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The Jugular



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

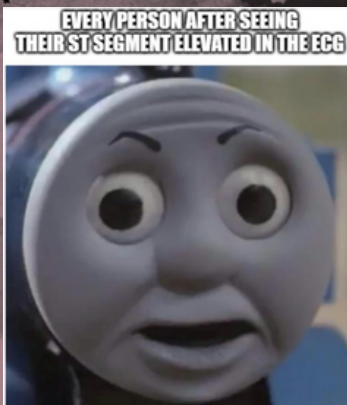
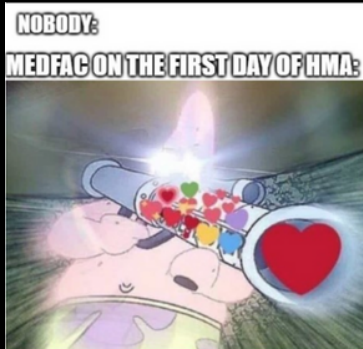
01	JOURNEY THROUGH THE MEMES
06	CURRENTLY IN HOSPITAL FOR TOADYCARDIA! BY SOPHIA
07	RISE OF MEDTERTAINMENT BY GERALDINE
09	ZEN WALLPAPERS BY ANUPAMA
10	PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSPIRACY BY GRACE
11	SLANG FOR INTERNATIONALS BY AURELIA
14	SWIPING RIGHT BY EMILY
16	TAKING THE LIGHTRAIL AGAINST THE SUNSET BY SAM
17	LES VOYAGEURS BY SHILPA
18	THE TANLEY PARABLE: ALL FEARED MOODLE ACTIVITIES BY CINDY
20	IF DISNEY PRINCESSES WERE DOCTORS BY SOYEON
21	CLAIRE'S MAGIC SCHOOL BUS TRIP!
22	WHAT WAS ONCE A SIMPLE FACT BY ALLYSON TAI

JOURNEY THROUGH THE MEMES

BY JACK VORGIAS, GERALDINE YANG,
TERRY ZHAI, CEDRIC SIU, AND KEVIN ZOU

MED STUDENT'S HEAD IS DULL TO
PERCUSSION

BOUND TO DELIVER ANGINA ON
VIEWING



HMA IA due at 9:00am	Panik
hands it in at 9:00am	Kalm
teamwork peer teaching the next day	Panik







Currently in hospital for TOADYcardia 🏥



Sophia Dang tugs on your heart strings with this reference to the Phase 1 HMA toad practical 🐸💔🥺🌀

Rise OF Medtertainment

written by

Geraldine Yang

& edited by Caleb Tan

Lately, it seems like medicine has been seeping into every part of my life. From the incessant intercom announcements to don my mask on public transport, to the influx of Moodle emails in my inbox, the threat of illness has taken on a remarkable urgency historically uncommon in my age bracket. It goes beyond a simple fear of respiratory disease and has transformed into something more omniscient, as evident by spending a few minutes on your social media platform of choice. Within seconds of unlocking my phone, I am greeted by memes about mask-wearing, \$20 superfood smoothies, and dermatologist reviews of different sunscreen application methods. After a few cursory swipes, I close the app and begin to feverishly type into my search bar, filling up my history with such intellectually-enlightening queries of the likes of “what is spirulina” “how often apply sunscreen” and “30 vs 50 spf”. All of these occur under a minute, with a smattering of other unrelated interests and advertisements interspersed throughout my expeditious scrolling.

This rapid exposure to a spectrum of niche, health-related content is not one unique to my own social media experience. Rather, the user-generated nature of such platforms allow it to serve as a lucid reflection of cultural trends, fads and fears. In contrast to the mass media of the past, primarily manufactured by larger media conglomerates, social media is a more direct representation of modern desires and anxieties. The low barrier to entry enables nearly anyone to produce content – for better or worse, with the power of complex algorithms being harnessed to boost content that feeds upon our subconscious wants and anxieties. And while this allows for access to a seemingly unending source of personalised, deeply relatable entertainment, it goes without saying that this unregulated flow of information poses as a breeding ground for medical misinformation.

In particular, the 21st century has nurtured a new genre of entertainment – “medtertainment”. Perhaps exemplified in the disturbing allure of pimple popping videos, the race for digital engagement has resulted in the blurring of medicine and entertainment. The genre is wide in its variety – from reality shows like Dr Oz, to ChubbyEmu’s case-study summaries – there exists a spectrum of medical content both in its subject matter and scientific validity. To succeed on social media, health information can no longer merely be informative – it must also capture and maintain the attention span of millions. An attention span that is markedly evolving in nature.

Recent data from Google reveals that Gen Z is increasingly using TikTok and Instagram instead of traditional search engines. Our digital language has evolved to become more visual and simplistic. Infographics and slide-by-slide carousels are easier to digest than the extensive pages of text often uncovered by Google searches for health conditions. Meanwhile, the more intimate presentation of personal anecdotes on TikTok provide us with a sense of trust that is absent in the web pages of government health departments. As a result, our health literacy is becoming largely derived from 15 second chunks of info.

