

*The*  
Disorganisation  
*of* Celia Stone

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*To Augie, who brought everything I feared –  
and more than I ever dreamed*

'A modern stoic knows that the surest way to discipline passion is to discipline time: decide what you want or ought to do during the day, then always do it at exactly the same moment every day, and passion will give you no trouble.'

W.H. Auden

# 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

## PEAK POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

- Activities/outings with 1-3 loved ones at a time
- Date nights with Jes
- Vietnam with Jes
- Working on the book and blog
- Running

## PEAK NEGATIVES

- Overbooking weekends (e.g. weekend in which had date night, then breakfast do, then family thing, then girls' night)
- Obligation parties/large social gatherings (don't want to go, feel guilty, go anyway, have shit time, leave early, feel guilty)

## TO SCHEDULE – BASED ON PEAK POSITIVES

- Schedule Jes' parents to dinner quarterly, Dad weekly, alternate fortnights for grandparents, Aubrey & Dave and Lili & Bennett quarterly each. Consider outings e.g. local tours & escape rooms, not just dinners
- Offer to babysit some of Jes' little cousins?
- More/regular date nights
- Solo creativity-nourishing activities for self
- Mid-year holiday
- Volunteer; to contribute to society?

## NOT-TO-DO – BASED ON PEAK NEGATIVES

- NO booking 2+ events in one day
- NO bookings on Sundays AT ALL
- NO going to parties when don't really want to

## AIM

- Make 2019 a qualitatively better and more efficient year

**2019**

**January**

## Tuesday 1 January

Life really doesn't get any better than a lovely sunny New Year's brunch with my husband, Diary; unless, that is, it's a lovely sunny brunch producing a really solid, actionable set of meeting minutes.

Jes looked a bit resigned when I got out my notebook, printouts and refillable ballpoint, pushing aside my long black to make room, but made no protest apart from saying, 'I thought you don't believe in New Year's resolutions.'

'I agree the traditional form of New Year's resolution is largely useless,' I said. 'But people who leave it at that are equal cop-outs to the people who make their resolutions only to immediately break them and go back to their old ways. In fact, I sympathise more with the people who made and broke their resolutions. At least they had some positive energy.'

'Right,' said Jes. He finished the remaining two-thirds of his flat white in one gulp and gestured for another to the waiter, who nodded across the crowd. I decided not to tell Jes that having so much milk and caffeine before his meal was going to destroy his appetite and that he should drink more mindfully. He looked a bit hungover, and I should be chill about this sort of thing during the holidays. I pressed on with my point instead.

'Just because the old formula of making resolutions is ineffective doesn't mean we should squander the opportunity. Especially one that conveniently comes at this point in the calendar year and festive season. It's a time we are naturally reflective, so it's

a logical opportunity to assess our activities over the past year, and their impact, so we can identify actionable improvements for the next.'

'We should make one of our resolutions that you have to put a dollar in a jar every time you use the word "actionable", said Jes, which I ignored. The incomparable Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Workweek* and other bibles, has a great method for this process: the past-year review. I proceeded to explain.

'Basically, we look over our entire calendars for the past year, everything we did. Obviously, you need to be able to refer to a diary or calendar where you have faithfully and systematically recorded all events and activities for 2018.'

'Ummm.'

'I printed them out,' I said, handing him his, and taking a sip of my coffee. God, it was good. Coffee out is such a treat. 'So use this to identify your peak positive and negative experiences. You can analyse this information through the lens of the 80/20 rule.'

Jes looked blank.

'The Pareto Principle?'

'Sorry.' He shrugged.

'In this context, the 80/20 rule means roughly 20% of people, activities or commitments will have triggered 80% of your peak positive or lowest negative points last year.'

'Right,' Jes said, scanning his printout. His fresh coffee arrived and he immediately drank half of it.

'Then, based on knowing what is good for you and bad for you, you can actually schedule in more of the positive leaders for the year ahead in a concrete fashion and get them on the calendar. You can book and pre-pay. It's solid and it's actionable!'

