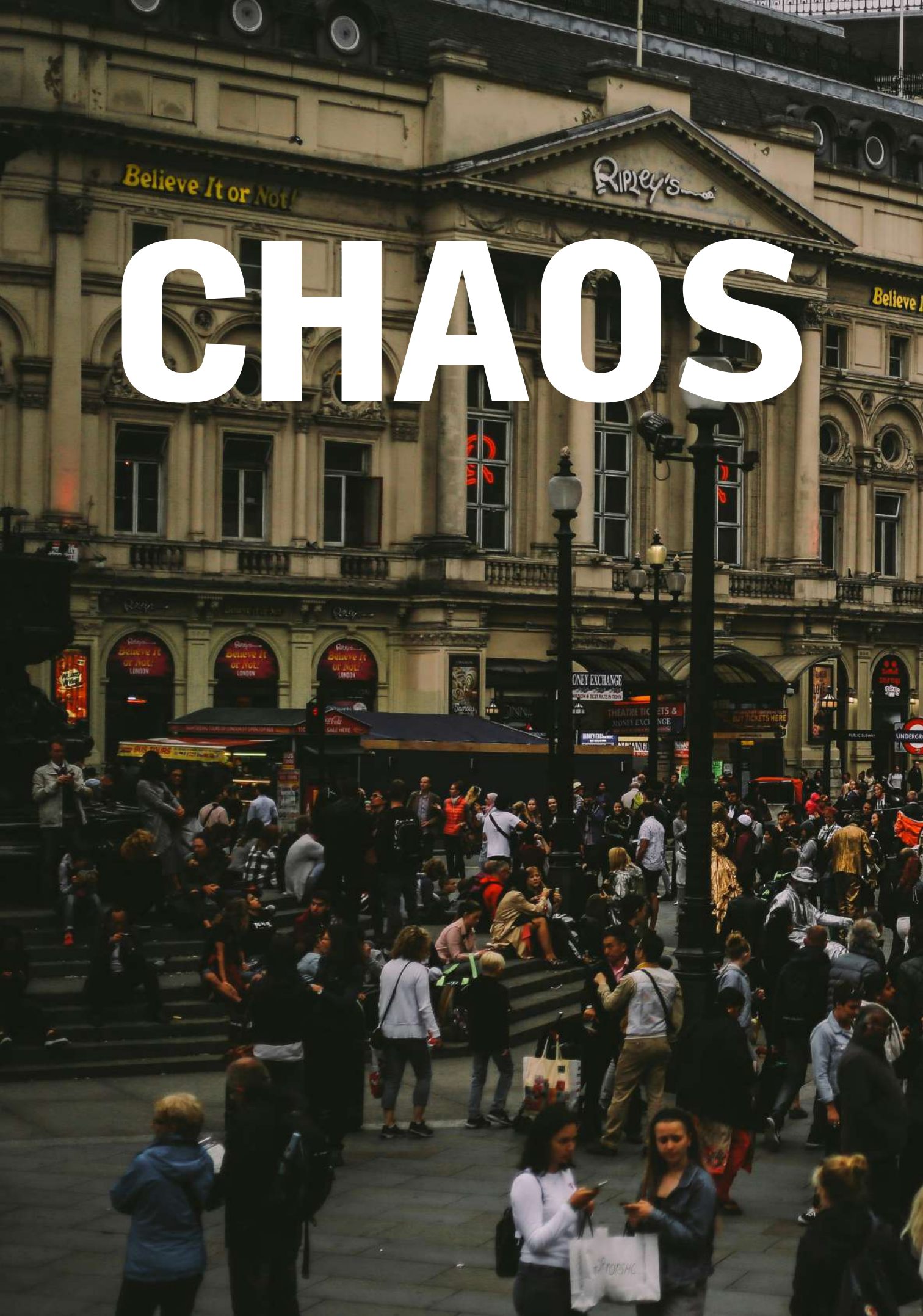
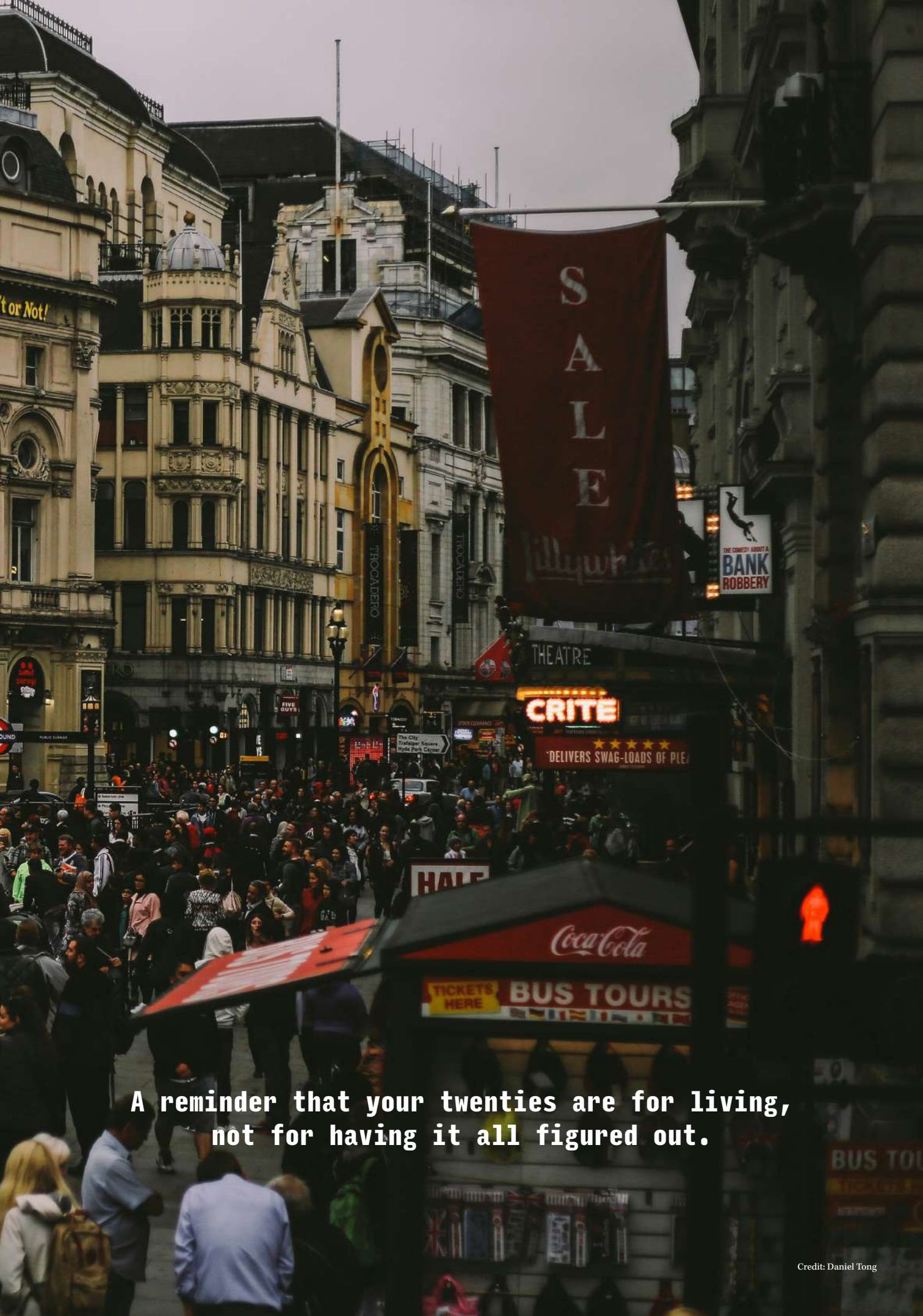


**CHAOS**

# CHAOS





**A reminder that your twenties are for living,  
not for having it all figured out.**



# CHAOS

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MAY THESE YEARS BRING YOU THE CHAOS  
that reminds you your 20s are not for perfection,  
but for growth and becoming.



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## EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to your twenties. Or at least, welcome to the chaos that comes with them.

Your twenties are supposed to be the “best years of your life”, but let's be honest—they rarely feel that way.

To me, my twenties so far have been chaotic—and every other acronym you can think of. From crying outside a kebab shop, unsure of what comes next, to flying solo to Italy to rediscover myself, and meeting an Italian man who drove me to the beach without a single word understood between us, but sharing the same love for the sea and sand on our toes. From relentless comparison to everyone my age to believing that everything happens for a reason: every rejection, every closed door, every wrong turn. At the end of the day, that's what has led me to this exact moment.

I can't count the times I've felt lost, behind, or hindered in my twenties. We romanticise youth, obsessing over it and creating this false urgency to have it all figured out by a certain age. But we don't have to. One thing I can promise you is that these moments—messy, confusing, overwhelming—are temporary.

This magazine isn't a guidebook to your twenties. It isn't about perfection, timelines, or having a fully mapped-out life. It's a reminder that you are not alone, that the uncertainty, fear, and mess you're experiencing are shared by so many others navigating these same years.

I'm in my twenties too, and trust me, I'm not the person to give you advice—at least not yet. Like you, I'm living them, making mistakes, failing, getting up, and embracing it all with everything I've got. Yes, these years are messy, but that's what makes them worth it. Embrace them with joy and curiosity, because they never come back.

I hope this magazine brings you comfort and a reminder that there is beauty in chaos. Remember: life is just starting. You are not behind. You are simply getting started, and there is no deadline for blooming.

As my mum once told me, “*What a privilege to not know where you want to be in life yet—and to have the choice to live another day with endless possibilities.*” So, for now, just exist. Enjoy these years. Embrace the chaos, because it's exactly what shapes you.

With Love,

Your Editor-in-Chief,

Gabriela

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As older men are praised for chasing youth, women seeking stability, maturity, or presence are shamed, exposing the double standards, stereotypes, and scrutiny that turn personal choice into scandal. Age-gap relationships aren't just about age—they reveal how society polices desire, dictates who can love freely, and judges women more harshly than men.

In your twenties, love can feel like chaos—a haze of situationships, ghosting, and men who dodge commitment with a shrug and a half-hearted excuse. Amid the noise, the allure of an older partner can feel disarmingly simple: stability, maturity, and someone who actually knows what they want.

But the moment a young woman is seen with an older man, the whispers begin. Society applauds men for chasing youth, for flexing their “silver fox” status, while shaming women for seeking security or experience.

Age-gap relationships spark an age-old debate. Some argue the only line that matters is the legal one: if both partners are of consenting age, then why should anyone care? Yet young women with older men are still viewed through a lens of suspicion and taboo, with judgement placed squarely on

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## LOVE WITH

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her shoulders rather than his.

We often hear men's voices in these dynamics, but rarely women's. And when women do speak, their words are drowned out by cliches. So why do women genuinely prefer older men? Is it about maturity, experience, financial stability - or something else entirely?

For Francesca, 25, who once dated a man in his forties, the answer had little to do with money or material comfort. It was about presence.

“It's the confidence they portray, like they've got their stuff figured out, which I can't say about people my age,” she said. “Men in their twenties are often still insecure, still figuring out their path. Older men usually know what they want. They've had the experience, and they're more straightforward.”

Amy, 27, echoes the same feeling. Dating a man ten years older was, in her words, “life-changing”. For the first time, she felt like an equal, not a babysitter.



“He is a full adult man who doesn't sit back and wait for something to happen. He puts effort into his life and into our relationship, something I never felt in relationships with guys in their twenties.”

And yet, even when women cite maturity and confidence as the draw, society rarely accepts these reasons at face value. Stereotypes step in where nuance is ignored. The infamous “daddy issues” trope, popularised by Hollywood scripts and lazy internet jokes, reduces women's choices to psychological wounds.

Amy rejects that entirely.

“My dad is my best friend. The whole ‘daddy issues’ label comes from the media and Hollywood, but it unfairly puts the blame on women. Dating someone older isn't always about your father. That stereotype is too simplistic.”

For her, the appeal wasn't about replacing anyone - it was about peace of mind.

“If the guy I'm dating doesn't text me much in one day, I won't agonise over it. With older men, there's a maturity gap. They don't play games.”

Still, double standards linger. While some women may unconsciously echo parental patterns, this is far from universal. Many date older men purely for stability, experience, or emotional compatibility - not to replace or compensate for a father figure. And for those with healthy, close relationships with their dads? The “daddy issues” diagnosis just doesn't fit.

Yet the stigma remains. A young woman with an older partner risks being branded a gold digger, manipulative, or shallow. Meanwhile, older men dating younger women are cast as enviable bachelors with

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## OLDER MEN

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bragging rights. Flip the script, and an older woman with a younger man is reduced to a “cougar”, criticised as predatory. No matter how you frame it, the judgement always falls harder on women.

Francesca finds the hypocrisy exhausting.

“When a young woman dates an older man, people assume she’s with him for money. But is it really wrong to want financial security in a relationship? Especially in an economy where making ends meet month-to-month is a struggle. What feels wrong is being with someone only for that reason.”

The scrutiny reveals something deeper. Men are rarely condemned for prioritising youth and beauty. Women, on the other hand, are shamed for seeking stability, as though their desires are transactional while men’s are natural. Both sides stand to gain, yet only women are put on trial for it.

James, 42, admits the imbalance openly.

“I’ve been single for the last two years, and most of the women pursuing me are 23 to 28 years old. The reason behind it is so much more about the terrible state of 23-28-year-old men than anything negative

with the women. These women are ready to experience different aspects of life that younger men haven’t had time to reach yet.”

The media have been complicit for decades. From Brad Pitt to Leonardo DiCaprio’s carousel of under-25 girlfriends, Hollywood and gossip columns alike have framed the older-man/younger-woman pairing as glamorous, aspirational, and inevitable. Onscreen, it’s romantic; offscreen, it’s scandalous - but only for the woman. The trope of the powerful older man with a bright younger partner is so entrenched that it spills into real life, shaping how audiences judge women when they make similar choices beyond the screen.

