

After I died, I stopped being able to text. Every time I picked up my phone, the screen would flicker and the phone would shut down. After setting it down, it would start working again. Perhaps it was some rule for the dead: 'Thou shalt not contact the living via text or email.'

Verwijderd: I set

Still, I'd sit on my bed, in my little two-bedroom rented terraced house with damp walls and half-arsed heating, holding my phone, trying to get it to work. Old habits and all that. It was comforting.

A few days later, my family came to clear out my stuff so the house could be relet. They took almost everything: clothes, furniture, saved receipts, tattoo sketchbooks, my collection of semi-permanent hair dyes, roller derby skates, tampons—only a futon in the spare room was left. I had no idea who was getting what because I hadn't left a will. I mean, I was only twenty-five when I died. They didn't get the phone, though. They tried—my mother rang my number and listened for the ring, but I hid in the closet with it, and it didn't work. She sighed—probably hoped it would pay off her bingo debts. Shortly after that, my phone service was disconnected, and there was no chance of any calls or texts.

Verwijderd: to sell it to

Met opmerkingen [MS1]: You are going a bit fast here, from a reference to her problematic relationship with her mother immediately back to her losing that bit of comfort she was still holding on to. Is her holding on to the phone a reference to keeping in touch with the world of the living? To still being able to be reached, even though she died?

Met opmerkingen [MS2]: Could you explain what she can do? What does touching entail here?

Met opmerkingen [MS3]: Here I wonder whether this was always the case, or whether this has changed when she went from living to dead. She died with her phone in her hand, which suggests to me that she was quite a social person. Or is this about holding on again? Is the house also something she doesn't want to give up on? Is she afraid she'll have to leave once the house is relet?

The phone is the only thing I'm able to hold—perhaps because I died with it in my hand. I can touch other things, but not grasp them. And apparently I'm invisible which is a shame, because when people come to view the house, I'd like to be able to scare the shit out of them. I'm comfortable here, even with only a futon, and would rather not share the house. I'm not sure if this is the last stop, or if at some point I'll move on to some other realm or whatever, but for the time being, I'm fairly happy, and I'd like to be alone.

Met opmerkingen [MS4]: Because you give quite a long elaboration on why she wishes she wasn't invisible, the transition isn't that clear. You also end on a positive note: 'I'm fairly happy, and I'd like to be alone', which makes the reader have to go back to remember what the 'All is not lost, though' refers to.

All is not lost, though. I can do some ghostly stuff like make the lights flicker and make things fly around without touching them. I discovered this when I had the brilliant idea to write a letter to my sister, Charlotte, and tell her I was fine and I hoped she'd taken the jewellery. I spotted some paper and a pen left in the kitchen, and it zoomed towards me, the pen nearly taking an eye out. But I couldn't pick up the pen.

Met opmerkingen [MS5]: How does this work? She's invisible, yet she can touch things, but she can't grasp things; she can't pick up the pen. Could a pen actually take her eye out then, or is this figure of speech?

I really wish I'd been able to do that when I was alive. I wouldn't have had to get out of bed to get my phone from the dresser, and wouldn't have tripped over the charger wire and hit my head on the corner of the dresser. That had hurt. Worst of all, it had killed me.

Met opmerkingen [MS6]: You might want to make explicit you mean 'making things fly in your direction' since you end the former paragraph with the fact she couldn't pick up her pen.

At first, I didn't know I was dead, because I was still thinking, and I figured if I could think I must be alive. But then I saw my body on the floor, a halo of blood spreading around my head on the laminate flooring, eyes open and not breathing. I knew then it was over. Fortunately, my sister found me a few hours later, so my cat didn't have a chance to chew my face off.

Met opmerkingen [MS7]: Good part, it shows her kind of humour.

Met opmerkingen [MS8]: Very Cartesian of her!

My poor cat. Apparently, I'm not invisible to animals, or cats at least. She ran away when she saw my ghost.

Met opmerkingen [MS9]: Too much? That she can see her body on the floor is already enough for her to realise she must be dead, and the blood and the laminate flooring is to paint the picture for the reader. Question: isn't blood easy to clean from a laminate floor? Further down, she says it's still there. Or is it still visible in the cracks and gaps?

Met opmerkingen [MS10]: What's the name of the cat?

I'd been about to do something when I died, but I can't remember what. I'd been stuck on level 674 of Candy Crush for days, and was just about to give it another go, so maybe that was it. I don't know. It's making me crazy, not being able to remember. It's like when

Verwijderd: cats

Met opmerkingen [MS11]: From the room, or away from the house, never to be seen again?

Met opmerkingen [MS12]: Ok, so maybe she isn't that social. Either way, you might want to elaborate on why she likes to be alone.

there's a word you want, but can't think of it, and it's just there, on the edge of your brain. You can't quite reach it, and the harder you try, the further away it seems to get.

