favourite colour: blue
favourite films, as listed in a neat little row of four on Letterboxd at the moment: *Moulin Rouge*, *Chicago*, *Past Lives*, *Anatomy of a Fall*
favourite memory of 2023: almost walking the entirety of Monarto Safari Park. It's a beautiful place. But very gigantic.
favourite form of torture: self-afflicted.

least favourite month: February. Too short.
least favourite trope to come across in any form of fiction: when characters refuse to talk to one another about something, and let it fester for far too much time. Don't bully me like that.
least favourite memory from childhood: not blurting out the surprise I was keeping secret for like ten minutes. Be the chaos you wish to see.
least favourite reminder: I will die one day :(

June 2024 – films watched

1st: *A Star is Born* (2018; rewatch with my ex); *Happy Death Day* (ohhh the meme is in the second one)
2nd: *Happy Death Day 2 U* (you are gayyyyy); *Godzilla Minus One*
3rd: *Waitress the Musical* (rewatch)
4th: *BlackBerry*
6th: *The Color Purple* (2023; rewatch, I was needing cheering up, no idea why this was the choice for that)
7th: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*
9th: *Steel Magnolias*; *Hit Man*
10th: (six-hour flight to Perth) – *School of Rock* (rewatch); *WALL-E* (rewatch)
11th: *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*
...

14/11/2021

What Was Today's Dream? It was something involving an animal, but it was probably only vivid for a few minutes before I virtually forgot everything except for this animal. I think it was large, the animal, like exceedingly large for whatever it was, but not in a fat sense. It was just...giant. Something incorporated this large creature into the dream, but we'll never know...and sometimes it is best to just leave dreams alone like that, let them fade off into obscurity.

how we talked when we were thirteen:

Keeley – 3/10

you're rilly sweet sometimes but also a massive bitch. I like the clothes you wear but u treat me like shit and b4 I can consider giving you like a 5 or 6 you need to figure out how to not take your anger out on me.

your so cute but I can't stand to be around u sometimes. gross person.

13/02/23

Repeat after me: you do not need attention to feel worthy.

I come back to that frequently enough because it is important to remind myself, but also because it isn't difficult to slip back into the mentality that I am lonely and alone if people are not responding to me or I'm not starting conversations to keep people interested in me. If someone stops being interested, that is their problem and not solely on my shoulders – and to avoid sounding stuck-up, it is not a defect of theirs to stop wanting to talk to me....