In a digital environment where new content is simply a swipe away, creators must fight to capture a rapidly decreasing attention span. This capitalistic motivation has led to the increasing employment of clickbait, traditionally reserved for advertising, to health-related information. Claims are exaggerated, facts duplicitously reinterpreted and simplified to create provoking headlines. In such environments, the advent of alternative medicine movements, such as anti-vaxxers, becomes more intelligible. At its core, such movements appeal to the inner fears and desires of those individuals in a way that mainstream medicine does not. Often, such individuals may have a reduced trust in the mainstream medical system due to mistreatment, or simply not feeling understood. Health professionals may not have had the time, resources, or training to properly engage with their concerns in a meaningful manner.

Alternative and holistic forms of medicine are not a new phenomenon, however, the accessibility and pervasiveness of medical disinformation on the internet has certainly made it easier for individuals to join these movements. The tailor-made nature of algorithms can potentially encourage and radicalise individuals with a dormant distrust in the medical system in a manner completely novel to the 21st century. And despite attempts at regulation (which often amount to no more than simple disclaimers or links to verified sources of information), it seems as if little can be done to combat this growing tide of medical disinformation without having to fundamentally change the mechanisms by which social media operates. At least, within the online sphere.

Perhaps, the key to opposing medical disinformation does not lie in attempting to beat the content creators at their own game, but rather targeting the structural factors that create distrust in the medical system. Instead of spreading public health messaging in the form of TikTok Dance Challenges, the true pathway to combatting disinformation is more tedious and time-intensive in nature. This can range from changing the way we communicate with disenfranchised populations to properly address their concerns, to incorporating more critical thinking skills in the curriculum. As technology continually exploits the psychological loopholes that capture our attention, we too, must evolve in the delivery of health education.

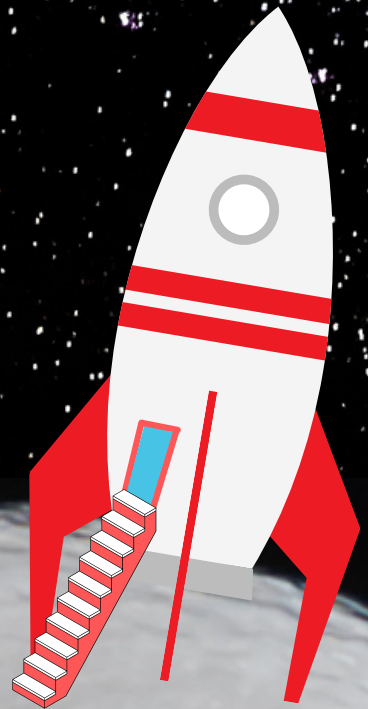
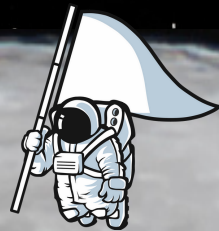


Transform your room with zen

Feeling like a calming aesthetic? 🧘🏻🌈 Anupama Pangeni's got you covered with some zen wallpapers to spruce up your life and bring a smile 😊



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSPIRACY



WRITTEN BY GRACE SMITH,
EDITED BY KATERINA
THEOCHAROUS

Conspiracy theories have been around for ages. Dating back to medieval witch trials, the moon landing, Paul McCartney's death... for some reason, we've always been fascinated by them. They can be exciting! They can also be dangerous. And both of these factors can be equally appealing. They've been around for ages, but they are particularly rife today, after a difficult 2 years of living in a global pandemic. And they can be about anything and everything, but they particularly plague the medical field - as I'm sure we now all know, after the past 2 years were made even more difficult by conspiracies about mask-wearing, vaccination, data-farming, and whether the pandemic was even real in the first place.

In our professional lives, we will inevitably have to confront these kinds of conspiracy theories, presented by patients, families, researchers, and policymakers alike. And this will inevitably present a great challenge as we deal with all those key stakeholders. If we can understand a little about the psychology of their making and appeal, then we can hopefully have more empathy and tact when faced with them in our careers.

I know that I, along with others, tend to assume that conspiracy theorists simply lack

information, and that education and facts would 'sort them out'. However, in reality theorists have plenty of facts - sure, they may consume some 'alternative news', but as a general rule they're also still being exposed to all the same mainstream media as everyone else. The issue is more down to their creative interpretation of the facts. It's about making the facts more exciting.

Conspiracy theorists want to feel privy to rare knowledge. In this context, it makes sense that obscure sources are deemed the most desirable and 'reliable'. The 'lone wolf' seems more credible, despite the fact that it is heavily disputed, because they are controversial and have to fight for what they believe in. The rationale is that minority thinkers are actually on to something, and have separated themselves from the wolf pack with their higher thinking.

