

HOMESICK

Anon

"I am homesick for a place I am not sure even exists. One where my heart is full, and my soul is understood" (Melissa Cox)

Cancelled

I wrote my own eulogy because I had this great idea you should be able to attend your own funeral and get the chance to find out how much of an amazing person you were. Considering you are no such thing, why should the living get to know you in a halo of purity when you knew yourself as a complete fuck up? If God needed an Angel, perhaps I could make the grade for a day. But on second thoughts, perhaps not. I certainly hurt my fair share of flies in life.

Nevertheless, I had enough faith in the Angel illusion that I crafted a statement about my wonderfulness and posted my video before regret set in. While my body continued to live and breathe, my eulogy spread like the virus I had become. A funeral date was set by me for Tuesday. This was my favourite day of the week because out loud, it sounded like the closest thing to a choice I ever had.

Eulogy day would prove to be a symbolic ending of a life that resembled a screaming cacophony. Ideas pulled me constantly in more directions than my brain had pathways. Space and time no longer existed with conviction and I couldn't remember my birth name. By going viral and cancelling everything and everybody I'd once known and loved, I became a nothing. I flung terms like 'gone viral,' 'binge watching' and 'throwback' about like nobody's business. I was trivialising pandemics, mental health conditions and decent music for the sake of joining the commercialised, commodified and cancelled world of extremes and vilification. At 14, I was exhausted.

I assumed I could cure the gaping hole of nothingness within my soul by being everything all at once, but all I became was nothing in nowhere. I was impossible, and as a privileged and cisgender, heterosexual female with a body the colour and shape of fairy tale heroines and Disney princesses, I had no right to exist and nothing left to protest. I was left with no choice but to do what I was acutely skilled at. Cancellation.

Family and Devices

Reflecting back on life as one does when writing their eulogy, I realised too late what I stood to lose by selling my soul to the scroll. I remembered the day my parents ungraciously relinquished their parenting duties by throwing their hands in the air and announcing their fatigue at competing in a losing battle against an algorithm. My family believed I had developed Stockholm Syndrome, and their refusal to negotiate with terrorists was their defence. Their story reads that before I infected society with my 'youth macro influencer

vlogging status' to keep my dopamine supplies topped up, I had soul, substance, and a name with a satisfying lilt on the end.

I played with dolls that had outrageously unrealistic bodies. I loved to sing and dance and folklore indicates I felt and expressed big feelings. When I was happy and alone, I drew on the pavement with chalk – hearts, flowers and trees, or machine guns, sinking ships and rockets. But when the fear set in, I realised it was fire I'd been playing with and not dolls. With the beauty of hindsight, my ignorance that I could be a person with a pretty name and nothing on my mind was laughable.

Doctors' reports all suggest mum and dad's worries began when I stopped daydreaming and finding pictures in clouds. They were concerned when I stopped finishing sentences as well, but when the fear of starting things at all reared its head, an obvious solution appeared like a Catherine Wheel. A special device for school, home and the dangerous in between. As clearly illustrated within Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, my psychological development depended on my bottom level needs being met. Device of torture or fleeting and sparking beauty in a sky of fireworks? It didn't matter which. I was saved.

My parents called my views distorted and a product of seduction and grooming into the virtual. But I held the cure to fear and boredom in the palm of my hand. With endless opportunities, full stops became defunct and days went forever. My daily quest to be informed enough to feel real, relevant and sufficiently guilty left precious time for school. Besides, socialising in the flesh felt stilted and robotic. People persisted in dangerous and life-threatening behaviour daily while being acutely aware of the long-term health risks including death. Being human became perpetually embarrassing to me, and my parents' lives would attest to how prone to addiction and weakness they were.

Diagnoses and Robot Therapy

The faces outside began to disappear. On screen I was on fire, but in the flesh I felt untethered. On the rare occasions mum and dad tried behavioural experiments by removing my device, strangeness would prevail. I experienced phantom device syndrome and while my right arm would physically feel like it was holding my lifeline, whenever I checked there was nothing there.