James is blunt about it: “The media reinforces a double standard, glamourising the man while judging the woman unfairly.”

Online culture adds fuel to the fire. Instagram aesthetics, sugar-daddy jokes, viral TikToks - all of them fetishise and ridicule younger women in these relationships in the same breath. What’s glamorous on screen is scandalous in real life.

Perhaps the real issue isn’t age at all. It’s the lens through which we view it. Age-

gap relationships are rarely just about age; they’re about what we project onto them - gender roles, insecurities, fantasies. And until we stop holding women to a harsher standard than men, the debate will never truly be about love. It will be about sexism, dressed up as concern.

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

# everything I know about

"I thought I knew a lot about love. Not as much as Dolley. Read as soon as possible."  
SHARON HOE



# THE FRIDGE

**In your twenties, survival isn't just a mindset—it's a lifestyle measured in small choices, contradictions, and the quiet chaos of daily life. The fridge becomes a stage for ambition, indulgence, and improvisation, holding the messy truths of growing up in London: balancing dreams, responsibilities, and the occasional reckless whim, all without judgement.**

Almond milk, oat milk, half a birthday cake, six condiments, and a bottle of prosecco saved for emergencies. Open your fridge, and you see the truth about life in your twenties in London: the one you try to perform and the one you actually live. Because fridges aren't just for holding food. They hold chaos, identity crises, small victories, minor defeats, and proof that surviving your twenties is basically a full-time job.

Somewhere on the middle shelf, broccoli meant for meal prep rests next to a Domino's pizza box from last week and a lonely lemon I've grown attached to. There's a jar of pesto I treat like gold sitting next to the Chanel perfume I forgot to return to the cupboard because, apparently, perfume lasts longer if kept in the fridge – at least according to TikTok. These cold shelves are where ambition, survival, and absurdity collide.

And then there's the financial chaos. Why spend on groceries when cow-foot shoes are whispering your name from a website? Why buy a £6 salad when a £6 iced blueberry matcha feels more essential? Beans on toast becomes a small triumph, a reminder that frugality is sometimes the only glamorous thing in your life. Tesco meal deals find their way into your bag like a survival tool, as crucial as the Oyster card getting you to work on the Central line.

The fridge is where our Pinterest self meets your reality self. On one shelf: truffle mayonnaise, kombucha, and fancy mushroom soup in a glass jar. Another: leftover curry, a single lemon, and a bottle of wine silently judging last week's choices. Kale you planned to blend, ice cream you bought after a random Monday heartbreak, and noodles you don't even remember picking up. The recipes saved on your phone? Hundreds, and none leaving the digital realm. It's exactly like your twenties: full of intentions, short on execution.

# IDENTITY CRISIS

Fridges also tell stories about class, survival, and living in London. In Peckham or Croydon, student flats might have one loaf of bread, a tin of baked beans, and some questionable cheese. In zones 1–2, first-job graduates might have fridges that look like wellness blogs come to life: chia pudding, multiple bottles of kombucha, and jars of stuff you can't even pronounce. Both extremes are valid, both chaotic, and both survival strategies. My fridge oscillates between these worlds: one week a single jar of red pesto and emergency prosecco; the next, overflowing with half of M&S because I finally decided I deserved it.

Even daily joys are contained in the cold chaos. Picking up a Tesco meal deal after a ten-hour shift can feel like winning the lottery. Walking into an M&S store becomes a mini Disneyland, a thrill reserved for young professionals – spreadsheets swapped for Percy Pigs and yellow-sticker sushi. A £3 sandwich can carry the same small victory as a full evening out, sustaining you through a busy day.

Fridges can be stages of life. The First Paycheque Fridge: proud, aspirational, and stocked with celebratory wine and M&S meals. The Breakup Fridge: sparse, sad, leftover spaghetti and ice cream tubs. The Girlboss Fridge: meticulously prepped quinoa jars, stacked and labelled,

Instagram-ready, but joyless. And then there's the Mid-Twenties Fridge: a chaotic mash of all three, exactly like your life — messy, absurd, and thriving.

And yet, despite the chaos, the fridge never judges. It quietly holds evidence of our choices: the shoes we splurged on instead of vegetables, the takeaways we relied on, the recipes we never made, and the small moments we celebrated with beans on toast. A cold, cluttered archive of life in our twenties in London.

It's seen you drunk at 3 am, hunting for frozen pizza you're sure is still there. Hungover the next morning, searching for electrolytes. Heartbroken with ice cream in hand. Or ecstatic, pulling out the prosecco saved for celebrations – or emergencies. It's witnessed every emotion, every low and high, without judgement.

So next time you open yours and cringe at the chaos inside, take a deep breath. The fridge doesn't care if you bought Tabi shoes instead of veggies or that your kale is rotting next to your Chanel perfume. It just holds the evidence of your life – chaotic, contradictory. Messy, occasionally luxurious, utterly real. And in the end, surviving London, surviving your twenties, surviving yourself? That's more than enough.



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Ramona Gabriela Toderascu

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Kiah Thorne

# CH AOS

Your twenties don't come with a filter. Behind every quiet street is a secret, and behind every twenty-something is a story they swore they'd never tell—but you'll definitely recognise. From money messes to bedroom scandals, these are the stories that *only these years can produce* — messy, wild, and completely unforgettable.

“I got banned from Klarna for using it too much on Deliveroo and not paying the money back in time. All I ever wanted was Maccies.”

—Fran

“My boyfriend and I used my housemate's cooking oil as lube one night. I got a UTI the next day.”

—Jess

“The guy I was seeing said he was going on holiday with his ex and that if they didn't get back together, he'd 'wife me off'. I'm still baffled by his audacity”

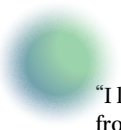
—Kiera

“I am blocked from using Trainline. I used to ask for a refund after every trip, and they clocked it a few years later—so now I've been banned forever.”

—Maya


“I slept with the groom before his wedding. He said he wanted to experiment with a man before marrying his wife.”

—Ross




“I lied to my parents that a girl’s scratches on my back from sex were actually from a cat. They’re Muslim and didn’t want them to know their daughter is both a lesbian and sexually active.”

—Alyah




“My ex-boyfriend once told me ‘good boy’ during sex. He said that with my hair in a ponytail I looked like one. I was mortified.”

—Kirsty




“I went on a Hinge date with a guy who was scared to sit on the grass. We had a picnic in Hyde Park, and I had to give him my jacket to sit on because the grass had a ladybug a meter away from where we were sitting—and he’s scared of bugs.”

—Mariah



“My manager matched with me on Grindr before I started working at the company. He has three kids, and is married to a woman.”

—James



“On my first day at work, I was sharing my screen when I received a notification about a new dark romance spicy book I had pre-ordered. Now everyone knows I read smut.”

—Elle

# FILLES

# Back Under Their Roof: Living with Mum and Dad



**When independence feels out of reach and adulthood is an uphill climb, moving back home isn't failure—it's a strategic pause. Sometimes it means navigating cramped spaces, renegotiating boundaries with the people who raised you, and finding ways to reclaim autonomy. Resilience isn't only about moving forward—it can mean returning to where it all began.**

With rising rents, unstable jobs, and the pressure to keep up appearances, regression has become one of the defining fears of young adulthood. Moving back in with your parents—once considered a short-term solution—now feels like a rite of passage many would rather avoid. In a decade sold as “the best years of your life”, nothing stings quite like the idea that you've slipped backwards.

Moving back home always carried emotional baggage, but today the modern world amplifies the sting. Rental prices in London rose by 11.5% in 2024, according to the ONS, while England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland all recorded annual increases of nearly 7-9%. In a climate where even a shoebox-sized room can drain half a salary, independence is more precarious than ever. These are the forces that make moving back less a choice and more an inevitability. And yet, the shame persists. Why is it so embarrassing to say, “I live with my parents”?

For Hannah, a 26-year-old paralegal, the move back to her parents' home in Norfolk after two years in London felt like a complete reset. “When I moved back home, I felt like I was starting from the beginning,” she says. “Everything I'd done so far felt like it didn't matter. Rationally, moving back home gave me a better life—I didn't have to worry about rent and had a cooked meal every night—but my happiness just wasn't there. I felt constantly regressed.”

The squeeze of moving back isn't just about money. Part of the discomfort comes from comparison. From jobs to postcodes, young adulthood often feels like a scoreboard. Where you live becomes shorthand for how far ahead—or behind—you are. Returning home to London might mean proximity to opportunity, but moving back to a small town can feel like social suffocation. “All my friends were living their best lives in London,” Hannah says. “I felt like mine was taken away.”

The stigma isn't just external. It's also about who you become when you move back. Jasmine, 22, who returned to Birmingham after graduating, says the move erased her growth. “I was not the same 19-year-old girl I was when I left for uni. Going back to my childhood bedroom felt like I was her again,

not the 22-year-old young woman I'd grown into. And my parents saw me that way, too.” She described the transition as “hard” and “triggering” - to go from living with your friends to being asked when you'll return from the pub.

Psychologists point out that our sense of identity is deeply tied to space. The environments we inhabit shape how we see ourselves—and how others see us. When you return to your parents' house, you're not just stepping back into a physical room but into an old version of yourself. That friction between past and present can make the experience feel regressive, even when the decision is logical.

According to Millie, a 25-year-old creative originally from Brighton, moving back home was less about identity and more about survival. She returned to her parents' house after changing jobs and starting a master's degree. “With a lower-paying job, I couldn't cover my rent in East London. I'm grateful and fortunate that my parents let me move back, but now that I'm ready to move back out, it feels impossible.”

Her story reflects a broader trend. One in four London families now has an “adult child” living at home, while across England and Wales, more than 3.8 million adults are in the same position, according to ONS. In the cost-of-living crisis, moving home is less about regression than adaptation: a financial reset in a system where housing independence has become a privilege.

Still, the emotional contradictions remain. Gratitude and frustration exist side by side: the comfort of home-cooked meals, the clash of outdated parental expectations, and the bittersweet recognition that this may be the last time you live with ageing parents. For some, moving back strengthens family bonds, while for others, it fuels suffocation.

The truth is that moving back home isn't what the failure culture suggests nor the idyllic safety net it pretends to be. It's both a step back and a step sideways; both suffocating and stabilising, frustrating and fortunate. In today's housing market, independence shouldn't be a privilege reserved for couples or high earners. Renting without compromising your wellbeing should be a baseline, not an aspiration.

If moving back home is painted as regression, maybe it's time to reframe the narrative. In today's economy, returning to your parents' house isn't a weakness - it's resilience. It's a refusal to be crushed by a system stacked against you. And if survival means pressing pause in your childhood bedroom, maybe that isn't failure at all.



Credit: Bjoern Martinsen





## **Moving Back Home: A Survival Guide**

### **Set Boundaries**

Just because you're back under your parents' roof doesn't mean you're a teenager again. Life experience has changed you—and now it's time to make that clear. Your parents might slip back into old habits of “parenting” you, but it's up to you to assert your adult independence. Have open conversations about rules, chores, and routines. Respectful communication and compromise are key, and remember: this is an opportunity to learn from each other and embrace new perspectives.

### **Save Money**

One of the perks of moving back home? Your rent and bills are probably lighter—or non-existent. Resist the temptation to blow your extra cash on clothes or nights out. Budget smartly and use this breathing room to save, invest, or fund your next big move.

### **Do Your Share**

Adulting doesn't pause just because you're home. Don't let your parents shoulder all the chores; cook, clean, and grocery shop. Supporting your independence with action reinforces your boundaries and keeps everyone happy. Treat your parents like roommates too—loving roommates, but roommates nonetheless.

### **Give Back and Be Grateful**

Living at home might feel like a step back, but it's also a chance to cherish time with your family. Spend moments with your parents, grandparents, and relatives. Friendship, laughter, and shared meals now are precious—these days at home won't last forever.

### **Set Goals and Work Towards Them**

No one's planning to live with their parents forever. Use this time wisely: save for your own place, hunt for a new job, or tackle things you've always wanted to try but couldn't while juggling bills. A clear list of goals keeps you motivated and makes this chapter productive, not stagnant.

### **Get a Hobby**

Scrolling through everyone else's Instagram life can make you feel stuck. Keep busy with a hobby, learn a new skill, or dive into a project you've neglected. Living at home is a pause, not a rewind—you're still moving forward.

### **Find Joy in the Moment**

This chapter may feel awkward, frustrating, or like a step backward—but it's also an opportunity. Embrace small pleasures: family dinners, lazy Sunday mornings, or simply having a stable space to recharge.

### **Journaling**

Feelings of regression, boredom, or frustration are normal. Writing them down helps you process emotions, track growth, and turn a seemingly “paused” period into a meaningful one.

# Agony Mums:

*Three mums,  
Three countries,  
One mission:  
To guide you through  
the chaos of your 20s*

**WISDOM**

**WITHOUT**

**BORDERS**



**From India, Vandita Garg, 57, shares wisdom shaped by her life as a finance consultant and mother of two.**

#### **Relationships & Friendships**

In your twenties, you'll meet every kind of person — the good, the bad, and everyone in between. The trick is knowing who to keep and who to let go of. Often we realise it too late, or we stay in denial, and by the end of it, we suffer more than we should. This is the decade where you're becoming your own person and laying the foundation for the rest of your life, so don't let anyone clip your wings. This is your time to fly.

#### **Career**

We live in the best of times and the worst of times. If I had the opportunities that exist today, back when I was in my twenties, I would've gone where my heart took me, but unfortunately I didn't have that option. So my advice is: seek discomfort, chase your passion. It may not be easy or conventional, but time will pass regardless, and life will go on. You might as well spend it doing what your heart desires. Take it slow, there is no rush — your twenties are a trial period. You have your whole life to figure things out. You'll fail, yes, but getting back up is infinitely easier than for a career you don't like.