'Right. And what about the negatives?'

'Yep, that's the second part. You take the negative leaders and

make them into a not-to-do list and put it somewhere you can see it for a while, theoretically until you learn to stop doing them out of guilt, or FOMO, or whatever it is that made us do them. This is where I fell down in 2018. It's a lot easier for me to schedule more positive stuff than to do less of anything.'

'Really?' Jes said.

'But this is why I want you to do it with me this year,' I said. 'Help keep me accountable.' I looked at my beautiful husband, his messy brown hair and his melty brown eyes and his funny smile. His expression was brightening, because our food was arriving: bacon, eggs, toast and chipolatas for him, house-cured salmon bagel for me. 'Yay,' I said. 'You can do your review while you eat!'

'Yay,' said my patient beloved. 'Where's yours?'

'I already did mine.'

I looked over mine while we ate and Jes flicked through his printed-out Google calendars and made notes. Then we swapped and looked at each other's.

'Running,' Jes said in disgust, looking at my list.

'You like hiking.'

'Hiking's *nice*. It involves stopping and smelling the roses.'

'Roses?'

'Well, trees.'

'Running also involves enjoying scenery,' I said.

'We already catch up with friends and family a lot,' Jes said, reading down the page.

'Yes, but the scheduling of it takes up a lot of my mental real estate, so if we do that in advance then it's easier.'

'If you say so. But this looks like a very full schedule.'

'Too much? Maybe I drop couples dinners with Lili and Bennett and Aubrey and Dave to twice a year each?'

‘Maybe. And why is keeping up with my grandparents and sister on *your* list, anyway?’

‘Well, is it on yours?’

Silence.

‘That’s why.’

‘And babysitting my cousins?’

‘I don’t know ... it would be nice to be part of their lives, get to know them better?’

‘Yeah, let’s put that on the maybe pile. Along with volunteering.’ He drank the rest of his coffee, and said, ‘OK, now we’re talking: holiday! But only one?’

‘Well, I might need the rest of my annual leave to work on the book.’

‘OK ... I’m down with not overbooking weekends and going to obligation parties. I put that as a negative, too. It’s you scheduling all that in, though.’

‘This year I won’t!’

Jes’ peak positives also included Vietnam, date nights, and small get-togethers, as well as a couple of big hikes he did and some of his work field trips, which amazed me – imagine listing any work day as a really *positive* experience.

Thoroughly satisfied by our session, I sipped my cold but still delicious coffee and was at the point of packing up when Jes said, ‘Wait. I’ve got one more item.’

‘What is it?’ I said, excited. I was already thinking, maybe he wants to do pottery classes with me! Or go horseriding! Or abseiling? Learn to whittle?

‘It’s time to reopen discussions on whether we try to have a baby,’ Jes said.

This time it was my turn to stare blankly at him. I felt my hands

scrabble for something to do. They found my coffee cup.

‘You said you’d maybe revisit the issue. You’re 34 this year.’ Undeniable. ‘And you’d want a nice long time to plan and prepare, knowing you.’

‘OK, you can flag that,’ I said, slowly. My coffee cup was empty. How did that happen? I put the cup down. ‘That’s logical.’ But I felt my heart pounding, thinking of how I’d just spent half an hour contemplating our current difficulties in trying to shoehorn everything necessary into life.

‘Celia, are you all right? You’ve gone white,’ Jes said.

‘No I haven’t,’ I said, faintly.

‘We don’t have to talk about it now. I’m only putting it on the table.’

‘No, you’re right. This whole exercise is about designing the future, after all. Thanks for communicating with me,’ I said, ineffectually tidying the breakfast mess on the table. ‘I’ll take it on notice.’

Now Jes has fallen asleep on the couch, sleeping off the load of artery hardeners he just consumed, happily oblivious to what he’s done.