The teachers and school counsellors said I potentially suffered from a condition where my brain got too distracted and I had trouble focussing on my classwork. They suggested I go on a waiting list to be assessed by experts, and what was eventually revealed was that, in no uncertain terms, I was a ticking timebomb of abnormality.

Mum and dad felt cross they had to deal with me at home and longed for me to study and leave the house. I opted to stay in where I was safe, secure and protected, and therefore ready for Maslow's eventual promise of self-actualisation.

It initially felt exciting to begin my new life, but even on the pills to change my faulty brain pathways, I developed a chest ache that began as a flutter and morphed into a feeling of being flattened by a concrete block the size of Uluru. I had therapy sessions with a robot on my computer, but could never be certain what the right answers were. I was confused by the

questions and usually ticked the smiley faces or C's. Pounding and debilitating headaches began during these sessions, happening concurrently with heavy pounding on my bedroom door.

In despair one day I travelled in the car to a real-life appointment with my doctor. While my parents perched apologetically on chairs in the extravagant waiting room, I sat in her equally ridiculous office fiddling awkwardly with broken threads of my hoodie. She dictated the contents of our session into a Dictaphone, mostly asking and answering her own questions in the affirmative. I was trying valiantly to uphold the nodding and smiling routine, but on this day found it impossible to make eye contact. I was completely naked and exposed and missing in some vital way.

So as the final seconds of an 11-minute appointment reared their head and she began her symbolic routine of shuffling her prescription pad and looking pleased, I surprised myself by blurting out words of nightmares I had been experiencing for months. As the words kept tumbling out, I wondered if she would try to interpret the dreams. Freud was cancelled in my online psychology classes, despite his daughter being a feminist, but who knew? I need not have worried that she furtively hid behind a Freudian heart, because her disinterest in my dreams were as palpable as my fear of having them.

Even the absurdity of tears spilling from my parched eyes as she walked me to the door was not enough to slow her confident stride. To her credit she did look frightened and speedily advised that if the nightmares continued, she could prescribe a pill to stop the dreams at our next appointment in three months.

Accompanying my parents out of the waiting room and into the car, I felt twinges of the same gasping emptiness the nightmares delivered, but reaching the safety of home, I could already hear and feel the pounding on my door and in my chest as I furtively slipped into the staleness and warmth of my screens. I had expected to forget the dreams, but under the clammy sheets and duvet, I felt crushed by a potential future of lonely nonexistence.

My Angel eulogy was vlogged in a state of delirium. Swallowed by the barrenness of being no more or less than a valuable resource to be cultivated and sold to insatiable consumers, now frightened me more than being safe. I cancelled myself and left, for the second time that day.

The Extraction

This time I left my bedroom of my own accord. Despite feeling startled, my feet obediently walked me down our hallway and out of the front door into the blinding world. The air on my skin felt crisp but kind, and I was moving through space at an alarming rate. Sensing danger behind me I stalled and turned to be met with a frightening but familiar scene from many a childhood storybook. A Troll or an Ogre darkened the sky. My knowledge of Ogre folklore depicting their monster like natures, and Troll folklore depicting more reasonable and sociable qualities, meant that perhaps I was in denial of my recent online vitriol by deciding to call it a Troll-Ogre.

As my body slowed, I also felt a heavy weight and sharp pain that began at my shoulder blades. Craning my neck, I learned I was encumbered with a heavy backpack. As the Troll-Ogre cast a shadow over the crisp winter sun, and the backpack fell open and revealed some of its contents, I identified an immense feeling from long ago. A sharp, piercing pain and a simultaneous deadening and heaviness where dread of the future was born. A feeling of grief, loss and sadness. A feeling willing me to turn back to safety. But I kept moving and refused to pick a side.

The more distance I covered, the heavier the pack and I became. I was climbing upwards, noticing my bare and naked nose responding to the rawness of the air. My nose advised there was ocean nearby, and the smell of being little again almost brought me to my knees. The word 'Amae' popped into my head then - a Japanese word with several meanings, my favourite being "The urge to crumple into the arms of a loved one to be cuddled and comforted."