The pleasure of solving a puzzle, having details fall into place, that 'lightbulb moment' or 'click', is familiar to us all. It's reflected in our strange fascination with crime shows and detective work - all of the clues are there on the screen waiting to be solved in the end. Theorists take the clues they have, and set about to construct a narrative with these scraps in order to solve a

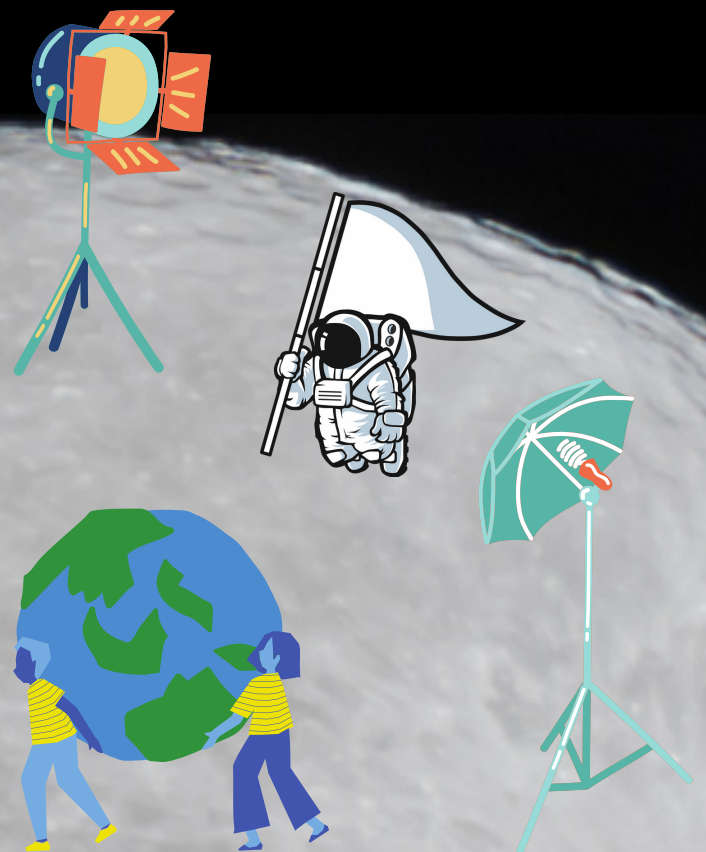
mystery and uncover a 'hidden truth'. It's a paradox: theorists see themselves as having their eyes wide open, when in reality their vision is clouded by their conviction that things can't be as simple as they look.

The other important point is that conspiracy theories can be a form of escapism. Most conspiracy theories blame events on seemingly 'preventable' issues like corruption, inequality, and injustice, and these really do exist in the world. But simultaneously, there really is suffering out there that is unforeseen, unavoidable, and horrific. Rather than facing these two sets of facts head-on, it could be easier to take shortcuts in thinking and conflate them, delegating blame for awful events onto certain people because that creates hope that stopping the person can stop the event. It also may allow people to 'make sense' of harsh realities that are otherwise impossibly terrifying and confronting, such as 9/11 or, of course, a global pandemic. Rather than acknowledging the horror of a new serious disease, shifting blame and using theories as an outlet for anger can provide an escape from the truth. But it also allowed confusion, frustration and fear to flourish during the pandemic, divided communities, and was a huge

challenge for healthcare workers and vulnerable people.

However, the fact remains that if we were to banish all conspiracies, then the world would be a much more boring place. The reality is much less interesting than theorists like to believe, and what captures us most about historical conspiracies is often the aspect of 'what if'.

So next time you hear a particularly lucrative version of the truth - a juicy conspiracy - think. Is this a plausible account of events? Possibly is it the easiest to believe in desperate times? Or is it simply the most fun?





RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION CHART

AL



USE THIS RPE CHART TO GAUGE YOUR MED SCHOOL
INTENSITY LEVEL

10	ALL-OUT SPRINT: 9 AM ANATOMY PRACTICALS
9	VERY HARD INTENSITY: 1A GRIND
8	HARD INTENSITY: WAKING UP TO WATCH LECTURES LIVE
7	VIGOROUS ACTIVITY: SPSS
6	HARD ACTIVITY: ANATOMY PRE-PRAC WORK
5	PROGRESSIVE PACE: WRITING FEEDBACK FOR GP MATES
4	COMFORTABLE BUT WITH SOME EFFORT: NOT EMBARRASSING YOURSELF IN HOSPO
3	COMFORTABLE PACE: GOING TO SG ON TIME
2	LIGHT AND EASY: ENJOYING A MARTIN WEBER LECTURE
1	MINIMUM EFFORT: DECIDING WHETHER JOE SHOULD DIVE

**MEDDIES!
CHECK YOUR
RPE LEVEL**

**BY
AURELIA LEUNG**



SWIPING RIGHT

*Written by Emily Seeto,
Edited by Jack Vorgias*

Six months in, and I find it hard to label myself as a “med student”. But it’s not exactly due to imposter syndrome sinking in its claws, but rather because of some bizarre desire for non-conformity. And in a world of labels and stigma and ever-present pressures to make a name for one’s self, I don’t think I’m alone.