### **Thursday 3 January**

Have baby? Think about having baby? I really don’t know how to classify this. Jes doesn’t want it on the backburner, but I am certainly not putting it on the active projects list. What would the corresponding first action be? Go off birth control, I suppose. Do you get fertile the second you go off the Pill? I suppose you would. Ugh, imagine getting a period again. Simply wanted to enjoy day, but now too twitchy. Might go for run.

**7pm.** Went for a run with podcast. Only semi-effective distraction – The Minimalists are getting a little repetitive. Maybe it's time for a new podcast. I could try the Mad Scientist again, get back into the whole Financial Independence Retire Early crowd. Only trouble is they are all so *American*. The financial detail is largely irrelevant for Australian listeners. Well, this is why I'm writing my own FIRE book.

There is really no other way to get that post-run feeling. Like my lungs and my brain are freshly oxygenated with joy and achievement, the sight of a sunset on the river imprinted on my retinas. I feel better now.

## **Friday 4 January**

Went for a hike with Jes. Nice being on leave and having time to do something like this together. I was hoping he wouldn't bring up the baby thing again, and he didn't.

Don't wanna go back to work on Monday. The feeling is tightening like a noose already.

## Saturday 5 January

### SHOPPING

- Dirty Clean Foods: beef bulk order
- Farmers market: eggs, fish, produce, chicken, bread
- Loose produce store: flour, pumpkin seeds, rolled oats, sunflower seeds, quinoa (remember containers)
- Coles (unavoidable): tinned stuff, toothpaste, tissues

### TO DO

- Water pots
- Fill birdbath
- Feed food scraps to worms
- Washing: clothes, towels
- Tidy weekly mess-plosion
- Vac, mop
- Granddad
- Track and classify expenses for week

**3pm.** New Year limbo well and truly behind us. Clock ticking through our last 48 hours of freedom. And of course tonight is inevitable social commitment that seemed a good idea to Celia's of Christmas Past: dinner at Aubrey and Dave's. More eating and drinking!

Jes awoke from post-lunch sleep in front of TV and asked what needed doing.

'I have to make a salad and buy wine and do my hair,' I said.

'I can get wine,' he said. 'I can't do hair.'

'Really?' I said, smiling, reaching out and ruffling his.

'And I know better than to get in the way of the salad.'

'Correct.'

‘What are you up to, anyway?’ he said, leaning over and kissing my neck in a way clearly calculated to make me lose focus.

‘I’m doing my 2019 productivity planner and calendarising our friend and family catch-ups as per our Year in Review.’

‘Sexy,’ he said, kissing down to my collarbones. ‘Tell me more.’

‘I’ve still got the artist dates with myself and date nights with you to schedule,’ I said, pulling bits of paper and highlighters out from under his butt and laughing. ‘Don’t distract me! Ah, damn it!’ The bloody washing machine was beeping again. Jes got off the couch. ‘OK, I’ll go get wine,’ he said.

‘Thank you,’ I called, as he shut the door behind him. I heard him splashing through my pot-watering puddles to the car.

Washing now wafting gently about in the lovely warm air, coming in fragrant through the window to me in my happy place, on the couch, laptop open to Evernote, and blissfully synced across phone and desktop, for sacred last Saturday of holiday.

# 2019 PRODUCTIVITY PLANNER

## VISION AND VALUES

'I am unattached to material objects - my home enables activities, not collections. I am a bestselling author, like Barefoot Investor Scott Pape, but a bit more radical, more lifestyle, more feminist; someone who inspires women to take charge of their lives and finances. I am financially free to choose this work without needing a full-time job. I enjoy solitude but also relationships. Fitness is a part of daily life. I maintain movement at work by getting up, stretching and resting eyes every twenty minutes' - hah! - 'Instead of watching TV and drinking, I write, listen to music, make love and dance.'

## HORIZONS OF FOCUS

Work, creative expression, family, friends, Jes, health, finances, environment.