#### **Finances**

Learn to save, and learn when to take risks — both matter. The risks bring you money and that's how you grow your savings. As an Indian woman, my advice is simple: invest in gold and silver. They're stable, they can be bought in small amounts, and they grow with time. Real estate and stocks can be unstable and volatile, but gold never loses value. And above all, become financially literate like your life depends on it, because it does.

#### **Self Discovery**

I realised I can't stand hypocrisy, and that honesty is my most important value — in myself, and those around me. I also discovered I can read people easily, which is a skill I would advise most 20 years olds to pick up. It makes life both peaceful and lonely. Peaceful because you surround yourself with truth, lonely because you can't pretend to like someone once you see through them. But knowing who you are is worth the trade.

#### **Enjoying the Present**

Time will pass anyway. Whether you worry, panic, or prepare, the years move forward. You may think, "It's too late, I'll be 27 in two years by the time I finish studying," but you'll be 27 in two years regardless whether you chase what you want or not. So why not go after what you want? The future is inevitable, but it shifts depending on what you do now. Focus on the present — it's the only part of life you truly get to live.

**In Norway, 56-year-old nurse and mother of three, Anne Karlsen, reflects on lessons she's carried through family and work.**

### **Relationships & Friendships**

When it comes to family and work relationships, it's sometimes best to keep things on a surface level. Stay in touch with what's necessary, but keep it friendly and positive. Not everyone needs to have a central place in your life—especially those who don't bring positivity or support. Protecting your energy doesn't make you cold; it just allows you to focus on the people and relationships that truly matter.”

### **Career**

Spend time figuring out what you actually want and don't be afraid to try something different. Don't be afraid to explore something unconventional. Education is important today in order to compete for jobs so choose something you believe you can enjoy because you'll be working for a long time. And remember, it's never too late to change direction.

### **Finances**

When you're young and your expenses aren't huge yet, try to save a little whenever you can. Even small amounts really do add up over time, and having a financial cushion gives you options—whether it's moving to a new city, taking a course, or just having peace of mind. I've learned that building this habit early doesn't mean being miserly; it's about giving yourself freedom and flexibility for the future.

### **Self Discovery**

I dared to try something new, even though 'life' at the time felt very safe —maybe a little too safe, actually—and didn't feel quite right. Taking that step was scary, but it taught me a lot about myself: what I enjoy, what challenges I can handle, and what kind of life I really want. Sometimes the safest path isn't the most fulfilling, and stepping out of your comfort zone can open doors you didn't even know were there.

### **Enjoying the Present**

You can enjoy life now while still keeping an eye on the future—without worrying too much. Figuring out what you really want in life whether that's your education, career, or even a life partner and family—takes time, and that's completely normal. Don't feel pressured to have everything sorted or to follow the path others expect. Life is long, and there's space to figure things out at your own pace.





**Cristina Bocanete, 53, a Romanian decorator and mother of one, offers her perspective on embracing growth and balance.**

#### **Relationships & Friendships**

Always choose quality over quantity when it comes to friendships. Not everyone is meant to stay

In your life - and that can be a blessing in disguise. When someone shows you who they really are and it's clear they're not good for you, believe them and let them go. Many of the people we meet are acquaintances rather than true friends, and that's okay.

#### **Career**

If you don't see yourself in what you're doing, it's okay to walk away. Your career should never cost you your happiness. One bad day is normal, but if it turns into weeks or months of unhappiness, it's not worth it. Don't be afraid to start over. Sometimes beginning again is the bravest and healthiest choice you can make.

#### **Finances**

Money is hard to earn and so easy to spend, but try to save a little whenever you can. Be proud of what you make because it's the result of your hard work. There's a special joy in treating yourself with money you earned, knowing the effort and time that went into it. Saving, even in small amounts, makes those moments even sweeter.

#### **Self Discovery**

You'll learn the most about yourself through mistakes, so don't be afraid of them. They're not failures, they're lessons, each one teaching you how to grow. Every experience, good or bad, shows you something about who you are. Above all, do what makes you happy. Don't measure your life to how much you're pleasing others; ask yourself if you're truly happy. At the end of the day, you are the one person who will always have your own back.

#### **Enjoying the Present**

You're so young, I promise you, you are not running out of time, and you don't need to have everything figured out right now. Every age has its own beauty, so enjoy where you are. Everyone has their own path, and things happen when they are meant to. Don't pressure yourself to hit milestones by a certain age; focus instead on what feels right for you. Live in the present, because the truth is, none of us know what tomorrow - or even next year - will bring. The best thing you can do is make today meaningful.



Image Courtesy of Hugh Davison

We walk in their shoes—every step tells a story, revealing the paths, missteps, and wisdom that shaped them

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a bright pink, sleeveless, form-fitting dress and black high-heeled shoes, is hanging from a dark wooden ledge in a tunnel. She has her arms raised and is looking directly at the camera. The tunnel has a brick floor and concrete walls. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows.

*PINK ISN'T JUST PRETTY,  
IT'S POWERFUL.*

*NOT SOFT, NOT SIMPLE—  
A COLOUR THAT DISARMS  
AND REFUSES TO BE QUIET,  
ALWAYS LOUDER THAN IT LOOKS.*

Photographer  
Zhong Feng

Art Direction and Styling  
Ramona Gabriela Toderescu

Model  
Kiah Thorne



Photographer  
Zhong Feng

Art Direction and Styling  
Ramona Gabriela Toderascu

Model  
Lara Miller

# PLOT TWIST: ADULTHOOD

Little Tonia had her heart set on becoming a rainforest vet, treating wild animals and exploring the Amazon like a real-life explorer. She still pursues wild stories today, just not with a stethoscope. She has the same spirit of adventure but is preparing to become a journalist. Same sense of adventure, just different kind of jungle.



ANTONIA



KANU

Mini Kanu had aspirations of becoming a chef, graduating from culinary school, and opening a successful restaurant. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in journalism while continuing to cook lovingly for her loved ones. Just now, the recipes have changed.



HANNAH

Vedika aimed for the stars - literally - dreaming of life as an astronaut. Instead, she's a graphic designer, sketching entire galaxies onto a screen. The cosmos just looks a little different these days.



VEDIKA



FRANCESCA

Little Fran saw herself travelling the world and rescuing endangered animals on at a time. She continues to battle for endangered lives, this time for humankind, while working for the government.



ALICE

Alice once pictured herself in court, barrister's robe on, prepared to argue a case. Somewhere along the way, she switched from obligation for passion, and now she's at one of the best fashion schools studying journalism – proving that trusting your gut beats following a script any day.



Hannah had always dreamed of living on a farm with five dogs and two of every other animal. She now works as a mechanical engineer at McLaren instead, where she still works with horsepower, just not the kind she anticipated.



RAMONA

Little Ramona imagined she would be walking the runway at Milan Fashion Week. As it happens, she's actually reporting from backstage, pen in hand, taking in the mayhem she had hoped to traverse. Different perspective, same reality.

# New Countries, New You: Moving Abroad in Your 20s

**Leaving home in your twenties isn't just about geography; it's about identity. Uprooting yourself means more than swapping one postcode for another—it's about testing your resilience, rewriting your daily routines, and discovering how much of who you are is shaped by where you live. Moving abroad magnifies those lessons, forcing you to adapt, surrender control, and embrace growth in ways that staying put never could.**

There's something about your twenties that makes leaving home feel both terrifying and exhilarating. Maybe it's career uncertainty, the instability of friendships, or the sense that the world is bigger than the city you grew up in – that somewhere out there, life is waiting for you. For some, that urge turns into action: moving abroad. Adventure, independence, growth – and a lot of stress.

Lucy, 25, moved to China when she was 21. What was meant to be a year working as an au pair, immersing herself in language and culture, was cut short by the onset of COVID-19. "I had no idea what I was walking into. I knew less than ten words of Mandarin, so I almost didn't have enough knowledge to be scared," she says. "If anyone had told me a single thing about moving abroad the first time, I wouldn't have done it. I'm so glad I went knowing nothing. It was baptism by fire."

For Priya, 27, moving abroad meant leaving India to pursue her career in fashion marketing in London. She was drawn by the opportunities she couldn't access at home. "If you're lucky enough in your 20s, there will be a train taking you away from your home," she says. "It's really important to get on that train and surrender to the endless possibilities that lie in front of you."

Leaving home means navigating logistics, culture shock, and emotional upheaval all at once. When life already feels uncertain, the weight of those challenges is magnified. Independence becomes a test of balance—between careers and friendships, comfort and risk, survival and growth.

From visas and bank accounts to finding somewhere safe to live, the smallest details suddenly feel like mountains. What was once a given at home – knowing where to shop, how to ask for help, or who to call when things go wrong – becomes an obstacle course in a new country. The pressure of building a life from scratch can make even the most confident person feel unsteady.

Lucy recalls her first week in China: "The first night with my host family, I was like, 'Fuck, I'm in China. I can't get home. I've got to get on with it.' I had to put myself on manual mode and figure out the basics, like eating and showering."

Priya reflects similarly: "Starting a new life anywhere is a big deal – it's not just about the country; it's about leaving your comfort zone. Making my first three meals by myself, learning to cook dishes my mum makes – those moments made me think, 'This is why I came here.' Living here forced me to become more responsible with money and taught me perspective."

Small, everyday differences hit hardest. Lucy says, "You don't realise how much of a frame of reference is built by your culture until you go somewhere else. Simple things like using chopsticks or

measuring a suitcase became daily lessons in humility." But culture shock isn't just about food or language; it's woven into the very idea of family and community. Family structures and community expectations vary as well. "Families are very different – children grow up knowing community and family come first. It made me see how culture shapes everyday life," Lucy continues.

For Priya, the challenge wasn't just cultural—it was learning to live with uncertainty. "Surrendering to the unknown taught me to navigate life with less structure and more curiosity."

Every challenge carries its own reward, and often the toughest adjustments bring the biggest payoffs. For Lucy, it was running a half-marathon on the Great Wall of China, learning Mandarin, and building independence. "I had never lived away from home before. Living in China really shaped me – it was when I discovered who I was."

Yet the lessons abroad didn't end when Lucy left China. Returning home to England brought its own revelations. She reflects, "I had changed. Even walking around Morrisons felt foreign because I'd adapted to a different life. Coming home felt like belonging – in China, no matter how much I learnt, I always felt like an outsider. Home is where your frame of reference works." She adds, "China taught me that there isn't just one right way of doing things. Different cultures work differently, and you can learn from both."

Priya echoes this: "I am a lot more grown-up than I was when I first left home. I am more independent, more self-reliant. I know in my bones that no matter what happens, I can survive."

Both describe resilience, perspective, and adaptability. Lucy says, "Things don't faze me in the same way now because I handled so much at 21. Life abroad feels like a magical 'not your real life'. You can make mistakes, and there's always a way back. Life at home feels higher stakes – more real."

Priya adds, "Moving abroad teaches you to navigate life as it comes, and that's invaluable. You'll learn to embrace uncertainty."

If you're in your twenties and thinking about moving abroad, the message is simple: go. Do it. Don't think about it too much. Accept that it will be difficult, and figure it out as you go. Lucy says, "Moving somewhere completely new forces you to discover yourself. The more naïve you are, the more you learn. Even if it's challenging, it's worth it. You gain independence, perspective, and skills you wouldn't otherwise develop."

Priya agrees: "The chaos of moving abroad taught me lessons I wouldn't have learnt otherwise – independence, resilience, and self-awareness. Even when life felt like it would never be okay, I learnt that I could survive without constant support around me. Surrender to the endless possibilities. You can't plan for everything, but you can learn and grow from it all."

Moving abroad in your twenties isn't just about your location – it's about changing yourself. It's stressful, eye-opening, exhilarating, and sometimes lonely. It tests your courage and resilience, pushes you beyond comfort zones, and rewards you with moments that become lifelong memories.



## Tips for moving abroad

### Opening a Bank Account

Research the main banks in your new country. Some may require proof of address, a local phone number, a work contract, or even a tax identification number (TIN). Opening an account early helps you avoid expensive international fees and makes paying rent, bills, and daily expenses much smoother.

### Get Connected: SIM Cards & Internet

Check which local providers offer prepaid SIM cards or mobile plans. In some countries, you might need a local ID or bank account to activate a SIM. In the UK, for example, you often need a bank account to get a phone contract—but also a local mobile number to open a bank account—so planning ahead is key. Don't forget to sort out the internet at your new home—Wi-Fi installation can take days, or even weeks.

