

Alright, so I'm in an Italian restaurant, hungry and waiting for food, but it's a good thing. I've got that feeling that I want to throw up, I know I won't be throwing up though, because like I said, I'm hungry. Also, it's usually good to be hungry when you go to a restaurant. Mental reassurance done... my gut doesn't feel any calmer.

Now, my earliest recollection of me and my sister is her, about eight, sitting on the couch, I walk into the room much younger and kick her in the leg as hard as I can just because. She then gets angry and shoves me, and I start crying and running to Mum screaming, "Lindsay hit me." But apparently, before that time, me and her were best buds. So much so that when one day she said, "Mummy, I don't like vegetables they're disgusting. I just want chicken airplanes and potato smileys for the rest of my life!" I was like heck yeah and joined in. She grew out of that phase, but me and my developing infant child brain did not. So, every friend's house I've ever been round, I've had to tell their mum, I'm a fussy eater.

Now I'm maturing I'm eating more greens. I like to think it's my own decision to improve my life, but it's actually the painful crushing feeling I get in my heart every now and then, but actually—actually it's social pressure forcing that mleugh smelling food on the end of my fork into my mouth. I can ease that though; I've developed a way of expanding my horizons safely whilst politely declining things I feel I'm going to hate. It's all about the smell, mussels had a good smell and the texture of chicken and no vibe of slime that I always thought they would have. But when Kidney beans and marmite were mixed into my Shepherds pie, wow did that smell like a carcass that died six weeks ago of an infected wound dressed in the guts squeezed out of a wasp larva. I like regular Shepherds pie. I know it was that marmite and beans making it smell not to my palette, and indeed despite the reassurances that it would taste like the Jonas brother's music, it tasted like Jedward's.

That's the problem, I knew an Italian restaurant would smell like tomato...or pasta, or tomato on pasta? That smell is so strong it's gone all the way through my sinuses and into my throat and lingered there, bringing a wave of that wanting to throw up feeling the moment I walked in the door. And do you know what that's on top of? Nerves. Because I'm the centre of attention tonight, we're all here to celebrate me. Under sixteens. Manchester arena, I think. Called the Giga finals, which you qualify for after making it through the Mega finals. And the sport is, drum roll...Sword fighti- no I'm just kidding it's Chess. I don't think I'm actually very good at Chess, I just started early and understood the rules more than the other kids.

T'was a minor miracle how I got through. Only needing half a point, I walked into the hall with all the long tables set out like stems of dry pasta; each stem for a different age group. And I lost all hope when seeing my name at the top rank against a guy called Eugene Hess, what a nerd name. For once I thought maybe I should use all the time on my clock, since that was something I never did and perhaps that would be the key to success. Well after two moves Eugene offered a draw so maybe taking my time did work. Giga finals here we come. Also, big up my parents, when I walked back into the common room so soon after leaving, they all thought I'd fucking lost.

My most exciting game ever was when I kept taking my moves so fast that the other girl ran out of time. I could argue that by moving the insignificant pawn one square forward on the left side whilst the action was all on the right forced her to re-evaluate her plan to assault my right side defences, holding their phalanx like positions of everyone being covered, with only being able to move one piece at a time any attack could quickly leave her exposed without the ability to properly defend her king. But that would be bullshit, I moved the pawn because it can only go one place, one square forward, no thought required. My moves were Rotten Tomatoes certified shit, but she couldn't handle the pressure. Believe me it's not love of the game that keeps me playing. It's the winning. No aspect of it excited me, excites me or will excite me. There is no serotonin moving about in my head until I see that king get dunked on. I know this, I've played like a million games and the only pregame excitement I get is if I know the other person isn't as good as me. There's no, "up for the challenge," part that calls out to me nah fuck that, I win or I get nothing from it, cos after this monologue how much of a good learner do you think I am.

But yeah, celebrating me winning chess. Doesn't happen often, I played Chess for Norfolk twice and never won a game although Norfolk came last both times (side note I was board eighteen for Norfolk as in eighteenth best, Eugene Hess, remember him? Was board four). The one score I remember we got was eight points, out of a possible hundred. Twenty people play five games each so mathematically speaking the maximum number of people who played for Norfolk who can say they've won a game is eight. Again, that's eight out of one hundred games. Strangely though, if anyone else but me disses Norfolk, then they're due a mini Nelson's column statue to the back of the head for chatting shit about my home! Where was I? Ah yes, winning at Chess doesn't happen often. Which means more attention on me and my aversion to eating ninety percent of all foods. What sucks part three is that my social skills are fucked.

Let's start at the beginning. In primary school I was popular. So popular that that last popular wasn't emphasised enough. In primary school I was Pop-U-Larrrrrr. Then in year six instead of remaining in the crowd where everyone loved me, I was with more strange faces than familiar. No matter, I made new friends quickly enough, but these new people who would define who I was throughout my adolescence, well six years later and I'm still convinced they're allergic to the sun. Xbox was their reason to live. Not underage drinking like cool people. But I can't put all the blame on them for my lack of social development. Some of it I will admit...was also my mum's fault. At not just ten years old but well into being eleven I was still a Mummy's boy, sitting on her lap where she'd stroke the corner of her sleeve on my arms and neck. The fallout, after an outburst from my Dad at my Mum about this was that instead of coming home to watch TV with her, I would go straight into my room and into bed at four in the afternoon, school clothes still on. In hindsight I feel sorry for my parents, what on earth must they have thought about the weirdo that was their child. Only ninety percent of puberty to go.