I try to forget that I'm trying to remember. I'll set my phone down on the floor in my room and wander around the empty house for a while, then go back and pick up the phone, hoping it'll come to me. But it doesn't.

The landlady turned up to make sure the damp hadn't gotten out of control, and I followed her around, trying to let her know what I thought of her.

'Right, now you care. I've been living here for three years and you never once came about the mould in the kitchen or the dicky boiler.'

No response whatsoever. Figures.

She bled the radiators, then left.

No one came to view the house.

A few days later, my boyfriend (from when I was alive), [~~—do I really need that?~~] Rye (Ryan actually, but he preferred to go by 'Rye'—his favourite wholegrain), moved in with his dog, Kombucha, and everything went tits up.

Kombucha spotted me straight away, and ran up, wheezing and yapping. This dog wasn't some cute little puppy, but an old, three-legged, half-blind mini beast that needed insulin. He'd been abandoned a year ago by his previous family because they didn't want to pay for the treatments. I think the fact that he looked like a shrivelled, bristly gourd hadn't worked in his favour, either. I'd never been on the best of terms with Kombucha. He suffered some sort of PTSD and thought my cat was the antichrist and needed to be destroyed. [This had been a source of conflict between Rye and me. And my cat.]

I felt it, then, that feeling that what I was trying to remember was reachable. I toyed with my phone, willing the memory to surface.

Nope. Gone.

Rye didn't have a lot of possessions. He'd previously been sharing a house with four other people, so apart from his bedroom stuff and a second-hand IKEA sofa—which, knowing Rye, had come from the side of the road somewhere—he had nothing.

His first evening in the house, when Kombucha was giving me grief, I watched him concoct a baby sling out of a bed sheet and lift the dog into it. This stopped the barking and I was able to move about more freely. The little terror still watched me when I got close, but kept quiet.

After feeding Kombucha his vegan dog food, Rye cooked quinoa and chickpea tagine—my favourite. He sat on the saggy, pea-green IKEA cast off, Kombucha on his lap, ate his chickpeas, and cried, head down, his tears dripping down his nose and off his septum ring.

I stood next to him, unsure what to do. What would happen if I touched him? I reached out and patted his man bun.

Verwijderd: Oh r

Met opmerkingen [MS13]: Where's Julia when she says this to the landlady? Up in her face?

Met opmerkingen [MS14]: I'm not a fan of either option. Suggestion: A few days later, my boyfriend 'from before', Rye (Ryan actually, but he preferred to go by his favourite wholegrain)....

Met opmerkingen [MS15]: Yes, I love this. This is also why the poor cat needs a name: the hated dog gets a name, yet the beloved cat doesn't.

His breath caught in his throat and he looked up from his bowl. Kombucha gave a low growl. Rye stroked him absently, casting his eyes around the room. I increased the pressure on his head. He turned towards me, and I swear, in that moment, he could see me.

'Julia?' He said.

I nodded and smiled. 'It's me, Rye. I'm still here, still in this hou—'

'Are you there?'

'Yes, Rye, I just told you I'm—'

'No, it's only grief.' He looked back down at his soggy, overcooked quinoa. 'Seeing the newly deceased is the mind's response to the pain, an attempt to ease suffering by denying...' On and on he went.

I sighed. 'No, asshole, I'm here.' I moved directly in front of him and took hold of both his shoulders, looking directly into his eyes. 'Rye, look at me. I'm here, right here in front of you. I'm stuck here. I was about to do something before I died, but I can't remember. Please help me remember.'

'I can smell you, Julia—that cruelty-free organic fennel toothpaste you like.'

'That's great, but I'd prefer it if you could hear me.'

He stood up then, nearly knocking me to the floor.

I decided to go old school. I flicked the lights on and off. He stopped dead. Kombucha whined. I flicked the lights again, several times, steady, like the ticking of a clock.

'Julia? Are you here? Flash "yes" or "no" in Morse Code.'

I closed my eyes. 'I don't know Morse Code, Rye!'

'Wait, you might not know Morse Code. Okay, then. Flash twice for "yes" and once for "no".'

I flashed twice.

Rye beamed and wiped the tears from his face. He took a deep breath, frowned. 'How do I know for sure? Maybe you're an evil entity looking for a portal into the world of the living.'

This is what I had loved about Rye. He could swing from being BFFs with Carl Sagan to running with unicorns in seconds. It had also driven me bat shit crazy.

'I need to be sure,' Rye continued. 'How old is Kombucha?'

I flashed sixteen times, Rye nodding his head with each flash.

'One more question, just to be completely sure.'

I rolled my eyes.

Rye's smile faded a little. 'I can almost see you rolling your eyes.' Then he laughed, fresh tears emerging. 'A week before you died, I said I wanted us to live together, and asked you if you thought it was a good idea. Do you remember what you said?'