### Housing & Rental Basics

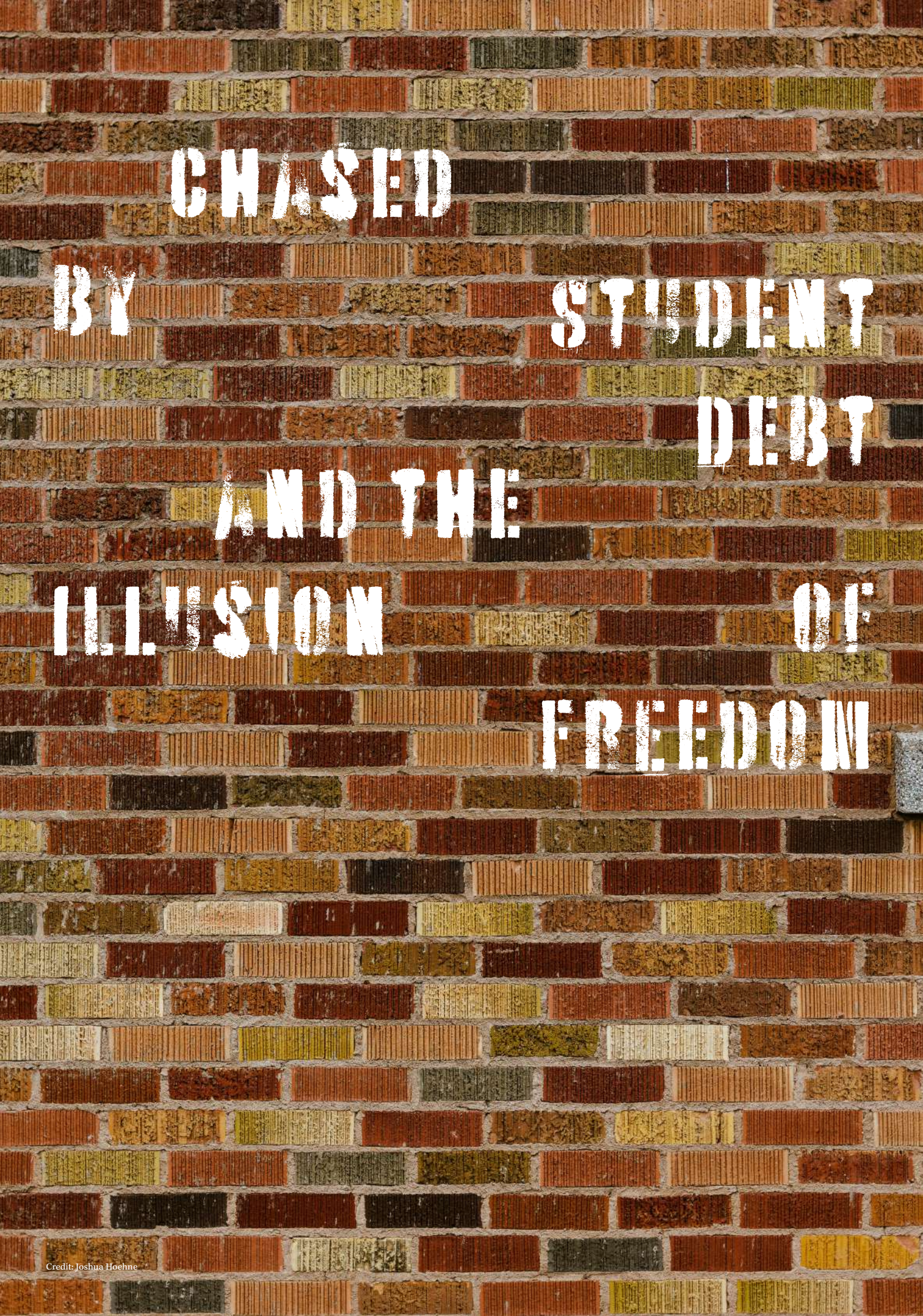
Understand the rental market and contract conditions. Some countries require deposits equal to one or several months' rent, a guarantor, or references from previous landlords and employers. Read contracts carefully—knowing the fine print can save you a lot of stress later.

### Medical Care

Figure out whether you need private health insurance or if you're covered by the public healthcare system. Registering with a local doctor or general practitioner early will save time and worry if you get sick.

### Understand Public Transport

Research how buses, trains, and metro systems work in your new city. Many countries offer transport cards or apps that make paying easier and cheaper than buying single tickets. Local apps—like Citymapper, which operates in 71 European cities—can help you plan routes, estimate travel times, and navigate like a pro.



CHASED  
BY STUDENT  
DEBT  
AND THE  
ILLUSION OF  
FREEDOM

**As wages stagnate and bills climb, even the smallest splurges can feel revolutionary when money is tight. Everyday purchases become tiny acts of independence, resilience, and quiet rebellion, revealing how young adults claim agency, savour micro-victories, and find fleeting freedom amid mounting costs and the pressures of early adulthood.**

When payday hits, for a brief, shining moment, you feel rich. You buy your work lunch without guilt, cover an Uber, and maybe even flirt with the idea of a weekend trip. Suddenly, someone suggesting getting tickets to a Pitbull concert sounds like the best idea you've ever had. You just got paid; why the hell not?

Then rent leaves your account, your student loan slices off its share, and before you know it, you're back to googling: "meals you can make with just pasta and olive oil".

This is adulthood in your twenties: a constant balancing act between entry-level salaries, mounting debt, and the creeping cost of living that climbs faster than any paycheck. Add in social obligations and the quiet gnaw of Instagram comparison, and suddenly, adulthood starts to feel less like a milestone and more like a subscription you didn't agree to.

"A few months after I graduated, I got an email from student finance with my full debt listed," says Molly, 25. "You don't realise how much money that is until you see it written down and compare it to what you actually earn. With interest on top, it feels impossible."

And what you actually earn isn't much. In 2024, the median graduate salary was just £26,500 – barely above that of non-graduates at £19,500 and still far off the £29,500 earned by postgraduates. In London, rent can swallow half of that. The math doesn't add up.

The pattern is universal: start the month on a high, free-fall into overdraft by week three – or worse, dip into the savings that were supposed to carry you forward.

"My savings account stopped being what it was meant for a long time ago," says Alex, 26. "It's really humbling when you transfer from your savings to your main account for a lager of Carling. The cost of simply existing in London during a cost-of-living crisis is draining."

And this is where the coping kicks in. Doom scrolling, doom spending, retail therapy – a whole cycle designed to trick your brain into feeling like you've got it all together. It's a lie, of course, one we see right through while still groaning at that TfL charge notification at 2 a.m.

And yet, somewhere between low wages, bills, and overdrafts, we find beauty in the small things. We return to our inner child. When the bigger milestones feel impossibly far away, a new pattern has emerged: using our newfound autonomy to reclaim tiny joys. Whether it's a hobby we once

abandoned years ago or a toy we always wanted but our parents couldn't afford, we reach back to those fragments of childhood.

"I always end up going back to buying things I wanted as a child," says Lauren, 24. "I recently bought the Lego set I always wanted. It's ridiculous, but honestly, it was the happiest I've ever felt all month. Half of my pay goes to buying things my parents couldn't afford for me when I was younger. Having my own income now – freedom to finally get what I want without asking anyone – feels liberating."

Payday, it turns out, isn't about wealth. It's about agency. About the small freedoms that signal independence. At the end of the day, our possessions become extensions of ourselves. Maybe what we buy with our so-called 'adult money' is also a way of healing our inner child. It's a paradox of our twenties: in a decade where long-term financial stability feels out of reach, small purchases offer immediate satisfaction, autonomy, and – for a fleeting moment – the illusion of control.

"To me, being financially stable is just being able to pay rent without asking my parents for help," says Khloe, 25. "I feel rich if I can afford therapy and a Pret in the same week."

These micro-markers of stability matter. They're independence measured in small victories, proof that you're surviving without a safety net. Traditional markers - buying a house, owning a car, watching your savings grow - feel distant, nearly unattainable.

"My parents bought a house at 25," Khloe continues. "At 25, I'm still living with strangers from SpareRoom in a shoeboxed room somewhere in Brixton. Buying a house now feels impossible compared to my parents' generation."

These delays aren't about choice; they're the product of rising costs and stagnating wages. Yet the pressure to keep up remains, leaving many of us caught between impossible expectations and our own realities.

Maybe that's the point. Our twenties were never meant to be neat. They're chaotic by design – a messy decade for experimenting, failing, and figuring out what we value. Financial chaos is formative. It forces scrappiness, resilience, and the ability to find joy in the smallest, most absurd purchases.

So yes, the mortgage can wait. In the meantime, buy the Lego set. Order a matcha. Pay for therapy if you can. These tiny freedoms aren't frivolous – they're survival. Each purchase, each little splurge, is a claim on your autonomy, a signal that you can navigate the chaos your way.

In the end, maybe that's the beauty of your twenties; you're not supposed to have it all figured out. You're supposed to splurge, stumble, save badly, and start again. Chaos isn't failure – it's the blueprint.

## Struggling with debt?

Student loans, rent, and living costs can feel overwhelming. Free, confidential advice is available to help you manage and plan your finances:

MoneyHelper offers free, confidential support to help you manage your finances and plan ahead.

**Debt advice:** Speak to an adviser about repayment options and make sure you're claiming all available benefits.

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# DATING IN CHAOS

**Navigating your twenties in the world of dating can feel like a constant balancing act between freedom and connection. Ghosting, swipes, social pressure, and cultural expectations collide, shaping how young adults experience love, intimacy, and self-discovery. Amid the mess and uncertainty, learning to set your own rules—and embrace the unexpected—becomes its own kind of mastery.**

They say love finds you when you least expect it. In practice, dating in your twenties feels more like scrolling through a job board full of rejection and unanswered messages. Is being single freedom—or humiliation? In this decade, the line between autonomy and loneliness is thinner than ever.

Being single can feel like standing at the edge of every possibility, wondering which path leads to connection and which to disappointment. It's a space of independence, yes, but also one of quiet pressure, comparison, and the constant question of what everyone else is doing with their lives. Some days, it's exhilarating: you can go to a gallery opening, take a last-minute trip, or stay home in your pyjamas with a bag of crisps and a half-burnt scented candle, and no one can judge you. Other days, it's just loneliness.

Tom, a 24-year-old legal recruiter, puts it bluntly: "For men, being single is either inadequacy or independence. For women, it's more about desirability or choice." Society applauds men for enjoying bachelorhood, while women who prioritise themselves quietly endure scrutiny. The underlying assumption is clear: women shouldn't need freedom—they should be paired up—whereas men are expected to explore.

Modern dating only amplifies the chaos. Emily, a 25-year-old solicitor, has logged years on Bumble, Hinge, and Tinder and calls the experience "the worst thing the world has invented after contraceptives". Swipes become a transactional exercise where your worth is judged in mere seconds, and forming a genuine connection feels almost impossible. "You go on dates, hoping the next one will be the love of your life, whilst they're wondering what colour your underwear will be," she says. In theory, singles are supposed to radiate independence. In practice, most of us are just waiting for a decent text back.

Ghosting, AI-generated texts, fleeting trends like "hot girl summer", and the performative side of dating apps add to the absurdity. "It's defeating," Emily laughs, a little bitterly. "You're trying to meet someone, and all these rules, algorithms, and expectations are in your way." Even with freedom, there's pressure to perform happiness while navigating the chaos.

Yet being single isn't inherently lonely. Sophie, a 27-year-old data analyst, who has explored casual dating, sees this stage as a time for clarity. "Being single is an important stage of life. You learn what you want, who you are, and how to depend on yourself rather than someone else." Freedom and loneliness coexist, she explains, and the ability to navigate both is a skill in its own right. It's messy, yes—but messy in a formative, even empowering way.

Cultural messaging complicates matters further. Social media and Hollywood shape what we think we should feel about our relationship status. Couples' feeds showcase polished love, while singles scroll comparing themselves to highlight reels. "There's pressure to be happy when you're single, but there's also pressure to be happy in a relationship," Tom says. Romantic bliss is curated online; single people are expected to radiate fulfilment even when reality is complicated.

Gendered double standards persist. Men are applauded for sexual freedom or commitment issues, while women who exercise choice face judgement. Sophie notes the internalised conflict: "I love my independence, but there are moments when you realise you still crave intimacy. It doesn't make me weak; it makes me human." Society tells women to be independent but also to pair up; men are rarely held to the same contradictions.

Hollywood reinforces this quietly but consistently. In countless films, the woman's story arc ends with romance, her journey framed around love and completion, while the male lead spends the film "finding himself"—making mistakes, learning life lessons, navigating life—before he ever arrives at a relationship. The underlying message is clear: male chaos is adventurous; female chaos is a problem to fix. Tom sums it up: "It's a male-driven narrative. There's an underlying assumption that women shouldn't need freedom—they should be paired up—whereas men are expected to explore."

And social media adds fuel to the fire. Swipe culture, curated couples, and viral dating discourse amplify the pressure to conform to a narrative that rarely fits reality. "You're going on dates with strangers hoping something sticks. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't—but at least you're trying and putting yourself out there," Emily says.

For twenty-somethings navigating this world, the stakes feel high. Freedom is valuable, but so is intimacy. Autonomy is empowering, yet desire is human. Sophie frames it perfectly: "Being single is about learning to balance freedom and connection. There's no right way, just your way."

Perhaps the real lesson is embracing unpredictability. Ghosting, swipes, unreturned texts, and social pressures are not failures—they're part of learning who you are, what you want, and how you navigate relationships, online or offline.

Tom offers perspective: "People think being single is a negative, but really, it's just a stage. You learn about yourself and what matters before committing fully to someone else."

By the end of your twenties, you realise there is no perfect script. Society's expectations, dating apps, and cultural messaging shape the narrative, but they don't define it. What matters is discovering your own rhythm between freedom and connection, independence and desire, and chaos and clarity. Sophie frames it perfectly: "It's messy, but that's what makes it yours. It's not about waiting for someone to complete you—it's about learning to navigate life, love, and yourself."

Single or partnered, your twenties are a playground and a battleground. It's messy, funny, frustrating, and deeply personal. And perhaps, in embracing the chaos, you find the truest form of adulthood: the ability to write your own rules, navigate your own emotions, and own your choices—every swipe, ghost, and late-night text included.



# *The Age Trap:* How Bias Keeps



Credit: Maria Lysenko

# Young Women from Leading

**Young women enter the workplace full of talent and ambition—but invisible pressures push them to appear older, tougher, or less themselves. Age and gender shape who gets taken seriously, who gets overlooked, and how organisations must confront bias to create fairer opportunities.**

Put down the retinol. Throw out your Mary Janes and hair bows. Apparently, if women want to succeed at work, they must appear older.

Research by McKinsey & Company reveals that nearly half of women under 30 say their age has negatively impacted their experience at work, compared to just 35% of men in the same age group. This comes from the largest study of women in corporate America, shedding light on a form of discrimination that is often overlooked: ageism against the young.

Age-related bias affects women across the board, but it particularly targets those at the beginning of their careers. Whether it's being passed over for promotions or excluded from opportunities, young women face a unique challenge. This discrimination is even more pronounced for women of colour.

During interviews for this report, several South East Asian women expressed that they had experienced discrimination for “looking too young for the responsibility.” One woman, who asked to remain anonymous, admitted she wore heavier makeup, “more typical of the older women in the company”, in an effort to appear more mature and impress her line manager.