I’ve read some great pieces by my fellow Pubs writers on the omnipresent Med Bubble, the rise of #Medtainment. I’ve scrolled through my Facebook feed only to find a Love Letter asking for a list of single Med students. No preference for personality or interests or experience- just that single demographic indicator, written as simply as ticking a box to say “yes, I’ll order that one please”.

And so the question begs; what is it that the rest of the uni sees?

If dating is simply the act of selling yourself (or whatever sense of self that remains once we pass the threshold between ‘in bed’ and the ‘great outside’), then being a Med Student- at UNSW, mind you- is our most marketable trait. And so as we trudge down the stairs from upper campus to the Quad our bio settles into place. *Med student*, it screams, but just beneath it says *smart, studies hard, competitive* and, in a whisper, *earning potential*.

Sometimes it feels like we’re grocery items on the conveyor belt being scanned and bagged one by one, or the instant swipe right by way of the degree we’re pursuing.

Sometimes it feels like we might as well be attending other UNSW events outside the “med bubble”, so to speak, wearing scrubs and steths as though parading round theatres in suits, hurling banana after banana at our peers.

It’s a bit of a double-edged sword. We’re proud to be here, to have put in the hours of memorising, countless embryology lectures and rubbish bins full of toads. But at the same time, what makes us proud isn’t necessarily what everyone sees, or what we want them to see.

Perhaps some of us are a little competitive, a little ambitious, a little too study-focused. But that’s not everyone, despite the fact that we all share the same label. We study medicine because we’re compassionate, empathetic, self-sacrificing and we love the long hours. Being med students isn’t our “brand”. We’re musicians, artists, athletes, writers, meme-makers, food-lovers.

There’s the notion of ‘reverse catfishing’ in which one objectively attractive human opts not to choose an objectively attractive photo as a profile pic on any given dating app. Think of it like posting the “before” shot when you’ve already reached the “after” phase, with the intention of weeding out prospective partners who “don’t see the real you on the inside”. Sometimes I find myself indulging in something similar as a uni student- saying you study “health” doesn’t share the same burden of expectation as studying “medicine”.

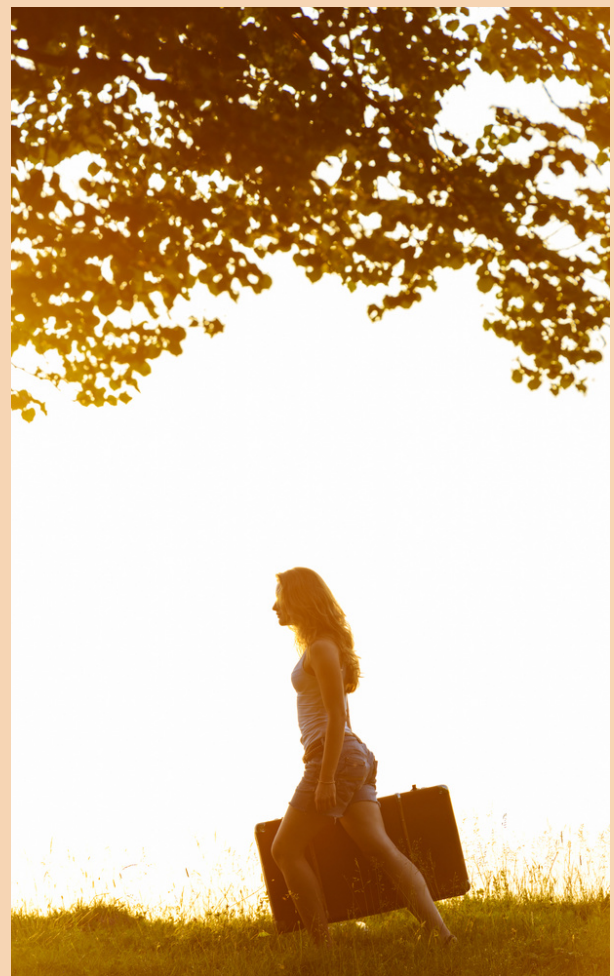
So I think it comes to this. We can’t change how the world sees medicine, or the large proportion of eager parents nudging their children in our direction.

=

What we can change is how we interact with the rest of the uni and the world at large and understand that our field of study is only part of our narrative.

One case in the medicine community is the infamous Ali Abdaal, known for topping his year at Cambridge, being so productive he’s got 25 hours in a day and reading every habit-building book known to man. And his story is a lesson learned; just because we study (or will have studied) medicine doesn’t always mean we’ll practise forever.

So while our bios will always have some element of “medicine” involved, there’s so much more that each of us offers. Or perhaps they’re blank and are waiting to be filled. But at the end of the day, we aren’t all carbon copies of each other, and medicine isn’t our manufacturer.



Taking the Lightrail against the *Sunset* after a long week



By: Sam SF

LES VOYAGEURS

BY SHILPA SANIL



NO MATTER WHERE WE TRAVEL TO,
WE WILL ALWAYS LEAVE A PIECE OF
OURSELVES AT HOME

THE TANLEY PARABLE : All-Feared Moodle Activities

By: Cindy Lac. 🖐
Edited By: Jason Lin

▼ All (except removed from view) ▼ ⚙ Course name ▼ 🗪 Card ▼

This is the story of a man named Tanley.