## RELATED GOALS

- Publish *On FIRE: How young Australians can take back control, reach financial independence and retire early*
- Achieve FIRE (be mortgage and financially free by 45)
- Return to pre-Christmas weight (incl w/ no weekday booze)
- Take proper lunch break every day, away from computer
- Maintain nurturing home setting
- Avoid car use, bus/ride/walk/run everywhere possible

## RELATED PROJECTS

- Clean mould from bedroom ceiling
- Replant dead courtyard pots
- Reticulate to avoid repeat of above
- Courtyard furniture to sit and enjoy live plants
- Replace family photos (old photo of Mum making me sad)
- Holiday
- Finish manuscript (end Jan)
- Update online profiles (blog, LinkedIn) pre-pitching

## BACKBURNER/SOMEDAY/MAYBE (MANY PROJECTS TRANSFERRED HERE TO HASTEN BOOK PROJECT)

- SEO optimise blog
- Letter writing night at writers centre. Could form useful networks, also feel good to tell politicians what I think of them?
- Next book: memoir about what happened with Mum (maybe) or novel?
- Restart donating blood (hard to schedule around work)
- Scan Dad's old photos for him in case of fire
- Switch to ethical super fund + investments?
- Solar panels? LED lights?
- Girls' trip with Aubrey?
- New Zealand, Tasmania, Europe, Bibbulmun Track with Jes
- To try: acroyoga, rollerskating, self-defence, pole dancing/barre/ballroom?
- Transfer old Word docs into Evernote

## RELATED NEXT ACTIONS

### *Calls/anywhere*

- Google three people for retic quotes
- Look on Gumtree for furniture (recycling)

### *Errands*

- Go to Waldecks for potting mix and plants

### *Agendas*

- Talk to Jes re: holiday location

### *Delegate*

- Mould to Jes

### *Home/computer*

- Finish chapter 30, research good table for defining assets
- Compile spreadsheet of fellowships, awards, publishers and agents
- Add to website and LinkedIn: 2014 MoneySmart Week award for financial literacy workshops, 2018 youngest ever winner of Jan Pentland Prize for contributions to financial counselling sector; links to 2018 Money and Mamamia coverage, plus Daily Mail list with me as one of Australia's top 10 personal finance bloggers

### *Home/active*

- Remove wall photos

## WEEKDAY\* MEAL PLAN

Max health & save time = natural glowing beauty, thus minimal beauty products and fancy clothes required

### *Breakfast: n/a*

### *Snack*

black coffee. 1kg bag fair-trade beans yields ~55 strong coffees, roughly 18g beans each. \$38 bag = \$0.69 a cup = \$165 for a year of workdays. Cost-effective indulgence.

### *Lunch (per served)*

4 cubes frozen spinach

1 banana

25g oats

25g seeds

300ml milk (full-fat is wholefood, promotes satiety).

Blend, bottle and freeze.

### *Dinner*

Grass-fed + finished red meat (1x per week)

Free-range white meat, occasionally F/R pork (2x)

Sustainable fish (1x)

Vegetarian (1x)

Meat servings ~130g, add 1 cup veg, 1/2 cup wholegrains

\*Weekends: ad hoc as you can only plan so much (Jes laughs when I say this?)

### *Hydration*

1L morning + 1L afternoon + 1L evening

This year will EVERY SATURDAY process new notes from in-tray and categorise into above system, thereby ensuring all stray thoughts in head that emerge on road, in shower, bed, etc, appropriately captured and will be actioned methodically, thereby relieving stress, according to productivity guru David Allen.

# DAILY ROUTINES

## DAILY ROUTINES

### AM

**4.45AM.** Up. Brush. Floss. Tongue scrape.

**5AM.** Self oil massage, for physical and mental wellbeing, improved sleep.

**5.20AM.** Meditate.

**5.40AM.** Morning pages journal as per Artist's Way (separate notebook).

**6AM.** Writing manuscript: 1200 words.

**7.15AM.** Pack backpack: lunch + clothes + coffee.

**7.30AM.** Run to city: 3km. Podcast OK for mornings, for inspiration, keep weekly rat race in perspective.

**8.30AM.** Locker room. Shower and dress using capsule wardrobe/ Standard Work Uniform concept, popularised by Steve Jobs etc.