A hiring manager at a top-tier technology company shared his insights on the generational divide in the workplace. “There's always been a hostile attitude toward younger generations,” he said, “but it's intensified in recent years.” He pointed to the stereotype of Gen Z employees as “lazy” or “difficult,” which he accepted was not true, but felt it was sticking. According to him, recent graduates tend to prioritise wellbeing and are more willing to challenge authority, behaviours that some senior colleagues interpret as a lack of work ethic.

Amelia, a 24-year-old working at a leisure centre, believes her age and gender delayed her promotion. “My managers didn't think customers would take me seriously in a managerial role,” she said. “Now that I am a manager, I have to lock up the football pitches alone at night. I feel unsafe, but I don't think I can raise it as a concern. They'd probably see me as incompetent, because my male colleagues, who are the same age as me, aren't worried about their safety.”

These experiences highlight a broader issue: the workplace often fails to consider how gender and age intersect, particularly in male-dominated industries. A young man entering a trade role may not think twice about working alone in clients' homes, but a woman in the same situation might be forced to weigh personal safety against professional opportunity. This unspoken reality can deter women from entering certain careers altogether.

Anna, 23, a recent graduate applying for entry-level roles, shared that a university careers officer advised her to omit the year of her graduation from her CV and LinkedIn profile. “You don't want them to be able to work out how old you are,” she was told. “They won't pay you as much if they know you're fresh out of university.”

According to career coach Charlotte Rooney, as reported by AllBright, the burden should not fall on young women to disguise their age or change their behaviour. Instead, she argues that honest conversations need to happen at senior levels of leadership to address these unconscious biases and to actively work to dismantle them.

Discrimination against young women in the workplace is often dismissed or minimised, yet its effects are tangible and far-reaching. From pay inequities to stalled career growth, the message is clear: young women are undervalued in the workplace. But the responsibility to address this bias doesn't lie with those experiencing it. Organisations must look inward, challenge outdated assumptions, and create environments where young women are not only welcomed but empowered to lead.

# BEIGEL BAKE HIGHSNOBIETY

## What your favourite bagel says about you

### **Smoked Salmon and Cream cheese**

Posh and effortless, you probably go pilates every morning

### **Salt Beef**

Bold and unapologetic, you probably work in finance and have strong opinions about everything

### **Avocado**

Trendy and slightly extra, you probably start every day with a matcha latte and a journal

### **Tuna Mayo and Sweetcorn**

Loyal and nostalgic, you love a classic and probably joined the London Marathon





NOT IN

HIGH NOBIETY

LONDON

FALL/WINTER 2024

Coca-Cola  
Sold here

Harden's  
2022

Harden's  
2024

Harden's  
2025

Photographer  
Zhong Feng

Art Direction and Styling  
Ramona Gabriela Toderascu

Model  
Kiah Thorne

Credit: Kateryna Hliznitsova



# Conversations With Virgin Mary

Virginity isn't a milestone, a moral score, or a gossip topic—it's a spotlight on the double standards women still face. This story follows one young woman as she carves her own path through myths, judgement, and cultural pressure, proving that intention, autonomy, and self-determined timelines are the real acts of rebellion.

Meet Josie, a 26-year-old Irish Catholic and creative assistant from East London. Her friends call her the Virgin Mary 2.0. I first met her months ago in a corner shop in London Fields. I was reaching for my ritual tub of Ben & Jerry's; she was buying something far less indulgent: a pregnancy test. We caught each other's eye, then glanced down at what the other was holding. The contrast was too much - ice cream versus Clearblue - and we both burst into giggles.

It felt like the most girlhood moment: two strangers laughing at the quiet absurdity of being women. She told me she was a virgin, the whole thing a drunken dare with her friends. I wished her good luck and went on my way. Two weeks later, I bumped into her again - same shop, same aisle, different expression. "It was positive," she whispered, as though confessing a sin.

Now, I'm at her kitchen table in Dalston. She insists on serving me her "infamous" avocado toast with poached eggs. Josie flits around the kitchen, giddy like a child on Christmas morning, ready to tell me the full story - the one that once made her feel like Mary, Jesus's mum.

"My period was two months late," she begins, curling her fingers around a coffee mug. "It had been late before, but it had never been more than a few days. My friends were celebrating passing the SQE, and someone joked I should take a pregnancy test. I thought it was hilarious. I mean, I'm a virgin - what are the odds?"

The odds, apparently, were terrifying. Back at the flat, she unwrapped the Clearblue stick, expecting nothing. Two lines appeared. Laughter turned to panic. "I thought the alcohol was messing with my vision, but the longer I stared, the clearer it got. I was pregnant. Or at least, the test said I was."

They ran back to the shop, bought another test, and this time it came back negative. Google was useless, ChatGPT congratulated her, and she was too terrified to call her Catholic mum. Eventually, a gynaecologist confirmed: work stress had delayed her period. The first test was a false positive.

But in that moment - staring at two lines - Josie felt centuries of Catholic guilt, purity myths, and societal judgement collapse onto her.

"When it comes to my virginity, I've always felt like it was either something to be ashamed of or something sacred," she admits. "I never wanted men to know. If I told a guy I was a virgin, he'd stop caring about who I am and only want to be my first. It felt like a fetish."

She describes adolescence as a constant game of comparison. "At 15, loads of my friends had already had sex. I felt behind. In uni, too. Men don't want virgins, but they don't want you to have too many bodies either. They want you in that middle zone: experienced enough to know what you're doing, but not 'slutty'. It's exhausting."

Virginity, Josie explains, is treated like a commodity. Women are judged for having too much sex or none at all; men, meanwhile, are expected to lose it early, even celebrated for it. "I went on a double date recently," she says, "and the guy already knew I was a virgin. He barely listened to me - he just wanted to sleep with me. It was

# "I was a virgin staring at two lines."

dehumanising."

Being raised Catholic added another layer of pressure. "Sometimes people assume I'm saving myself for marriage. I'm not. It just hasn't happened. But Catholic culture always tied purity to value. And that's ridiculous. My body is my timeline."

Biology, of course, tells us virginity is a social construct. There's no medical test for it. Hymens don't "break" as proof; they stretch and change from exercise, tampons, or simply from being inactive. Yet countless women across cultures are still subjected to invasive "virginity tests" or judged for whether they bleed on wedding-night sheets. Josie reminds me how deep these double standards run.

"Historically, brides had to prove they were virgins. Men didn't. In fact, they were encouraged to go to brothels as teenagers. You see it in Game of Thrones or even sitcoms like New Girl, where Nick's dad hires prostitutes for him. For men, sex was a rite of passage. For women, virginity was currency."

Pop culture hasn't exactly helped. From American Pie to Easy A, virginity is either a joke, a stigma, or a fetish. Rarely is it just neutral. "It's always portrayed as something you're supposed to lose, like dropping a burden," Josie says. "But for me, it's not about losing anything. It's about choosing."

At 25, Josie calls herself an "unintentional virgin". Not religious, not saving herself, not naïve. Just someone waiting until it feels right. "People think being a virgin makes you inexperienced or childish. But actually, I know exactly what I want and what I won't settle for. That doesn't make me behind. It makes me intentional."

Sitting across from her, it's clear her story dismantles the myths we've inherited - from Catholic purity culture to misogynistic history to Hollywood scripts. Virginity is not a medical fact nor a moral marker. It's a construct, one that continues to weigh more heavily on women than men.

"Sometimes I wish I could be carefree and just go home with someone after a night out," she shrugs. "But that's not me. I'm going at my own pace. It's my body, my timeline."

In 2025, that shouldn't sound radical. And yet, it still does. Josie's story isn't really about virginity at all - it's about autonomy. Whether you've had sex once, a hundred times, or not at all, the real rebellion lies in refusing to let culture, religion, or partners dictate your pace. Her so-called "unintentional virginity" becomes something bigger: a reminder that choice, not circumstance, defines us.

What Josie carries isn't purity, shame, or a ticking clock - it's intention. In a world still measuring women by what they have or haven't done, her story insists on a different metric: agency.

Virgin or not, the only timeline worth honouring is the one you set yourself.

# The Watermark Generation

Words by: Kanu Gang

**In a world where algorithms dictate aesthetics, trends masquerade as personality, and every purchase becomes a performance, young adults are navigating identity like never before. Likes, shares, and curated feeds have replaced introspection, turning self-discovery into a scrollable, monetised spectacle. The challenge isn't just who you are—it's who you're allowed to be online, in a world where authenticity comes with a hashtag.**

Identity used to be this messy, unruly thing, like a junk drawer filled with contradictions, inherited trauma, and half-formed opinions about whether pineapple belongs on pizza. It was shaped by geography, family dysfunction, and whatever books happened to be lying around your childhood home. Philosophers spent centuries wrestling with questions of selfhood: Descartes had his “*I think, therefore I am*”, while Heidegger wondered about authentic being-in-the-world.

Now we have “I purchase, therefore I am”, and our being-in-the-world is mediated by whatever trend or aesthetic the algorithm decided we should embody this month. From socks to politics, relationships to belts, everything today comes with a watermark, a breadcrumb trail that leads straight back to your ‘For You Page’.

The ‘self’ is split between being a mood board and a vision board. It’s not that there weren’t aspirations before - it’s that now, on the surface at least, they all look eerily the same. We curate our personalities like interior designers working on a very expensive, very public renovation project. The question isn’t “Who am I?” anymore, but “What am I trying

to look like I am?” And increasingly, the answer arrives pre-packaged with a logo and a targeted Instagram ad.

We’ve all heard of ‘-cores’ by now. Every year, a new one emerges (or an old one resurfaces), trickling down from runways to department stores. Miranda Priestly’s cerulean monologue in *The Devil Wears Prada* still rings uncomfortably true. Every trip becomes a new wardrobe; every trend, a fleeting costume. The clothes rarely make it into everyday rotation, and when closets inevitably overflow, the cycle ends in Vinted, charity shops, or landfills. Bank accounts and selves alike become casualties of this churn.

Because this isn’t just overconsumption. It’s over-identification. Each “core” promises instant personality, community, and – most importantly – content. You’re not just buying an aesthetic; you’re buying a performance of selfhood optimised for engagement.

The Labubu phenomenon captures it perfectly: grown adults forming emotional attachments to £25 vinyl toys that look like fever dreams about dental hygiene. These aren’t just collectibles; they’re identity totems for the algorithmically dispossessed. Or take Dubai chocolate, that grotesquely expensive, Instagram-optimised confection that somehow became shorthand for luxury and sophistication. Nothing says “I have my life together” quite like £20 chocolate that tastes like fiscal irresponsibility.

On the surface, it’s funny. But underneath, it’s bleak. These things stand in for us. Instead of slowly building identity from experience, contradiction, and memory, we outsource it to commodities. Marx wrote about fetishism, how objects replace relationships, and how we mistake things for people. He probably didn’t predict googly-eyed figurines on his grave, but the principle holds. The Labubu isn’t just ironic – it’s prophetic.

We’ve reached peak commodity fetishism: people are literally forming parasocial relationships with inanimate objects that have been designed to look like they have personalities.

Marx is probably having a good laugh in his grave (or a good cry) at how completely his predictions have materialised. We don’t just alienate our labour anymore; we’ve outsourced our entire sense of self to brands that promise to reflect our inner lives back to us for a modest fee.

Every morning, millions of twenty-somethings wake up and ask not “Who am I today?” but “What am I today?” The algorithm serves up a menu: cottagecore, mob wife, office siren. Pick your character, learn your lines, and don’t forget to tag the brands. Identity formation has collapsed into content strategy. Personality is branding; branding is performance; and performance has replaced being.

And yet, the cruellest part is how all this gets marketed to us as authenticity. “Find your true self with our fall collection.” “Express your unique personality with these trending items.” Be yourself, but on our terms. Brands don’t just want to sell us products; they want us to sell ourselves. We confuse self-expression with consumption and having a personality with having a personal brand.

This isn’t just about vanity or superficiality. This is about what happens when the most intimate aspects of human experience – our sense of self, our relationships, our values – get fed through the machinery of capitalism and come out the other side as lifestyle content.

The language of authenticity has been co-opted so completely that we’ve forgotten what it might mean to be authentic in a way that can’t be packaged and sold back to us. We’re living through the greatest identity crisis in human history, and we’re solving it by buying things.

The solution isn't to pine for some imaginary past when identity was pure and untouched by commerce. The past never existed. But what we can do is remember that real identity is not curated; it's accumulated. It's made up of contradictions, boredom, awkwardness, and thoughts that don't translate into content. It's the interests that don't photograph well. It's conversations that don't go viral.

The most radical thing you can do in 2025 isn't to buy into the latest trend; it's to be genuinely, embarrassingly, unmarketably yourself. To like things without needing to post them. To think thoughts that don't fit into captions. To resist being turned into a lifestyle product.

If Descartes' certainty was "*I think, therefore I am,*" ours has become "I buy, therefore I perform." But performance isn't being. And until we relearn how to coexist with the outside market, we'll keep mistaking logos for lives.

Maybe the real treasure was the authentic selves we lost along the way to becoming brands. And maybe, just maybe, we can find our way back to being gloriously, messily, unprofitably human.

The Labubu will decompose eventually. Your student loans will outlast it. Choose your identities accordingly.