Tanley was a phase one UNSW med student. His life was simple – he would attend online lectures, attend SGs and go to in-person practicals.

But there was one thing Tanley really looked forward to at the end of every course, the thing that made his hard work worth it: seeing the 100% completion on his Moodle interface.

He had six fully completed courses under his belt, four from last year and two from the summer term. He even underwent the inconvenience of not using the “filtered courses” option so that every time he logged onto Moodle, he would have to scroll past and admire his trophies.

Every day he would scroll through the left sidebar, checking if a post-prac activity or self-directed lecture was unlocked. Throughout the hardships, he would persist – whether that be his internet crashing during an Annemiek embryology module, or when he would redo the physiology quizzes so that he would get a passing 90% grade so that it would register as completed, or when the anatomy stars weren't put in the right region by a pixel and he would have to restart.

If there was a reflection section for Moodle modules in his portfolio, he would have an easy 300 word paragraph explaining his formative journey.

And Tanley was happy.

And then one day, something bizarre happened. Something that would forever change Tanley and the life that he lived.

THE TANLEY PARABLE : All-Feared Moodle Activities

By: Cindy Lac. 🖐️
Edited By: Jason Lin

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ONCE UPON A TIME...

Disney Princesses WERE DOCTORS

BY: SOYEON KIM



Cinderella

ORTHOPEDICS

Ariel

PATHOLOGY



Rapunzel

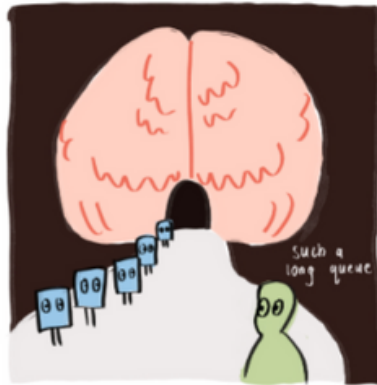
PAEDIATRICS

CLAIRE'S MAGIC SCHOOL BUS TRIP

Little green person explores a new land



what's this?



Such a long queue

... but it's so empty in here



it's a look out!



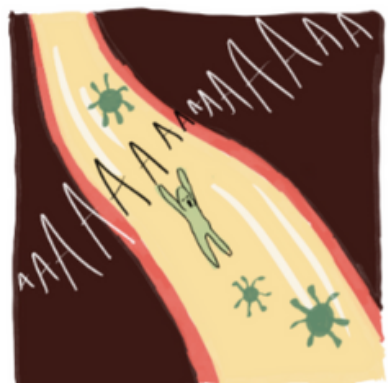
that doesn't look like a textbook



get me out of here!



what a strange sky



the end.

BY CLAIRE
SHI

What was once a simple fact

Written by Allyson Tai
Edited by Saleha Sehgol



I.

'Rhys?'

She looks up, startled.

'It's been a while, hasn't it?' he laughs, picking up her books when she knocks them over.

A while is an understatement, she decides. For years, she had him held in her mind in the same way one might hold onto a simple fact, a fact that one had no particular use for, but, when it resurfaced every now and then, gave inexplicable colour to everything around her.

'I didn't know you go here,' he says, and sits down next to her, a bit too close. 'What do you study?'

'Classics.'

'Oh wow.'

'How's Marie?'

'She's good. Moved to NYC last fall. You should call her sometime. She talked about you a lot in middle school,' he says, distracted. He ends up rifling through her books and reads her translations. She watches on, flustered (for what is more naked than a re-imagining of someone else's words?).

When he is done, he turns his attention to her. He quizzes her on herself and she tries her best to return the favor. He hangs on to every inflection and syllable and comma and silence and she is seen.

II.

She lies on the floor of Tracey's bedroom eyes open but not seeing.

'How do you know him again?'

'You know Marie? It's her brother.'

'What a small world. Why don't you message him?'

The thought hasn't even crossed her mind. She doesn't expect him to respond but he does and comes over.

It is late, by the time he gets up from her side to leave. And it is at that moment that she realises that she wants him to stay.

For when he looks at her, she is thirteen again, in Marie's bedroom, watching him from the window as he runs out into the night, against the bass line of some song from some party somewhere neither near nor far — she is home.

III.

He invites her to a party a fortnight later. He parks his car in a back alley and they walk up to the house together. She trails behind and commits every washed-out sign, every lone white car in an empty lot, and every banana leaf that spilled over its fence to memory.

'Come along now,' he says, and guides her through the back door. He finds his friends in the kitchen and she stands next to him patiently as he talks to them.

He regards her for the first time mid-conversation.

'—not that you would understand,' he teases her. 'It's much harder than Classics, I'd imagine.'

She doesn't know what to say and looks at him with uncertainty as his friends bring down the sky with their laughs.

He laughs at her too. 'Relax, it was just a joke.'

'Good one,' one says.

Some slap him on the back.

She excuses herself.

'Tell us, is she easy?'

