

# Allison is Homesick

In 2016, I found myself back home after a couple of then-wasted years of further education. I accumulated the debt, I fell in love, and I received a piece of paper with my name and a graphic design degree. This was mostly summarised on another piece of paper that secured an assistant manager position in a two man cafe. Two years later: one of my dwindling hours wasting ink and napkins, on the phone to my now long distance girlfriend was interrupted by a message from my sister to call her. My gran had suddenly passed. It was peaceful and in her sleep. No sign of struggle or pain. She was found shortly after the neighbour noticed her cat was still waiting to get into the house.

The funeral was sweet. Tears were shed by my dad, my mum, my sister, and me (collectively her last remaining relatives). A lot of town members paid respects, most stayed long after the buffet to say their condolences and grace us with Go(o)d intent and loving memories of my gran's history from childhood to mere hours before her passing. The reading of the will barely shocked us. Being the last of six widowed great aunts - and being a widow herself - left all four of us with an equal divide of twelve other wills and a guaranteed sale of her house. Each of us received personal messages on the grounds that we never share them or she will haunt us (which garnered a few well-needed laughs). But we stayed true; mine reading to quit my job and pursue my dream of finally settling down in Aberystwyth with Naomi. Shortly after finishing a rather difficult last year of Geography, my sister Allison found herself a cheap flat a short drive from my new house. We began to abuse a pair of "adjusted" student cards for discount pints and travel, as Allison also began to explore a freedom she'd never truly experienced before. We both still stayed in regular contact with my parents. They both took honorary demotions at work and spent the next few years travelling while they still felt they could truly enjoy it. My gran's passing treated us all well. And suddenly, Allison became homesick.

Our parents' frequently rented cottage had become a regular haunt; thanks to a new fad of ghost tours of our supposed haunted Irish town. And Allison was showing signs of being off. This mostly went unnoticed by others until when there was that sudden downpour; as a small group of us were splitting a stranger's joint in the local beer garden. The stranger was an expert in holding your eyes. They took all opportunities of the joint between their fingers to treat it like a physical beacon that forced us to pay attention. When the rain became more assertive, the parasol basked us in shadow and collected clouds of grey (and the ethics of "Poverty Tourism". Maybe if we were all sober we'd have noticed Allison uncharacteristically passing the joint, acting as a midpoint between A (me) and B (Naomi).

The stranger - named Noah - encouraged us to abandon the second half of their second spliff. Allison's polite refusal to join us in the calling hunt of the log fire was rewarded with the flirtings of Noah. "That last half's all yours, baby!" Even as the rain got heavier and heavier she refused to step into the inn for warmth. Many variations of "never ending pint" jokes were made. By the time the barman had braved himself to

collect the glass, she was nowhere to be seen - and the pint glass was overflowing with rainwater. But was quickly forgotten as Noah navigated the conversation back to the beautiful Irish cottage they AirB'n'B'ed in some town filled with tales of faeries and vengeful ghosts. Alison's Irish goodbye was seen as nothing more than the mere hitting-of-a-bad-way. Until the barman thanked us for his "tip".

She answered the door but held herself behind the doormat that reads "Fuck Off" in cursive. Still hidden behind the door the way you would answer to a possible murderer or Jehovah's Witness. She welcomed me in all the same, directed me to the living room, and asked if I could fix her a cuppa. I brew her a concoction of strong tea, three sugars instead of two sweeteners, whole milk instead of skinny - the same way I would when she was sick. I make sure to use a mug salvaged from our childhood home. A desaturated relic probably bought for no more than a couple quid. I come through to the sitting room to find her usual haunt of the overstuffed throne vacant, instead she huddles herself in the corner of the loveseat. Something must show on my face, to which she points behind her and unconvincingly states "better for my back". I gently place myself next to her to ensure the tea doesn't spill, and pull my legs up to mirror her pose. She waits three minutes before taking her first sip. She sings praises to my tea-making, saying I should never have left the cafe and that my talents are being wasted in graphic design. I jest that she's jealous I can use my degree while her bachelors in geography only comes in handy with navigating customers to the cereal aisle. She doesn't laugh. Her faraway stare says that she didn't hear me, and not that I have upset her. We sit in silence for a while before whipping out her phone and playing Bon Iver a little too quietly. I try to force any kind of emotion out of Allison. I bring up Noah's obvious flirting and that she should maybe give them a message. The following 30 seconds silence was heavy dreadful. I break the silence in a last ditch attempt to get anything out of her. "I've never been a fan of For Emma, Forever Ago. I'm not his biggest fan but I love Bone Aye-Ver Bone Aye-Ver by Bone Aye-Ver". Her smirk shows she's still in there. "What? What's wrong? Am I mispronouncing it? Is it not Bone Aye-Ver? Is it Bohn Ee-ver? Bohn Ee-ver, Bohn Ee-ver - Bohn Ee-ver?" She finally breaks and throws a pillow at me with a laugh.

We spend a couple minutes shooting the shit. She says that she thinks she might book

out the cottage without telling mum and dad. She keeps urging that there's something that's pulling her back home and she won't be back to herself until she finds out why. I understand completely, also being prone to extreme homesickness when I was younger (leading to many late night pick-ups and drop-offs of hastily cancelled sleepovers). I promise that I won't tell our parents. The last thing she needs is my dad robbed of the first time he's been truly relaxed in decades. I leave a couple hours later, Allison looks exhausted. I give the house a wee tidy as she falls asleep on the couch. I wash the dishes, I take out the bins, I tuck her in, and post her keys back through the letterbox after I lock the door.

It's less than 12 hours when my dreams of our small town are interrupted by my phone vibrating off the nightstand. "5 Missed Calls" blinds me in the darkness of 3AM. Two messages are left on my answering machine. "I'm scared. Please I'm begging you don't want to be alone." and some distant sobs on the other. I have to shoulder down the door when I abandon Naomi's car in the middle of the road. Her house is quiet. There's no response to her name. I search the bathroom, the kitchen, and finally the bedroom. I flick the light on and scan the room. When I eventually spotted her she was sobbing upright in the furthest corner of the house. But her outermost features pressed against an invisible pane of glass, her cheeks and stomach flattened. Tears funnelled between the crevices between herself and whatever theoretical border was contrasting her. Tears streaming down eyes she whispers "Help me".

Her alarm was accompanied by the sounds of bones crushing and sinew squeezing against an ever shrinking prism formed by the corner of her room and an invisible hypotenuse between the two walls. I watched in awe as

her mangled corpse climbed and stretched ever thinner to form a column, her blood tickling the stucco ceiling. Fragments of marrow streaked like marble. Not a trace of her is left behind. Not a stray hair. Not a scab. I never went to the autopsy. The column eventually succumbed to gravity and puddled on the floor.

Her ceremony was handled back home. Our parents took the mourning particularly hard. They cancelled all future plans of travelling, saying it didn't feel appropriate this time. The last of Allison's money broke me even for travelling to the memorial. Nothing to bury. Only to scatter.

It wasn't long before I found myself pulled back there again after coming back to Aberystwyth. More and more I could hear people whispering around me. A sudden influx of tourists came to visit the site where a girl exploded in the corner of her room.

I left my job. Abandoned my flat. More or less cut all ties of the small town.

Naomi  
understand  
s and says  
“you’re  
always  
welcome  
home  
whenever  
you’re  
ready. I’ll  
always be  
here if you  
need me”.  
I feel it  
though. I’m  
not where I  
need to be.  
I feel the  
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