Longchamp Medium Bag  
£110



Boots Non Slip Jaw Clip  
£2.50



Amazon Hair Metal Clips  
£2.98

Rhode Pocket Blush  
£25 each



K18 Molecular repair oil 10ml  
£27



Aesop Hand Balm  
£27



Prada Paradoxe Intense 50ml  
£112



Tatcha Dewy Skin Mist  
£23

# UNZIPPED: The Chaos every 20-something carries everywhere



Shiseido Eyelash Curler  
£27



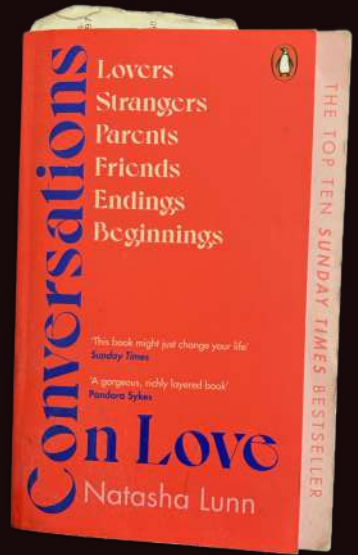
Provisional Driving Licence



Hycosan Extra Eye Drops  
£11.99



Apple Earphones  
£19



Conversations on Love by Natasha Lunn



Gisou Honey Infused Lip Oil  
£24



Denman Grooming Hairbrush  
£17



Contact Lenses

Digital Camera  
Ideally bought from Ebay



Oyster Card

Boots Pregnancy Test  
£4.99



Perfume Sample

## Dirty Martini

*A timeless classic—sophisticated with just enough edge. Best served on blurry nights, during 2am oversharing, or when you're still figuring out the whole 'adulting' thing.*

### Ingredients:

4–6 green olives, pitted, plus 25ml of the brine

Ice cubes

150ml gin

25ml dry vermouth

### Method:

Step 1: Chill the glass. Place two martini glasses in the fridge to cool. Thread the olives onto cocktail sticks and set aside.

Step 2: Mix it up. Fill a jug or mixing glass with plenty of ice. Pour in the gin, vermouth, and olive brine. Stir slowly until the outside of the jug feels ice-cold. Taste to check the dilution is just right.

Step 3: Serve and savour. Strain the mixture into the chilled glasses, garnish with your olive skewers, and serve immediately.



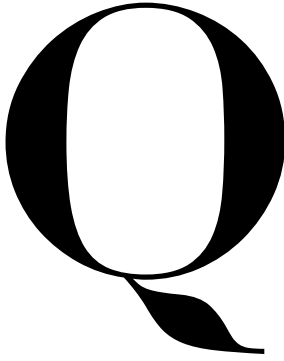
# Bad Decisions, Great Stories: *The Chaos Playbook*



If chaos were a person, it would be Shahil—stumbling into strangers’ weddings, crashing cars, and “accidentally” trying every drug, yet always grinning, unfazed, and somehow employed.

Born in Delhi and drifting between corporate gigs and India’s underground creative scene, he treats disorder as a lifestyle: dropping out of university in Chicago with no plan, befriending gang members, and once convincing his parents that a girl’s party injuries were caused by an imaginary cat named Rose.

He’s the Dennis the Menace of his friend group—only sharper, more self-aware, and weirdly philosophical—he talks about chaos like it’s a muse. When we spoke, he made a compelling case, somewhere between recklessness, manifestation, and what happens when you deep-fry 25 Dino Nuggets in search of secrets.



### **What's one chaotic thing you've done in life that you have absolutely no regrets about?**

'Dropping out of university, no question. I knew after two semesters that I wasn't doing it. I was submitting assignments, getting decent grades—but I wasn't showing up. I missed exams. I knew I wasn't going to finish.

When I looked at LinkedIn after quitting, I thought. "None of these places is going to hire me." It was reckless, sure, no backup plan at all, but it forced me to figure things out in my own chaotic way. If I hadn't taken that leap, I wouldn't be where I am now.'

### **Would you say dropping out was the most reckless thing you've done?**

'Haha, not really. I've crashed my car five times – that's reckless! But dropping out was definitely the kind of recklessness that worked out. Other times I've ended up crashing at random people's places with no plan, and sometimes that chaos leads to opportunities.'

### **Do you thrive in chaos, or is it just attracted to you?**

'I'm not always chaotic. Generally, in my industry, chaos is just part of it. There's no structure. Everyone's doing their own thing—friends, artists, managers, more friends posing as managers. It's not organised. But there's something in it that keeps you hooked.

### **What has chaos taught you?**

'Chaos taught me a lot. I kind of believe in manifestation, as cheesy as it sounds. I've always been the guy just to take the first step—and things somehow happen. Life unfolds around that decision. That's how I live.'

### **How do you balance a corporate job with a creative one?**

'I love what I do because it's a nascent space, if I had to use a technical term. The whole scene—Indian hip-hop, nightlife, fashion—it's all at a crossroads. There's culture coming in and going out. Local scenes are getting global attention. It's beautiful, but it's also chaotic because we're building something new. It hasn't been done before. You can't just copy-paste New York in the '90s. You have to grow it, organically.

I'm lucky. I found a corporate job that still overlaps with the creative world. I stay close to it, gain experience, and build credibility. And eventually, I'll do something of my own. But this feels like a movement. It feels real.'

### **Would you say chaos is expensive?**

'I feel like it is, but also, not really. I don't think chaos itself is expensive. I think it's addictive. People crave it. You need to have that kind of energy around you—it's about who you're with. It's not the place, it's the people. You could be anywhere and find chaos if the vibe is right.'

### **How chaotic would you say your life is?**

'Well, I don't go to work on Fridays, because my nights usually turn into mornings, haha. There's just a lot going on for me and the people around me. Substances, alcohol—it's just the environment. So even if I'm not participating, it's still the vibe around you. It's very easy to get lost in the moment.

One time, I air-fried Dino Nuggets—like 25 of them—and we just had them on paper towels. No plates, nothing. Took them down in the elevator, into the lobby, offering them to strangers in exchange for their deepest secrets. You would be surprised how many people would exchange their affair for a Dino nugget, especially when they are drunk.'

### **What's your most absurd 'it seemed like a good idea at the time' moment?**

'We used to talk to Uber drivers all the time. Once, I chatted with a homeless man who looked somewhat suspicious. He had his phone and wallet stolen, and needed to call someone. I gave him my phone and said, "You can wait in my apartment lobby while your ride comes." Turns out, he was in a gang—the Latin Kings in Chicago—and sold drugs. Gave me his Snapchat. Said his Bitmoji was a girl because he sells drugs and needs to hide his identity. He waited in my apartment lobby, and I was just like—"Sure, man."

### **What's your philosophy on consequences?**

'My philosophy is that consequences are just a cause-and-effect relationship. That's it. I'd say I'm fairly calculated about most things. But you've got to accept that sometimes your actions will have consequences—and you have to make peace with that. People use the word 'consequences' in a negative way, but it's just life. If I do this, then that will happen. That's all. Don't give it too much weight.'

### **Do you think chaos is a phase, a personality trait, or a coping mechanism?**

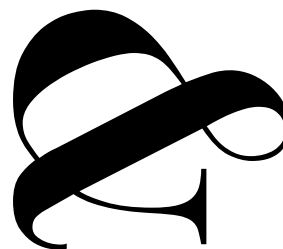
'All of the above. It is a phase—you evolve, and your chaos evolves. I'm still young, but I know it'll change. It's also a personality trait. It never really goes away. If you're someone who thrives in chaos, then your life will always have a bit of that madness. Even if you think you want a quieter life, deep down you know it'll never really happen. I've got a chip on my shoulder—I know that. And yeah, it's a coping mechanism too. Sometimes, to achieve something, you have to let go for a little bit. Step out of what's expected of you. And once you do that, things start happening.'

### **What's the most recent chaotic thing that's happened to you?**

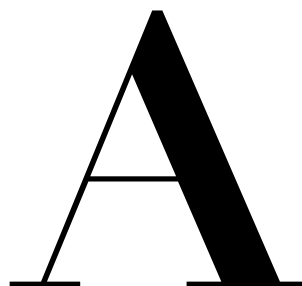
'Last night, I was at this party, just hanging out. I met these girls, and at one point, when I was bantering with a guy friend of mine, one of the girls started getting playful, like play-fighting. It was all jokes at first, but then she got a bit too aggressive. I woke up this morning with scratches all over—my neck, my arms. I didn't think much of it at first, but then I noticed blood clots on my arm. That's when I realised, I couldn't just leave it. So, I had to come up with a story to tell my parents. I told them I'd been hanging out with this guy friend who owns a cat—and that the cat scratched me while I was playing with it. I named the cat Rose, which is the same name as the girl who scratched me. So, I kept saying, 'Rose did this,' like it was some little inside joke with myself. My mom freaked out and made me get a rabies shot. So, I've been in and out of a fancy clinic for two days now, all because of 'Rose the cat'—who isn't real.'

Shahil doesn't pretend to have all the answers. But in his world, questions aren't meant to be answered anyway – they're meant to be tested, poked, laughed at, and maybe scratched up a little by a fake cat named Rose.

He calls it chaos. I call it brilliant.

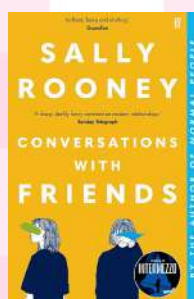


**“I once met a homeless guy who needed to borrow a phone. Turns out, he was part of the Latin Kings”**



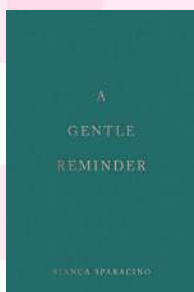
# Navigate Your Twenties,

From heartbreak to career chaos, love, regret, and self-discovery—your twenties are a whirlwind. These seven books get it. Whether you're searching for guidance, comfort, or just a laugh at life's unpredictability, each one captures the beauty, confusion, and chaos of figuring out who you are while trying to 'have it all.'



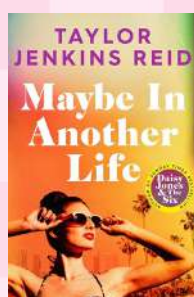
## Conversations With Friends - Sally Rooney

*Rooney's Conversations with Friends dives into the messy, intoxicating world of youth. Following Frances as she navigates love, friendship, and desire with an older married couple, the novel explores intimacy, identity, and the complex relationships that blur the lines between them. Sharp, captivating, and unflinchingly honest, it captures the thrill—and chaos—of being young and searching for yourself.*



## A Gentle Reminder - Bianca Sparacino

*Sparacino's collection is a heartfelt, empowering guide to love, self-worth, and personal growth. Through short, powerful reflections on love, she reminds us to honour ourselves, avoid settling, and embrace relationships—and a life—that truly value who we are. It's the perfect companion for anyone learning that self-love isn't optional; it's essential.*



## Maybe In Another life - Taylor Jenkins Reid

*Reid's novel is a captivating exploration of fate, choice, and the roads not taken. When Hannah bumps into an old flame, a single decision splits her life into two parallel realities—each with wildly different consequences. A thoughtful, heartfelt story about love, chance, and the messy, unpredictable ways our twenties unfold, asking whether some connections are truly meant to be.*

# One Chapter at a Time



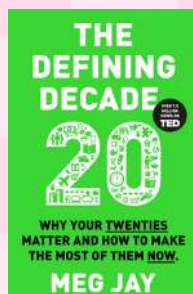
## The Midnight Library- Matt Haig

*Haig's fantasy novel is a moving, imaginative journey through regret, choices, and the what-ifs of life. When Nora finds herself in a library between life and death, she gets to explore the lives she could have lived—and what she really wants for herself. A thoughtful, hopeful read about second chances, self-discovery, and finding meaning in the messiness of adulthood.*



## Everything I know about Love - Dolly Alderton

*Alderton's debut is a brutally honest, hilarious, and tender look at growing up in your twenties. Through a mix of personal essays and nostalgic flashbacks, she explores love, friendship, heartbreak, sex, and the chaos of trying to 'have it all' while figuring out who you are. The perfect description of how our 20s really feel. It's the perfect companion for anyone navigating adulthood—messy, confusing, and completely unforgettable.*



## The Defining Decade - Meg Jay

*Jay's book is a wake-up call for anyone navigating their twenties. Blending real stories with research, she shows why these years are far from 'just an extended adolescence'. From careers to relationships, the choices you make—or don't—can shape your relationships, career, and life ahead. Insightful, empowering, and unmissable, it's a guide to making the most of this chaotic, pivotal decade.*



## Cleopatra and Frankenstein - Coco Mellors

*Mellors' Cleopatra and Frankenstein is a bold, unflinching look at love, ambition, and the chaos of youth. Following 24-year-old Cleo and 45-year-old Frank, it explores passion, excess, and the consequences of impulsive choices. Hilarious, heartbreaking, and utterly compelling, it's a story about finding connection—and yourself—amid life's messy, unpredictable turns. Everything your 20s feel like.*



**MEALS FOR THE  
MESSY  
IN-BETWEEN**



\$2.15

\$2.25



\$3.25

\$2.10



\$1.75



\$1.75

## Hangover Pasta

### Ingredients:

2 tbsp olive oil  
150g pancetta (or bacon)  
500ml tomato passata or chopped tomatoes  
350g spaghetti  
100g grated pecorino cheese (or Parmesan), plus extra to serve  
Salt and black pepper

### Method:

Step 1: Heat the olive oil in a heavy-based frying pan. Add the pancetta and cook until lightly browned. Do not remove the excess fat — it's what makes the sauce so tasty.  
Step 2: Add the passata and cook slowly until the sauce has reduced by half. Season with salt and plenty of black pepper (the pancetta is already salty, so adjust carefully).  
Step 3: Meanwhile, cook the spaghetti in a large saucepan of boiling salted water for 2 minutes less than the packet instructions.  
Step 4: Using tongs, transfer the pasta directly to the frying pan with the sauce, keeping some pasta water in the saucepan. Add two ladles of pasta water to the pan.  
Step 5: Stir and cook over medium heat for 2 minutes, allowing the sauce to coat the pasta.  
Step 6: Add the grated pecorino and toss until just combined.  
Step 7: Serve in warmed bowls, topped with extra pecorino and black pepper.

**Tip:** If you're feeling fancy (or very hungover), a little drizzle of good olive oil on top adds an extra layer of indulgence.



## The Clean Girl Bowl

### Ingredients:

150g Greek yogurt  
1 banana, sliced  
A handful of strawberries, sliced  
A handful of blueberries  
½ apple, chopped  
1–2 tsp coconut flakes  
1 tsp chia seeds  
Drizzle of honey

### Method:

Step 1: Spoon the Greek yogurt into a bowl as the base.  
Step 2: Arrange the banana, strawberries, blueberries, and apple on top.  
Step 3: Sprinkle over the coconut flakes and chia seeds.  
Step 4: Drizzle honey over the top to taste.