'—she's totally asking for it.'

When she goes to hide in the restroom, she is cornered by a girl in blue, whose name she cannot remember ('Oh my god, *that's* who you've been talking to? Get out! I don't know him well but he seems like such a friendly guy!').

'What was all that about?' she asks, when he comes to find her later, once his friends have left.

'What? I want a drink — let's go.'

'They shouldn't say those things about me,' she says, her eyes defiant.

'Oh, nah, they're just...you know...guys being guys.' He grabs her wrist. 'Come on. I want a drink.'

IV.

She notices one day that even when he laughs or smiles, his eyes remain sad and preoccupied. As though haunted by something he'd lost long ago.

She thinks he knows but hides it — he is an actor and his life is his stage.

As the days roll on and grow shorter, he forgets to pretend when they are alone. When the facade cracks, and the show is over, it feels like no one is home.

She catches it once, when he's waiting for her to get ready. She puts down the brush and goes over to him and gives his shoulder a squeeze. He looks at her blankly, as though he had forgotten his lines.

'Where have you gone?' she thinks.

V.

She tugs at the sleeve of his shirt and he looks up.

'Look! I got the Chancellor's award this term.' she says, happily, showing him the email on her phone. He takes a quick look and then hands it back.

'Were they that desperate?' he says and something within her cracks gently into two.

'That's pretty something I suppose.' he says, averting his gaze. 'I only got it in my second year. You must have gotten a pretty lax professor.'

VI.

'Sorry that I got angry.'

He had yelled at her earlier that evening (she had asked him 'how was your day?').

'No, that's okay.'

He tells her about his dreams and hopes. His worries and nightmares. And in exchange, she tells him about hers.

He tells her about cold dinners, a mother whom he never seemed good enough for and the inevitable shattering of a dinner plate. And in exchange, she tells him about spilt wine, a marriage gone wrong and the sound of sirens as they neared.

And with each tentative baring of the soul, with each minute spent and given, with each rise and fall of their hearts, with each tear and laugh, with each moment of the mundane and the extraordinary, there lay hope that they might become whole again.

They talk into the early hours of the morning.

When it's time to go, she curls into him. Neither speaks and they stay like that for a while.

VII.

'That plate doesn't go there.' he says gently, and lifts the dish out of her hands. 'Don't worry. I can take care of it.'

VIII.

'You always let him off so easy.' Carrie sighs. 'He doesn't deserve you.'

'Hurt people hurt others.' She defends him.

'I guess...but you got bashed as a kid and you don't go around dragging people down.'

'I've had therapy, that's why. It's fine, Carrie, really. Don't worry. Let's talk about something else.'

IX.

'Can we talk?'

There is a broken dinner plate in the sink.

'What do you want to talk about?'

'I don't know.' she says. Silence. 'Why is the plate broken?'

'It's not.' He refuses to look at her.

'I'm not judging you. I only want to help—'

'I don't know what you're talking about. It was just an accident.'

X.

They soon fall into motion like actors in a play.

She sweeps the shards of plate and dinner up from the floor without a word.

He avoids her eyes and goes outside to cool off, in place of an apology.

XI.

He looks her up and down one morning.

'Why don't we do some exercise?'

Soon he says it everyday until her runners are worn, her debit card registers 'insufficient funds' for all the makeup she had started to buy, and she can no longer stand to look at herself in the mirror.

'You've gotten a lot prettier, recently.' he says and kisses her for a long time.

XII.

12:27 [sender]: where ru

3 missed calls from [sender] at 12:28.

12:31 [receiver]: I'm just with some friends :)

12:32 [sender]: who?

12:34 [receiver]: Just Tracey and Harry. Why?
Message read 12:35 by [sender].

XIII.

He doesn't show up to date night for the third time.

She's fed up and refuses to be the one to message first again. She's had enough. She drains her account and checks into some motel in a part of town he doesn't go to. She doesn't want to see him.

So when he turns up in the motel lobby, she is suddenly afraid.

She swallows and goes up to him.

'I didn't know you were here. Just can't get enough of me, can you?' he teases. She says nothing. 'Well, I've got nothing better to do right now. Let's go get dinner.'

'That's so sweet. What a coincidence!' Tracey gushes later. She turns away, looking for some misplaced trinket that doesn't exist.

'Yeah.'

'It's normal for people to go to places where they'll see someone they like.' her therapist later suggests.

She agrees for the sake of agreeing but deep down she asks is it? In her case anyways. She then reasons that she's just being silly and lets it go.

XIV.

'Surely he's not that bad. He doesn't hit you though? I mean you've always been a bit sensitive. Maybe you're just overreacting?'

She thinks about it and suddenly feels bad. He's just insecure. She of all people should understand. She messages her other friends later and apologises for making such a fuss— she just has a propensity for drama. There's nothing wrong with the two of them. Everything is fine. She's just...crazy.

'Are you sure?' Carrie is doubtful. 'His behavior would be hurtful to anyone, not just you.'

'We knew you were being dramatic all along! So silly.' Tracey laughs at her silliness to which she half-heartedly laughs at too.