Anyway, when my parents came up to see me, I'd claim I was tired, which had some truth to it. Today I love my sleep, I'm mature enough to say I need to stop doing this thing and get some rest; instead of stubbornly staying up for the reason of spiting rest and relaxation to prove how cool I am to absolutely nobody. But it meant a lot to me in early high school. Cos great BBC shows like Spooks and Silent Witness were on (I liked the third Matrix the best because of its big shoot guns bits so that's how good Spooks and Silent Witness were, that the talking could keep me entertained). These shows could have had action packed climaxes, but I never knew because my bedtime was nine-thirty.

I was so enraged that, well there's a bit in the Inbetweeners where Jay says he's completed a football game and Neil's like you can't complete it because it just goes on and on forever. Oh me and my PsP completed some football games Neil. The career mode lasted fifteen seasons, fifty to sixty games a season, six minutes a half plus stoppage time, pauses for throws, free kicks and penalties, added to that all the time in the hub, doing contract and transfer stuff. Take all that time and times it by eight clubs I did it with. All at night after I'd been told to go to bed because I was so enraged and not tired. So yeah maybe when I told my parents I was tired at four in the afternoon it was kinda true. Also, I won every match like nine-nil, not because I was good, oh no there were so many skills and tricks that I never got the hang of, I just played on the second easiest difficulty.

So, where are we? Oh yeah Italian restaurant, feeling nervous. Let's add thirsty to the list. There's some water on the table but I don't like the taste of water. Let me justify it before

you judge. Well you remember that time I said I didn't like any healthy foods. Because little kids are fucking stupid, I decided I didn't like Dr Pepper because I didn't like pepper, also, I had never tried Dr Pepper or pepper. Ok then, well (and I swear the next bit will become relevant) coming of high school age me had just tasted Cherry Coke, and you don't understand, this wasn't a brand-new discovery for me. I knew Cherry Coke existed but eleven-year-old me had never tried it. I couldn't find it anywhere or worse, I would find it when I didn't have any money. Well as fate would have it, one day my mum did a thing at a community centre (something with kids and bikes) with a tuck shop and gave me a bit of money for it. And at that tuck shop... was obviously cherry coke. If you've tasted cherry coke, then you'll know that it doesn't taste much different. But I had built it up so much in my head and unlike me to my parents, Cherry Coke didn't let me down. And so, I was back at that tuck shop every day possible. This was now an out of control addiction, I'm not kidding I would sneak other people's glasses if I thought the black liquid had even a slight chance of being Cherry Coke. But one day, stealing someone else's drink, it wasn't either Cherry Coke or Regular Coke. What I had just drunk was in fact, Dr Pepper. And it was...even better!!!! So now my fizzy addiction was doubled and one innocent plea to my mum for the fizz soon became her habit to buy whatever cans were on offer every single shopping trip. I was done with water (you remember that's how this paragraph started), I still had juice at school or when playing football but everywhere else, three to five cans a day. The only liquid I would consume (cos obviously my fussy ass wasn't eating soup). Pause one second, just how the fuck do I still have teeth? That's literally only just occurred to me. I also liked orange juice, as in the pure stuff, as in has, "acidic" in its list of traits.

Yeah so four years of enamel murdering later and I'm starting to cut back on the sugar and drink a bit more squash. Water's still rank, I haven't changed that much but oh well maybe some of the oil on the margarita pizza I ordered will satisfy the thirst in my throat.

Maybe I could ask for more drinks, another coke please. But that will bring people's eyes on me and that makes me want to run away. No joke here I hate those moments *truly madly deeply do* (last pop culture reference I promise). The whole confidence anxiety thing probably wasn't helped that when I was a teenager, I had spots on every centimetre of my face. And if I got a cold or something that made my immune system a bit off and wonky for a week, there were even white heads on my lips and ears. Can't understand why it was that bad for me though, I mean all I did was, get no sleep, drink no water, eat like shit, stress out in every social situation and come home and get into bed without washing at all, rubbing my

oily forehead on my pillow after spending seven hours with five hundred other oily heads. Jesus hates me it's the only logical reason.

Anyway, I eat some bread just as a preparation for when I don't eat most of the food we pay for and I 'accidentally' cough, "Oh, there isn't much water left. Ok, I'll have another coke." I'm a bit of a genius, maybe that's why I'm playing chess with the giga nerds soon (spoiler, I won't. Not dragging my family to the other side of the country to comfort me after getting destroyed). When our food comes out to my surprise over half the orders where margaritas like mine. And it tastes nice, everyone says congratulations to me and smiles with no mocking. I'm expecting something so bad and I panic when I can't see anything going wrong. But they look actually happy for me and that's it. Eventually my awkward smile turns genuine. Maybe, just maybe, I should let the past go a little bit.