**Tip:** Mix in a spoonful of nut butter or granola for extra protein and crunch.

## Payday Curry

### Ingredients:

#### For the purée:

1 tbsp oil  
1 small onion, chopped  
1 green chilli, chopped  
½ tbsp ginger–garlic paste  
2–3 tomatoes, chopped  
5–6 cashew nuts

#### For the tadka (spice base):

1 tbsp oil  
1 tsp chilli powder  
1 tsp cumin powder  
1 tsp coriander powder

#### To finish:

Salt and pepper, to taste  
1–2 tbsp double cream  
1 tin chickpeas or kidney beans (drained) — or use sautéed mixed vegetables  
Fresh coriander leaves, chopped, to garnish  
Extra drizzle of double cream (optional)

#### Method:

Step 1: Heat 1 tbsp oil in a pan. Add the onion, green chilli, and ginger–garlic paste. Sauté for 2–3 minutes, then add the tomatoes and cashews. Cook until the tomatoes are soft and mushy, and the onions turn translucent.

Step 2: Transfer this mixture to a blender and blend into a smooth purée.

Step 3: In the same pan, heat another tbsp oil. Add the chilli powder, cumin powder, and coriander powder. Stir for a few seconds to release the flavours.

Step 4: Pour the purée back into the pan. Season with salt and pepper, then stir in 1–2 tbsp double cream. Let the curry simmer for 5–7 minutes, until slightly thickened but still pourable.

Step 5: Add your choice of chickpeas, kidney beans, or sautéed mixed vegetables. Stir to combine and heat through.

Step 6: Remove from the heat. Garnish with fresh coriander leaves and a drizzle of cream.

**Tip:** Serve hot with naan, roti, or rice — whatever you've got to hand.





## The British Dream

### Ingredients:

1 tin baked beans  
2 slices of bread  
Cheddar cheese (optional)  
Optional seasonings: chili flakes, pepper

### Instructions:

Step 1: Toast the bread.  
Step 2: Heat the beans in a pan or microwave for ~3 minutes. (If microwaving, remove the beans from the can first!)  
Step 3: Grate some cheddar cheese.  
Step 4: Spread or pour the beans onto the toast.  
Step 5: Add the cheese on top and any seasonings you like.

## Recovery Soup

### Ingredients:

4 fresh tomatoes or 1 tin (250g) chopped tomatoes  
2 carrots, peeled and chopped  
2 onions, peeled and chopped  
2 peppers (red or yellow), chopped  
2 garlic cloves, unpeeled  
50g blue cheese  
350–400ml chicken or vegetable stock  
100–150ml double cream  
50–75g butter  
Olive oil  
Salt and pepper  
Optional: paprika, cumin, fresh herbs for garnish

### Method:

Step 1: Preheat the oven to 200°C.  
Step 2: Chop the tomatoes, carrots, onions, and peppers. Place them on a baking tray with the unpeeled garlic cloves. Drizzle generously with olive oil and season with salt, pepper, and optional spices like paprika or cumin. Toss to coat evenly.  
Step 3: Roast for 20 minutes, until the vegetables are tender and slightly caramelized. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly.  
Step 4: Squeeze the garlic out of its skins and add all roasted vegetables to a blender. Add the double cream and butter, then blend until smooth.  
Step 5: Transfer the blended soup to a large pan, add the stock, and stir in the blue cheese until melted and fully combined. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.  
Step 6: Optional: reserve a few roasted vegetable pieces to garnish the soup. Serve warm, topped with herbs or extra blue cheese if desired.

**Tip:** Serve with crusty bread.





### Slavic Snack

#### Ingredients:

- 2 slices of bread
- 4 slices of salami
- 1 ripe tomato (sliced)
- 2 cheese slices (any melty cheese works well)
- Butter (for spreading)
- Salt & black pepper (to taste)

#### Method:

- Step 1: Spread butter evenly over both slices of bread.
- Step 2: Place one cheese slice on the bottom slice of bread — this acts as a barrier to stop the tomato from making the bread soggy.
- Step 3: Layer on the salami slices.
- Step 4: Add the tomato slices, then season lightly with salt and black pepper.
- Step 5: Place the second cheese slice on top of the tomato.
- Step 6: Finish with the second slice of bread, press gently, and cut in half if desired.



**Photographer**  
Zhone Feng

**Art Direction and Styling**  
Ramona Gabriela Toderascu

**Model**  
Lara Miller

## \* Your Twenties Starter Pack \*

- \* Perpetual overdraft (I'll start saving next month)
- \* 'What am I doing with my life?' voice note @ 2am
- \* Dating apps you delete and redownload weekly
- \* The tote bag that carries your entire life
- \* Rotating water bottle and iced matcha in hand
- \* That one houseplant you're trying (and failing) to keep alive
- \* Journaling phase that lasted three days
- \* Pile of books about love + self-help you'll read
- \* Vision board that hasn't manifested yet
- \* LinkedIn tab open but untouched
- \* Rent swallowing 70% of your paycheck
- \* The quiet fear that everyone else is 'figuring it out' faster
- \* 'I should start running' thought every Sunday
- \* Therapy fund (aka a candle from The Maxx)
- \* Spontaneous trips to escape the pressure (hello, gap year in Australia)
- \* Your Notes App: therapist, diary, and breakup rehearsal all in one
- \* The Ikea bag permanently used as a laundry bag
- \* Credit card maxed out on a pair of Margiela Tabis



The Boxer

Who

*Walked Away*

from

Corporate Britain

**In a world obsessed with status and comparison, choosing a quieter path can reveal a richer, more meaningful kind of achievement—one measured not in job titles or social media applause, but in moments of freedom, personal growth, and the small victories that make life feel truly lived. It's about finding balance, reclaiming your time, and building a life that reflects what matters most to you, even if it doesn't fit society's expectations.**

Trading titles for peace isn't something most people in their twenties plan to do. But for Ben, leaving a high-powered corporate job in finance wasn't a step backward – it was the first step in reclaiming his life.

On a Friday night in East London, he walks through the doors of the synagogue he calls home. He rents a flat in Whitechapel, where Hebrew scriptures painted across the walls greet him each morning, a silent reminder of continuity and grounding in a city that never sleeps.

"It's funny," he says, looking up at the verses. "I never thought I'd end up living in a place like this. But somehow, it feels right."

At 26, Ben is living a life that doesn't quite fit the mould. Born in Essex and raised without much stability, he worked his way to King's College London and a degree in economics, despite leaving school with just three GCSEs. He landed a coveted job in corporate finance, earning a salary that should've spelled "success". Instead, it crushed him.

"I had the title, the money, the late nights. But I wasn't living. I'd finish 16-hour days and collapse," he says. "I had nothing left for myself, nothing left for boxing, and nothing left for my girlfriend. The corporate world makes you believe suffering is the price of respect. But the truth is, it was killing me."

So he walked away. From the prestige, from the promise of a career ladder, from the paycheck that made everyone else nod approvingly at parties.

Today, Ben works in retail — a job he once might have sneered at.

"On paper, it looks like a step backwards," he admits. "But I'm finally breathing again. I don't need to impress strangers with my job title. I just want peace."

Life in London is fast and crowded, a constant visual noise of ambition and comparison.

"We're on average seeing over 5,000 people a day in a city like this," he says. "Whether you like it or not, you're judging what they're wearing and what they're reading, and then you go on social media and see someone's new house or holiday pictures. Comparison is the thief of joy, and social media makes it almost impossible to avoid. You see someone's perfect life, and it chips away at your own sense of achievement."

This year, Ben travelled to four countries, a milestone that felt massive to him.

"That's a huge success for me. But online, it just looks like I'm living my best life, when really I'm working two jobs and training every night just to afford it. Every time we post on social media, we feed into this machine of perfection, even when we say we want to be real."

For Ben, education wasn't something handed to him. Growing up, school was more survival than opportunity.

"I didn't have structure. I didn't have anyone pushing me. I was just getting through."

But university changed that. When he got into King's College London, he felt something he'd never experienced before.

"It was the first time in my life that I was genuinely excited to learn. I'd be skipping down the Central line on my way to lectures. It sounds cheesy, but it felt like magic."

That thrill of possibility is what pushed him to grab hold of opportunities — even the ones that didn't belong to him.

"At 22, success to me was about big titles, big salaries, and proving I could stand shoulder to shoulder with people who had more than I ever did. But those dreams weren't mine. They were society's dreams."

What is his, though, is boxing. Even now, after nine hours working in the stockroom, Ben finds his way to the gym.

"It's not discipline, not really," he says. "It's release. It keeps me from going mad. I could work all day and still run after, not because I love it, but because ticking it off the list keeps me sane."

Boxing has taught him resilience in ways his degree or old job never could. Years ago, when he broke eight bones in his hand, a doctor told him it'd be a miracle if he could hold a pen again.

"That crushed me," he admits. "I thought my dream of boxing was over. But suddenly, even brushing my teeth or cooking dinner felt like miracles too. It put my whole life into perspective."

The sport also gave him a philosophy for life in his twenties.

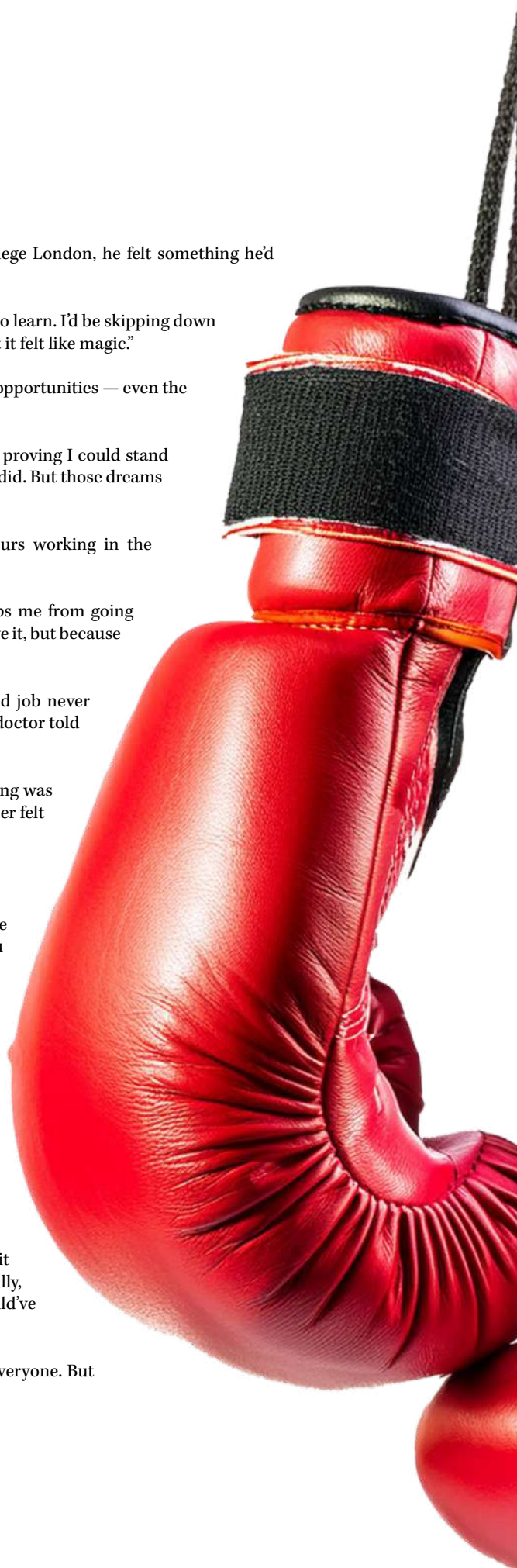
"In boxing, you win or you lose, and the next day everyone forgets. The world keeps moving. You celebrate the wins, you sit with the losses, but either way, you have to start again. It's the same with life — jobs, relationships, everything. The world doesn't stop. You've got to keep going."

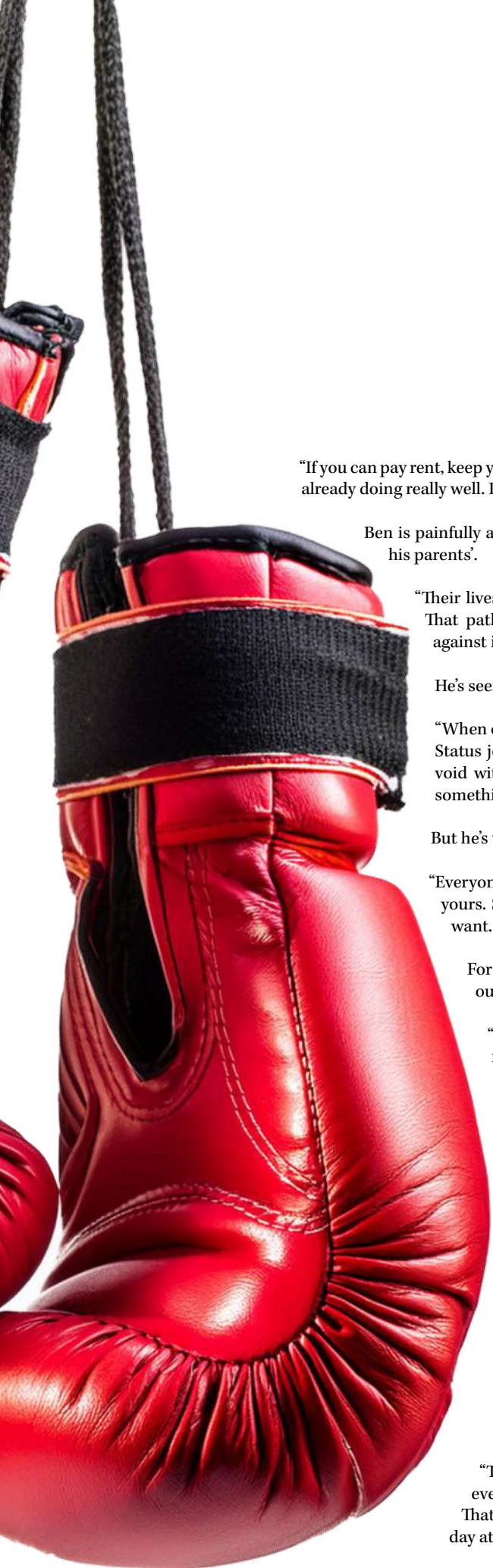
Ben is the first to admit his idea of success has changed. "At 18, it was fame, popularity, maybe a nice car. At 26, it's a fridge full of food and the knowledge that I can replace my laptop if it breaks. That's enough for me right now" he says.