**9AM.** Work.

### PM

**5PM.** Run home. No podcast: mindful silence as per Hugh Mackay.

**6.30PM.** Dinner (Jes 2 nights, me 5; desire for fair division of labour < desire for optimum nutrition).

**7.30PM.** TV. 1 x 20-minute comedy. Movies and longer dramas weekends only.

**7.50–8.15PM.** Diary writing &/or reading, screens off for melatonin production.

**8.15–8.30PM.** Teeth, bed, sleep mask, earplugs, lavender oil, 14 minutes for average human to fall asleep, sleep 8.45pm–4.45am = 8 hours. Cannot stand people who brag about how little sleep they get. True insomnia is debilitating, and even minor inadequacy compromises output, as confirm top performers, e.g. Sheryl Sandberg, Maria Popova.

SHIT SHIT SHIT! Is 5pm and have to get ready and do hair and make salad and be there by 6! What happened to Saturday?!!

## Sunday 6 January

### SUNDAY JOBS

- Slice bread, put in reusable bag and freeze*
- Divide beef into portions, wrap and freeze*
- Make lunches and grind coffee for week*

**10am.** Dinner was great but now my head is killing me. Can't believe it's back to work and AM routine tomorrow. No energy to write after yesterday's epic entry, so just a gratitude journal for now.

### I AM GRATEFUL FOR

1. *Jes. He stayed sober last night and drove me home. Do not deserve such a wonderful husband.*
2. *My job. I may not want to go back but at least I have one, unlike half the poor bastards I will be speaking to tomorrow.*
3. *Green & Black's dark chocolate. Organic, fair-trade and readily available.*
4. *Summer. Still not over the cold of last winter; it's 35 degrees and I want every degree to sink into my bones.*
5. *Holidays. We had preliminary discussion last night. South-East Asia maybe.*

**7pm.** Don't feel grateful. Don't want to go back.

**7.15pm.** Don't be a sook. It will be nice to see everyone. It's only work.

## Monday 7 January

**7.50pm.** Back to routine this morning. Quarter-hour self-massage in the dark bathroom, on the tacky towel over hard tiles, dim flickering candlelight while the city slept around me, a sweet-

smelling little oasis. Then a lovely warm morning outside for run. Scrolled through some of my favourite interview podcasts, and one caught my eye: an interview with Sarah Hill, author of a book being published later this year. It's called *How the Pill Changes Everything: Your Brain on Birth Control*. Tagline *The Surprising Science of Women, Hormones, and the Law of Unintended Consequences*. It's like the internet targets advertising to your very thoughts now.

Well, it was bloody confronting, but I didn't have time to process (still haven't) because there I was at the front door, taking a deep, centring breath in front of the same old frosted-glass door in its dingy metal frame, the Financial Counsellors' Association logo stencilled on it. Opened it to smell of old stationery and greasy keyboards and stale coffee, Kizzy and Noah unpacking bags and scratching around like chickens. Switched on computer with depressing realisation that computer does not register absences.

'Hey Celia! How was your holiday?' Kizzy said.

'It was nice! Didn't do much,' I said, instantly feeling like holiday wasn't even real but had vanished, insubstantial as smoke, subsumed by reality once again. 'How about you?'

'Ugh, heaps of eating and drinking,' Kizzy said, one glance at her confirming it.

'Yesss, how good is Christmas? I ate so much,' said Noah, always as skinny as a desert lizard no matter what he eats. 'Speaking of which, anyone want to go to Muffin Top?' They are always going to Muffin Top for coffee or toasties or doughnuts.

'Oooh, yes,' said Kizzy.

'I'll stay here and get myself sorted,' I said.

'Want us to get you something?' said Noah.

'No, I've got to get back on the straight and narrow. But thanks!'