XV.

'We've been going out for so long, they just want to meet you—,'
'Why are you being so difficult?'

His voice is icy and it stings. She looks at the ground.
'Sorry. I... won't bring it up again.'

Her voice is tiny and not her own.

His gaze softens. She feels it and finally meets it again.
'You know that I just want what's best for us. What's best for you.'

He raises his arms slightly and she is embarrassed by how quickly she falls into them, but she holds on — tight.

She doesn't think I love you but rather, please love me.

XVI.

'Haha, were you jealous?' she teases him slightly when she's had too much to drink. 'Don't be.' She kisses him.

He pushes her away.

'Who said I'm jealous?'

'You were glaring at Harry the whole time, silly.'

'No I wasn't. I don't even remember doing that. What the hell are you talking about?'

Silence.

'Why are you so crazy?'

Silence. Which makes him feel like he's the bad guy. So he snaps.

'Why can't you be more like Tracey.' He sees the hurt on her face, and feels better. 'Yeah. I didn't even say that much to her and I already know she's so much better than you. Prettier, funnier, smarter. I'd much rather be with her.' He turns away. 'I don't want to see you right now. I think you should go.'

XVII.

'He doesn't mean it, trust me.' his best friend dismisses, when she brings it up. 'He's just not emotionally ready.'

She doesn't know what to say. She feels foolish and lets the matter drop.

'But if you ask me... I think you should find someone else.'

XVIII.

'Jesus. He said that? He seemed like such a nice person though. Maybe you should cut him off.' Tracey says.

XIX.

'I'm sorry.'

'No, it's okay.'

'I'm so horrible.' he says, mournfully. And her heart breaks twice — once for herself and once for him.

'I know you didn't mean it.'

He doesn't say anything and hugs her tight.

XX.

She opens the door for him when he comes back that night.

'You're bleeding.' he says, and grabs her wrist to stop her from walking.

She looks down and sees the blood trickling from her Achilles and how she's tracked blood all over the floor.

'How did you hurt yourself?' he asks, concerned.

'I... I don't know.'

He sits her at the kitchen table and kneels at her feet, about to bandage her up when he freezes.

His gaze hardens.

'What's wrong?' she asks.

She follows his gaze and looks and sees it too — a shard of plate, in a puddle of her own blood.

XXI.

She finds a friend in the new exchange student, Jacob. She doesn't see Tracey or Harry much anymore because of how riled up he gets about them (though she messages them on occasion when he isn't around).

'That's not how a friend, let alone partner, should behave.' Jacob says, when she tells him everything. 'Fuck, I wouldn't even do that to someone I hated.'

He thinks for a while.

know you want to help him but sometimes, Rhys, you just have to leave people in the dust. You can't help a person who doesn't want to be helped. You can't love a person who doesn't love themselves.'

XXII.

She's about to say hi to Jacob when she feels something on her and looks up and sees his eyes fixed on her. His face is blank but she knows, from the way that he's holding his shoulders, that he is getting angry.

She excuses herself and walks away from Jacob (much to Jacob's confusion) and towards him. He, pleased, doesn't see the defeat in her step. He wraps an arm around her waist a bit too tightly and pulls her close as he brags about himself and laughs loudly at his own bad jokes.

She wishes she could both stay and leave.

'If he's as bad as you make him out to be, why stay?'

XXIII.

'Who was that?' he says when they get back.

'Who?' she tenses.

'The guy from the party.'

'Jacob? He's just a friend.'

'He's obviously in love with you. Why are you so dense? Stay away from him. I don't trust you to do the right thing.'

He throws his coat on the sofa and closes the bedroom door behind him.

XXIV.

'This quality of work just isn't acceptable, Rhys.'

She hangs her head in shame.

Her professor is taken aback and quickly tries to reassure her that as long as she takes a few remedial classes she will be fine.

XXV.

'I know this is the tenth time, but I honestly think it's just a me problem—,'

'God, I can't listen to this anymore.' Carrie says.

XXVI.

Jacob sets down a cup of coffee in front of her after class one day before she can pretend that she didn't see him. He looks at her sadly.

'I'm worried about you, Rhys. You don't seem like yourself anymore.'

When she has to go, he searches for the right words but there are none. Not really.

'Take care, okay?'

'XXVII.

He follows her around his place as she grabs her things. 'I'm sorry,' he says. 'I know I haven't treated you well. I'll change. I swear. Don't go, Rhys. You're the only one who understands me. I have nobody.'

He starts to cry and tells her that he doesn't want to live anymore.

She is horrified. She ends up pleading and in tears herself. Her bags and resolve lie forgotten in the corner as they cry into each other's arms.

XXVIII.

Her doctor doesn't say much as she speaks. As she speaks she feels she must sound crazy for her sentences are disjointed and jump over one another as she remembers and forgets and remembers again.