One of his proudest moments? Not a promotion, not a title — but unpacking his shopping last week.

"I came home, blasted some music, opened my fridge, and it was full: meats, veggies, even Jacob's crackers. It sounds silly, but that felt like making it. That little boy I used to be would've been proud" he says with a bright smile on his face.

He knows this quieter version of success doesn't impress everyone. But he doesn't care.





“If you can pay rent, keep your fridge full, and afford a holiday every now and then, you’re already doing really well. It’s not glamorous, but it’s honest.”

Ben is painfully aware of how different his generation’s reality is compared to his parents’.

“Their lives were linear: get a job, buy a house, get married, have kids. That path doesn’t exist for us anymore. It’s not fair to measure us against it.”

He’s seen how that absence of milestones warps people his age.

“When owning a house is out of reach, we chase other things instead. Status jobs. Designer clothes. Nights out we can’t afford. We fill the void with whatever we can, because at least it feels like achieving something.”

But he’s wary of falling into that trap himself.

“Everyone is too obsessed with their own lives to care much about yours. So choose the life you want, not the one society tells you to want. Chase dreams for the right reasons, not for ego.”

For all his searching, Ben doesn’t pretend to have it all worked out.

“There are days when I still think about the titles I gave up, the recognition I could’ve had. But when I strip it all back, I know that wasn’t the life I wanted.”

Life has a way of throwing contradictions at him. He’s Jewish, but he shares his life with his girlfriend Hannah, an Irish Catholic.

“The irony isn’t lost on us,” he smiles. “Two very different worlds, but somehow we make it work. She grounds me. Reminds me what really matters.”

Every morning, he leaves his flat in the Whitechapel synagogue, glancing up at the scriptures etched across the walls. Outside, the streets of London pulse with movement, ambition, and relentless comparison. Inside, there is quiet.

A reminder that even in the chaos of your twenties, you can still build something meaningful.

“These years never come back,” he says. “Try everything, do everything, and when you find something you love, cherish it. That’s what I’m trying to do—be the best version of myself, one day at a time.”

In Transit:

Navigating



Credit: Kateryna Hliznitsova

Friendship, Love, and Identity

**In a decade defined by change, the ties that once felt unbreakable are tested, and the people we thought would stay forever drift away. Learning to let go, invest in what matters, and sometimes put ourselves first becomes the real lesson—a reminder that choosing yourself isn't self-centred; it's self-love.**

Your twenties arrive with a kind of mythology. They're framed as the "best years of your life" – a blur of freedom, friendships, and opportunity. The reality, however, is messier: uncertainty, constant transition, and the reshaping of who we are and who we choose to keep close. These years aren't just about chasing milestones; they're about watching the scaffolding of relationships shift, sometimes collapse, even as we're still learning to build ourselves.

At first, that mythology feels true. In our early twenties, life feels crowded – with people, plans, and promises. Friendships are constant, group chats are buzzing, and nights out are spontaneous. Relationships form easily, almost by default, out of shared flats, seminars, or late-night library runs. It feels permanent, like life will always be this way. But just a few years later, things start to look very different. Careers shift, people move away, partners drift apart, and the friendships that once felt like the backbone of our world become harder to hold onto.

The truth is, our twenties are not about permanence. They're about change – sometimes rapid, sometimes painful, always transformative.

This decade is defined by transition. We make (and unmake) career choices, often subconsciously factoring in where our friends are – whether we want to live close to them or at least remain within the same orbit. But as responsibilities multiply, those circles thin out. Old friends disappear into the rhythm of their own busy lives, while new communities form through work, hobbies, or chance encounters.

Some of us stay steady, while others hit a new kind of growth spurt – not physical, but psychological. We develop new values and belief systems. We meet people whose experiences awe us, convincing us, for a while, that they'll be our "forever friends". But later, we see that even their seeming perfection carries flaws. Growing up means realising the blueprint for who we think we want to become shifts with every new connection.

Scarlet, 24, from London, describes her twenties as a "paradox". She explains how, after finishing university two years ago, she's changed a lot. "You are excited about who you're becoming but scared of who you're leaving behind," she says. "Some people aren't meant to stay forever, but it doesn't make the time with them less beautiful or meaningful."

By our mid-to late twenties, many of us feel a quiet kind of grief – not just for the friends and partners we lose, but for the versions of ourselves we've outgrown. The effortless closeness of university feels like a dream we're slowly waking from.

Amber, 25, from Manchester, recalls how friendship at university felt almost automatic.

"It feels like everyone is your friend – but that's just forced proximity. The moment we weren't in the same environment, the truth showed itself. It wasn't about them being bad friends; it was clarity. The real friendships survive distance and time, and the rest fade naturally."

What once required no effort – seeing a friend in class, bumping into them at the library, cooking together in shared kitchens – now requires planning, money, and intention.

"You go from seeing your friends every day, living ten minutes apart, to spending hours on Trainline just to meet halfway," Amber continues. "A train ticket can cost more than a flight these days. It's exhausting, but it makes you value those meetups so much more."

It's not just distance that strains friendships. The rising cost of living and the pressures of hustle culture mean generosity often feels rationed. Fewer people can casually buy a coffee or grab a pint of milk for a flatmate without expecting something back. It's not that people have become less kind – it's that survival takes priority in today's economic climate.

This sense of scarcity turns even small interactions transactional: splitting the bill down to the penny, sending Splitwise requests for a single pint. It can feel petty, but it's also symptomatic of a generation under strain. And behind the money lies something deeper: time and attention are also scarce, pulled in every direction by work, side hustles, relationships, and the constant performance of online life.

When so much of our energy is stretched thin, both friendships and relationships feel the strain. Bonds that once thrived on proximity now require deliberate effort, and not everyone is willing – or able – to give it. Over time, priorities shift, values evolve, and we experience what psychologists call divergent growth: two people simply moving in different directions.

Imogen, 26, from Surrey, explains how navigating relationships after university takes things "to another level".

"In uni, you see each other every day. Afterwards, it's long-distance, weekend trips and trying to make it work between jobs," she says. "My boyfriend lives in Liverpool; I'm in Surrey – we try to see each other every two weeks, but it's really hard."

Culture tells us "love conquers all". Films and TV shows promise that once you find The One, everything else falls into place. But in reality, it takes far more than love to make things last: communication, aligned values, and a willingness to grow both together and apart.

Sometimes, letting go becomes part of the journey. The version of a partner you needed at twenty-three may not be the same one you need at twenty-six – and that's okay.

That shift doesn't make the relationship a failure; it makes it part of your growth.

There's a biological underpinning to all this change. Our frontal lobe – the part of the brain that governs decision-making, impulse control, and long-term planning – continues developing until around the age of 25. In other words, we haven't finished becoming ourselves until our mid-twenties. No wonder friendships, values, and relationships feel like moving targets.

What feels like chaos is, in fact, development.

So how do we navigate this decade without collapsing under the weight of so much flux?

First, by accepting that change is inevitable – and necessary. Some friends will fade, others will deepen, and new ones will arrive just when you need them. Relationships may end, but they'll leave behind lessons that shape the ones to come.

Second, by practising intentionality. Unlike school or university, where proximity made connection easy, adult friendships and relationships require choice. Choosing to show up, plan, and invest matters.

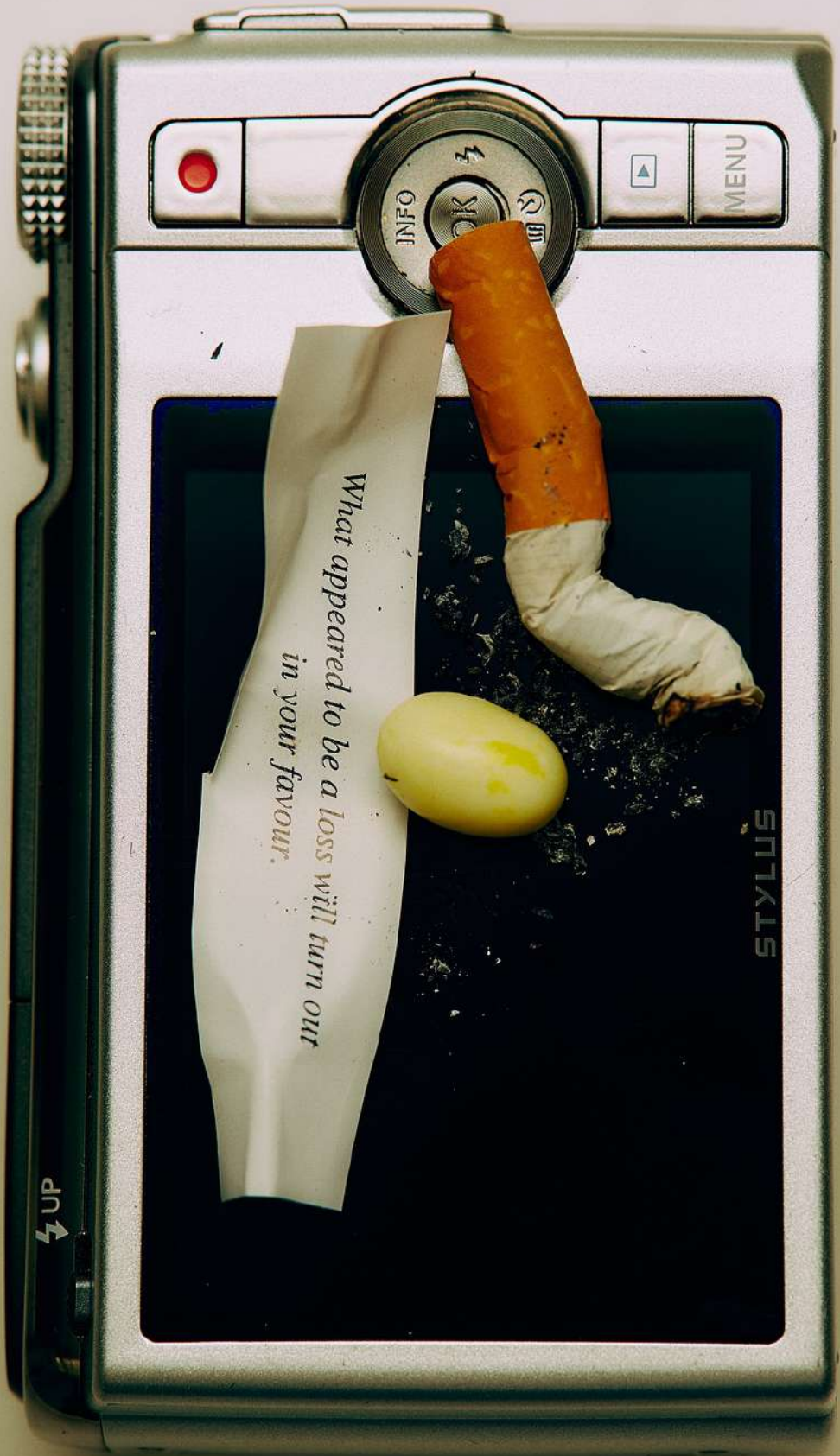
Finally, by releasing the myth of performance. People will come and go. That doesn't make them less important – it makes them part of your story.

Scarlet puts it simply: "Whenever I meet an old friend who says I've changed, I take it as a compliment. Because I have changed – I've grown. Some people don't grow at the same pace, and that's okay."

Our twenties aren't about holding everything together. They're about discovering who we are – through friendships, heartbreaks, rejections, and unexpected detours. People will leave, and values will shift. But that isn't a sign of failure; it's the design of this decade.

Friendship isn't a side plot. Relationships aren't either. They're the heart of how we grow, stumble, and eventually find our footing. And through it all, we learn that change isn't something to fear – it's the proof that we're alive, moving forward, and becoming who we're meant to be.

And maybe the most important lesson of all is that choosing yourself in your twenties isn't self-centred – it's self-love. Prioritising your growth, your values, and your wellbeing doesn't take away from others; it ensures that the relationships and connections you do nurture are richer, deeper, and more meaningful.





# The Panic Years

That's how my 20s have felt anyway.

A panic to be perfect,  
to have everything figured out before 30.

A panic to stay ahead of the cost of living crisis,  
buy a house—  
all whilst staying present because “you're only in  
your twenties once,”

remember?

A panic when people's success on LinkedIn  
makes your stomach drop.

A panic when you've got no plans on a Friday night  
but the rest of Instagram stories does.

A panic to constantly self-improve,  
to read more books—

until reading books becomes a chore,  
a hobby swallowed by a to-do list.

A panic to make people proud,  
to spend time with ageing grandparents.

To keep up with trends,  
plans with friends,  
and skincare.

Quite frankly,

I am tired of panicking about the panic years.  
But I know

I'll keep panicking about them anyway.

— Elle-Louise Wilmot



Believe It or Not!

Ripley's

Believe

Believe It or Not! LONDON  
Believe It or Not! LONDON  
Believe It or Not! LONDON

ONEY EXCHANGE  
THEATRE TICKETS  
MONEY EXCHANGE  
MARKET PLACE  
AVIATION

BUT TICKETS HERE

UNDERGROUND

TOEYHC





# CHAOS

Every chaos has its own colour;  
choose yours.