Up ahead, my vision captured an ancient woman from childhood dreams long forgotten till now. She stood statue like with hands on hips at the top of the rocky hill I'd just ascended. She wore the snowy white-haired wildness and skin the colour of dark, ancient earth that felt like a home I had once lived in. Behind me loomed the menacing nightmare of eternal cancellation. Looking upwards and ahead, I approached the woman with a tiny sliver of hope.

She looked me over and nodded, as understanding grew that the backpack was attached to my skin. This realisation triggered another memory, this time of a storybook I had loved as a child. The 'bad and ungrateful kids' in the story had to prove they were worthy of being Angels in Heaven by carrying burdens attached to their backs for a great distance and performing kindly and selfless deeds along the way. With this memory in mind of the storybook written by an author I'd gleefully cancelled, I felt the gasping emptiness again.

The old woman gently sat my burden and me down inside a cave entrance beneath a rocky outcrop. From where we sat cross legged, we could peak outside at the frothing Troll-Ogre while feeling somewhat protected. She reached over and peered inside my burden, producing sounds resembling groans, alongside empathetic sounds you would make with a hurt child. She then took my head in her gnarled and earth like hands, pointing it first in the direction of treacherous coastline to my right, and then to the left where the warmth and safety of the city lay. I suddenly longed simultaneously for the sterility and stillness of my bedroom, and the delicious unpredictability of immersion in an ocean that went forever.

The woman began to sift through my burden, removing laminated label cards and, to my horror, tossing them into the foaming mouth of the Troll-Ogre. She shushed me with her eyes and delved deeper as questionnaires and lists emerged, followed by an admirable collection of pills for every occasion and ailment. Again, most were tossed into the hungry mouth nearby. In the seemingly bottomless pit of my burden, she extracted all of my diagnoses that were neatly assembled on what looked like official hospital reports. As she sifted through the final boxes of my existence she murmured

"These here, you'll need for that world," as she nodded towards the cityscape to our left

"But use that," inclining her head toward the rocky and treacherous coastline, *"instead of these,"* as she pointed to a pack of 'SIFYOS' or 'Staying Inside For Your Own Safety' medicine.

When I assumed the extraction was complete, the ancient woman pulled out an enormous colourful card bearing 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.' I allowed a smile to form as she began to speak again.

“Being human is very hard my girl, and you're still forming. Live between fear and safety, coast and city. Don't let them labels steal ya soul. As for this thing here?”

She held up a device she had extracted, and before tossing it into the waiting mouth, stated with a fierce protectiveness that scared me

“You are bigger than this. The most important things to keep are them feelings that can't be named. They got to be felt my girl. Stop looking and answers seek you out. We're under construction until the day we die and beyond. Like this good earth beneath us. Come my girl. It's Choose-day”.

Homecoming

As in a dream, we arrived at a place I strangely knew. It was a secret cache of the softest, greenest grass living in the shadow of buildings. Its existence had always felt odd to me, but upon arrival here my burden felt lighter and integrated within me, just as the grass had somehow made peace with its concrete companions. The woman, gently but fiercely, held my right hand, while digging her other magnificently wrinkled hand into the burden to pull out the final item. Her hand itself commanded the respect of a thousand lives lived, in comparison to my online feed that had threatened to swallow me. The Troll-Ogre still frothed and snarled, now comedically bearing a fluorescent CANCEL HER placard.

As my back smoothed itself and my chest warmed, a Walkman with headphones and a mixed tape inside was gently placed into my right hand as she let go. The music player bore my father's writing. He had scrawled WALKPERSON across it and I could read the title track 'Homesick' written on the tape inside.

Before the ancient woman returned to where she had come from, she read out an alternative Eulogy. Her voice gently but resolutely immersed itself into the emptiness and filled it with hope and even possibility for a future.

“This here is Gracie. She's a good kid, but she needs growing up right. Who here is qualified for the job?”

To me she whispered

“They don't need cancelling any more than you do my girl. We just need more people in the world brave enough to live in the middle”

Even though I'm vegan, nothing smelt more like home than my father's leather smoking jacket. I crumpled into it completely and closed my eyes for a very long time. The Troll-Ogre retreated and a wordless promise was made between me and my monster.

The End