The headaches and the stomachaches and the feeling of drowning. The sleepless nights and the slipping grades and the thoughts that never stop running and worries that never go away. The panic attacks and self-doubt. How every time she met up with him, she'd have to write down everything that happened because she was never quite sure if they actually did happen. How she'd have to sleep for the whole day after and when she woke-up, it would be dark out and she couldn't remember a thing until she read what she had written.

'Have you heard about something called coercive control?' her GP asks her.

She shakes her head.

'Google it some more when you go home.'

So she does.

Two hours later her roommate finds her staring blankly at the same screen, as she wonders what on earth she has gotten herself into.

When she opens her referral letter to scan to the psychiatrist later, she laughs out loud but then shuts up when the shame hits.

'I had the pleasure of seeing Rhys today. She presented with worsened anxiety and depression. She has been in an abusive relationship for 7 months which she is finding difficult to breakaway from. Thank you for your opinion and management.'

It sounds like a gross over-exaggeration. So dramatic. The psychiatrist talks things through with her.

'Look. I don't think you need medication, Rhys. You've decided that you won't leave him. At least not right now. It's not much use for us to talk about all the things that he has done because regardless, my suggestion to you, which is to leave, will stay the same. So, why don't we focus on forgiving yourself, and coming to peace with just letting things be for now?'

Her psychiatrist smiles sadly at her speechlessness.

'Just remember, Rhys. Sometimes, control can look a lot like love.'

XXIX.

She flies home during the winter break. She spends a few nights at Dad's and a few nights at Mum's as she has always done.

She's unnerved by how similar the two of them are — him and Dad — as she listens to Dad boast over dinner. Her stepmother glances at her untouched plate and asks what's wrong.

'Nothing,' she replies with a careful smile. Her father laughs and teases her for being 'spoilt' and 'rude' and continues to speak.

When dinner has finished, and they are clearing the table, she flinches when the dinner plates clatter into the sink.

XXX.

'Mum?'

She steps inside and finds her mother sitting in silence, by the dining table, absent-mindedly looking out the window, with empty bottles by her feet.

'Hello dear.'

'Mum, the doctor said you can't drink anymore, remember?' she says, as patiently as she can, as she puts the glasses in the sink and the bottles in the trash.

'I haven't had that much.'

'Right. Well let's try not to have any at all, okay?'

'Okay, Rhys. You're the boss. Anyways, don't worry about your old mother — I'm fine. How are you? Any boys you're seeing?'

'Same old. I got the Chancellor's award this term, though.' 'Oh how wonderful! I'm so proud of you.'

'Thanks, Mum. But no. No boys.'

'I want grandkids. Preferably while I'm still alive,' her mother laughs. 'I'm kidding. Of course. You'll find someone one day, when the time is right.' Her mother pauses and thinks for a while.

'But someone who treats you well, okay?'

When the bedroom door is safely closed behind her, those seven words are all it takes. And the tears just run free.

XXXI.

She had once thought of her mother as weak for staying with her father for as long as she did. A coward. Why couldn't she just leave? But she gets it now — when she looks into her mother's eyes now, she no longer sees a stranger but she sees herself.

XXXII.

On her way back, she looks out the window after take-off as the city turns to stars. She thinks of how angry she had been at her mother for staying. And how because her mother had stayed, she now couldn't bring herself to leave.

She thinks of the children that she wants to have one day (she'd want two of them — a boy and a girl) and how, if it were them, she would want them to leave.

And, for the first time, she knows without question what must be done.

XXXIII.

She leaves him on a Sunday.

The last of the winter rain pours.

It's a good day. He tells her about his week, his plans to travel Europe someday and how the new intern was a total stick-in-the-mud. He even asks her one or two questions about how she's doing which makes her smile, which then makes her sad that it made her smile.

He glances at her when she takes too long to reply.

'Are you okay?'

She smiles sadly. *If only he knew.* It's too little and all too late. 'Yeah. Just thinking.'

When he's finished with what he's wanted to say and wants to go, she kisses him goodbye without him probing and lingers for a long time. He's slightly confused but shrugs it off and kisses her back.

When he gets up to leave, she lets him go.

XXXV.

'You'll love again.' Carrie says, and gives her a big hug.
She nods and smiles, but wonders if she'd have it within her to do so.

She reads all the letters she had written but never sent him and feels sad for the hopeful girl that she had once been.
The girl who never wanted anything except to love.

She misses him.

She wishes things were different.

She'd like to think there existed some world out there where dinner plates weren't shattered. Where children were always good enough for their mothers, just as they were. Where mothers were good enough for their own mother. Where he didn't hate himself so much. Where he would never do the things that he did. Where she would never stay for as long as she did. Where she would never have a reason to have to leave.

Maybe, in such a world, they'd cook dinner together, and then eat and laugh and talk, before they wash-up and put away the dinner plates back into their designated dinner-plate drawers — together. Or maybe they'd be good friends and go travelling to Europe or wherever they wanted and they'd stumble around, lost in the world, but always find each other in the end. Or maybe she wouldn't have a best friend called Marie in middle school and they'd be perfect strangers. Or maybe she would never meet him twice and he would have remained distant in her past.

All but a fond memory.

A simple fact.



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