Things That Happen in Your Late-20s

At 26 you’ve been thirteen twice.

At my christening Aunt Tina on my dad’s side gave me, by way of my parents, a taxidermied frog. The note stringed around his toe informed baby-me that a kiss bestowed upon the greyed mouth by my thirteen-year-old lips would procure me a prince. Well I’ve been thirteen twice and the prince hasn’t popped round, hasn’t offered me a drink in Vodka Revs, hasn’t woken in my bed. This doesn’t matter; in fact, this story is irrelevant. There have been gaggles of giggling princesses and maids-of-honour, countless ‘soul mates’, confidents, bezzies.

Later you discover you don’t know facts about your decade-old friends, that everyone has a secret they don’t want to share, even with you who is so understanding you think. Who has never judged anyone. But who has dismembered others with them. That teenage belief that you will one day know someone wholly is now just that: teenage. Cliché’s are proven and can be spoken lightheartedly with a shrug - you do die alone. Nothing that you’ve always known, that’s in your makeup, should be so disorienting.

Do you ever know who you are? Are you still hoping for one definition? To the barista at Starbucks this morning you were a tyrant, to your mother you are forever innocence, to your lover you are enigmatic, to your best friend you are everything but your flaws; you are the end of their sentences.

No more collecting friends like charms on your wrist; this one, found in Manchester, makes me laugh, this one is lucky, this one, bought for a £2 tequila shot and McDonald’s Happy Meal, always cheers me up. They are not yours and you are not theirs and you'll never know them inside and out. But you can Whatsapp them a tempura prawn Emoji and they’ll know that in the absence of a symbol for fingers crossed, that’s what it means. They buy you a Kinder Surprise when you’re heartbroken, and have the power to pick one without a loathsome car in it. You see that when you are cruel they understand you don’t mean it.

You realise that this man you spend 76 hours of your week with isn’t going to complete you. He is not the be all and end all. You can manage very well without him thank you very much, you just choose not to. You choose to have someone to laugh with and have sex with, to laugh during sex with.

This is a new discovery. Not one of habit and taste learned when you were in single digits ('I like all and any cheese. I hate jam and people touching my feet'), nor the discovery of the most intimate of relationships, emotionally and physically during your teen years. It’s not even 'I know who I am, and this is what I want you to be', broadcast when you thought you’d solved it in your early twenties. It’s a few more years treading the path to the land of Who I Am.

This sensation, this is more than finding a man who you can trust not to cheat and who makes you weep with laughter at his impression of a person whose brain is telling him not to dance but his body isn’t listening. This is more than a night out where you make new friends and pencil dates in your Moleskine to go out in Peckham. More than ordering two halloumis at Nando’s and getting five. More even than attending shows at London Fashion Week. The things that made you write ‘Content.’ as your Facebook status on 12th May 2019. More than getting everything you wanted.

Restlessness is not the right noun. Neither is depression as it’s too serious, too bound, too austere. Too ‘You need to see someone.’ This is an itch. It makes you neither happy nor sad, but it pesters. Your parents still don’t know the answer.

This reads as a list, and lists reach no conclusions.