Two flashes.

'Do you mean "yes" you remember, or that "yes" was your answer?'

How was I supposed to answer that?

Verwijderd: "

Verwijderd: ed

Met opmerkingen [MS16]: Just to make sure: he cannot feel her as solid, but his solidity can knock her over?

Met opmerkingen [MS17]: Did she ever answer that question? If so, how come she has forgotten? Can she not remember the week before her death? She remembers where she was with Candy Crush, after all. You could get away with this if he asks something that could be interpreted in multiple ways, like 'and asked you whether you wanted it too' or 'or that "yes" you thought it was a good idea?'

There it was again: that teasing memory, right in front of me.
And then something did come. Whatever I had been about to do before I bit the metaphorical dust, it had something to do with Rye.

I flashed the lights several times in frustration and went to my futon.

Met opmerkingen [MS18]: Does Rye respond to her outburst at all?

Usually, when we remember something we've been struggling to recall, it comes as a flash. This didn't. It came slowly, over the course of the evening.

I hadn't wanted Rye to move in. I'd said yes at first, but later decided to tell him I needed my space. More than that, I'd been planning to end our relationship of two years. That was why I'd gone for my phone. I'd failed epically, and fucking died in the process.

And now, here I was, dead, but still living with him.

We're told that when we die, we get to leave all our worries behind, but mine—one of them, at least—had followed me.

If I found a way to tell him, what would happen? Would I still be here and would he leave and let someone else move in, or would I go to wherever it is dead people with no unfinished business go?

Someone once said to me, 'You only die once'. But what if that's not true? What if you die twice, and the second time it's for real, and you're just nothing? At least here I was something.

The door opened. 'Julia? Are you in here?'

I flashed 'yes'.

'Can I sit down?'

'It's your house, Rye.' I flashed 'yes'.

'So, I think I might know why you're still here, on an earthly plane. I think it's us, what we had together...it was so special; you can't let go.'

'That's not it at all.' I said, and flashed 'no'.

He nodded. 'Letting go is hard.'

'Letting go is the easy part, it's getting rid of I can't seem to do.' I got up and went to the window, looking out at the cars going by, people living their lives. Rye continued to talk, looking at where he thought I was sitting on the futon.

Met opmerkingen [MS19]: Does she swear at him at some point? I can just imagine going her 'you moron' or 'you idiot'

'I thought maybe if I moved out, that would help, but I wasn't living here when you died, so it can't be that.'

I flashed 'yes', and said, 'That is precisely what I want.' I had no breath; the window couldn't fog, and my dead voice couldn't be heard. 'Please, Rye...pack your stuff and go. I just want to be left alone. I'm sorry for—'

Met opmerkingen [MS20]: Suggestion: I just want you to leave.

Verwijderd: '

'I guess the best thing to do is make the most of it, be as close as we possibly can.' He stroked a cushion on the futon.

I flashed 'no', quickly over and over, pausing briefly between each, hoping they wouldn't be confused for yeses.

Met opmerkingen [MS21]: Is this redundant?

He smiled sadly. 'At least we'll be together. I moved in hoping to feel closer to you, and you're still here. In a way, it's wonderful.'

There was nothing in that room, no loose objects for me to throw at him, but through the door came a packet of nutritional yeast, which burst open and rained cheesy flakes down on him.

He laughed. 'I'm sure we joked once that if we ever got married, we'd have people throw nutritional yeast at us rather than rice.'

'You joked, Rye; that was all you.'

When Rye left my room, after holding his arms open for me to hug him while I stood at the other end of the room ('I can't feel you, Julia, but I know you're there'), Kombucha barking his brains out at me, I had to will myself not to send a knife flying his way. If that happened, and he died here, I was sure we'd be joined together, like celestial soul mates.

Worse, what if he stayed here the rest of his life and died of natural causes *in the house*? I could play it as safe as possible with the knives, but the end result might still be the same.

I couldn't spend eternity in this house with Rye. Once he died, he'd be able to see me, hear me; there'd be no hiding. If he wasn't going to leave, then I would. The next time he opened the door to let Kombucha out for a piss, I was going to do a runner. I had no idea what would happen to me, but even if I died twice, it had to be better than this.

If I ever gain the use of my hands, I'm going to write a manual for the newly dead. And in it, I will include the fact that it's not possible to leave your house, or wherever you are when you die, so don't bother trying. You can't get so much as a toe through the door. Or the window—I'd tried to climb out of the open kitchen window when Rye was cooking. There's some barrier you can't cross. I'm assuming this is universal for all dead people, but it could just be me, lucky bitch that I am.

I could not communicate or escape. Shit was only getting worse. I had to find a way to get out or get *him* out.

For over a week, Rye had been transforming the house. He bought a bigger bed so that I could lie next to him while we 'talked'. He cooked for me, even though I couldn't eat. (He gave my leftovers to Kombucha.) He read to me from his book of Buddhist meditations and kept me informed of what was going on in the world. Every day, it was stuff like, '...all that lead poisoning, but everyone knows the water is fluoridated to dull us into submitting to the capitalist machine...', whilst waving his potato peeler about.

As the days slowly passed, my frustration grew. I took to hanging out in any room where Rye wasn't, trying to find a way to use my phone to communicate with him...but if I didn't flicker the lights occasionally to let him know I was listening, he'd come looking for me to make sure I was okay. By this point, though, I knew better than to signal that I wasn't okay...that prompted a marathon guessing game of 'What's Wrong with Julia?' He never once came close to getting it right.

In the end, I threw my phone into the compost heap, where it sank down into the pile of potato peel and was completely forgotten about.

Met opmerkingen [MS22]: The 'I'm sure' feels off, as if it didn't happen and he's just making up something he sees as possible, while Julia's response shows he made the joke for real.

Suggestion: I can't believe you remembered us joking about this, having people throw nutritional yeast at us instead of rice if we ever got married.

Met opmerkingen [MS23]: This last sentence lessens the effect of the strong way this paragraph opens. I suggest getting rid of it.

Verwijderd: a

Met opmerkingen [MS24]: How? Her phone service was disconnected before Rye moved in, plus it doesn't work when she's around. Can she even charge it, unable to grasp anything but her phone?

Verwijderd: pile

'I have two surprises for you.' Rye had just come home from work (he was a pet massage therapist), a book in one hand, and the other hidden behind his back. I'd been trying to use my telekinesis to concoct a rebus out of bay leaves and matchsticks to say 'please leave' and 'it's over', but hadn't had much luck.

Verwijderd: hand

'The first is a book on Morse Code. I thought if we learn it together, we'll be able to communicate more effectively.' He set the book down. Then he smiled shyly and brought his arm out from behind his back. 'I also got you this. It's handmade by South African HIV orphans. The material is repurposed cotton t-shirts and it's stuffed with dryer lint treated with a flame-retardant, because apparently, dryer lint is really flammable.'

Met opmaak: Engels (Verenigd Koninkrijk)

It was a small pillow, heart-shaped, saffron-coloured and smelled strongly of patchouli.

'Let's put it in our room.' I sighed and followed him into his bedroom. I refused to look to look at the pillow. I wanted to lash out; even stabbing him was starting to sound good, whatever the consequences. The outline of the bloodstain from when I'd died was still visible on the floor; I traced it with my toe, imagining I could pick up the silly pillow and rip it to shreds. Kombucha gave a low whine and scampered away. Rye, still talking, set the pillow on 'my' side of the bed.

Met opmerkingen [MS25]: Laminate floor, see comment above.

'—organic essential oils, which they distil themselves. The lint, of course, doesn't come from South Africa, since not many people there have dryers, so it's collected here by the homeless who go around to laundrettes—' I wasn't listening, just tracing that perfectly round mark, seething, willing him to shut up. '—and it just gets thrown out, can you believe it? Such a waste. They ship it to the orphans, but it's so lightweight, so there's not really a carbon footprint apart from—'

I was concentrating with all my might on something, *anything* that I might use—

WHAM!

Slicing through the air so quickly and smoothly neither of us saw it, a potato peeler flew in and impaled the heart-shaped pillow, releasing tufts of dryer lint and cloying patchouli.

As the fabric, soft and fragile from repeated handling gave way, more and more lint spilling out, so did my soul. I began to fade from the space—calm, fearless and untroubled now—but I could still hear him droning on, oblivious to the message he had received, up until my very last moment in the room, '—and I really think we should think of adopting one of these days...'

Met opmerkingen [MS26]: Are you attached to this? I think having the next sentence starting with slicing does a lot already.

Verwijderd: ,

Verwijderd: spilled

Verwijderd: and

Verwijderd: too

Verwijderd:

Verwijderd: , slowly,

Verwijderd: give way

Verwijderd: as Rye continued to

Verwijderd: e

Verwijderd: as yet

Met opmerkingen [MS27]: How about him suggesting they adopt one of those South African HIV orphans? Otherwise, it would mean he had changed the subject while his droning on explains why he still hasn't noticed the heart being torn apart.

The house was slipping away. I said a last goodbye to my home, to my family, my cat, wherever she was, and even to Kombucha. Rye I gave the middle finger...

All, then, was blissfully silent.

Met opmerkingen [MS28]: There's no period of transformation from him droning on to the blissful silence. Here, you could do something like 'Rye, whose words were becoming more and more faint, I gave the middle finger...' to point out she actually fades away, she isn't instantly gone.

Verwijderd: I gave