Kizzy and Noah's practice of spending \$4.50 a day on flat whites and other such sugary beverages works out to a bit over \$1000 for a coffee a day for the whole 48-week working year, \$500 maybe for Noah who is part-time. But my ritual is equally enjoyable. I only drink one coffee a day, having conquered the addiction of the dark times. The pour-over method provides enjoyment, luxury and totals 15% of the cost of Kizzy's habit. More satisfaction in a single sip of my rich long black, too, than in a flat white, and mindful savouring eliminates late-morning hunger pangs.

Mariel helped on the desks with pile-up from the holidays, and I took an actual lunch break! The little city park was pretty, and warm compared to the bite of the air-conditioning. After my smoothie I sat and soaked in the sun for another 10 minutes. I used to hate summer, but recently I can't get enough of it. I closed my eyes and breathed in the warmth of the air, concentrating on feeling it on the tip of my nostrils. The weight of the people and their problems in my office and inbox would crush me if I could not retreat inside my lovely strong healthy body. Even after the mindfulness exercise, after one morning, I felt the horror of their combined circumstances begin to batter at my defences.

After lunch, an intense discovery meeting with a new client, Graeme. I wanted to tell him things would be OK, but I've learned that stuff sounds as hollow as it feels to say. It's like visiting dogs in a shelter. They're at the mercy of a system that's bigger than either of us. Poor old Graeme, if only he hadn't lost his job. But this is what kills me. Why don't people like Graeme have a plan, a safety net? In their 50s and still completely reliant on their job to keep the wolf from the door? By the time I get them, it's too late for anything but damage control, negotiating with the banks and the payday lenders and contacting crisis supports. That's why I want my book to reach people my age, to inspire them to want something more: more

stable, more ambitious. Not blindly playing the game only to lose.

I ran home with my eyes burning from the computer and my brain buzzing with other people's burdens. The lowering sun was right in my face and the headwind nasty. I felt heavy and slow, but it was satisfying to pound my sadness into the pavement and my Christmas body back into shape; by the time I got home and was in the shower I felt totalled but good again, cleansed.

## Tuesday 8 January

**12.30pm.** Having pre-prepped smoothie lunches helps avoid temptations to go out with Kizzy and Noah. But while they are lovely pale-green liquid when freshly made on a Sunday, once frozen and thawed they are kinda brown. It doesn't affect the taste, but no one believes me when I say they are really quite tasty, just like a banana smoothie despite the colour. They are also very substantial (it took some experimenting to get the consistency pourable. I had to reduce the size of the bananas and remove one of the spinach cubes from the recipe but have perfected it now).

Sitting on the grass, by the time I'm finished chewing my drink, have made monumental decision: am going off Pill.

Podcast interview with professor who authored *How the Pill Changes Everything* was scarifying. Women's sex hormones apparently way more numerous and complex than men (who have only testosterone, not the interconnecting web women do) and affect everything – stress, sex, hunger, eating, emotions, friendships, love, moods, even partner choice. Professor says hormonal birth control mucks with all of this, not only fertility, but that the embrace of the Pill across developed societies, given its efficacy and convenience and what it has freed women to do,

has stymied much research into this and predated our understanding of these impacts, which she described as a cascading effect on ‘everything and everyone’ a woman encounters.

I started taking the Pill at 15. The GP said it didn’t matter whether I took the placebo pills that generate a fake period once a month, that I could skip them and no harm done. So I always did, and eventually the breakthrough bleeds stopped, and I never thought about it again until I took up yoga with Bernadette – around the same time as I started meditating, a last-ditch effort to call time on the dark times. It was all very effective at getting me to sleep again, but I didn’t quite bank on the additional teachings: Bernadette loves periods, WOMEN MUST BLEED, she intones as we all squirm, and is scathing about culture viewing them as a messy inconvenience. Can she tell from the way I can’t meet her eye in lectures that I haven’t had one in years? I always look around and wonder what everyone else is thinking: are they too unbelievers?

She must have been getting to me like water wears away a stone, though, because in recent years, I’ve gone from ignoring her completely to a kind of uneasy consciousness that taking the Pill nonstop for nearly 20 years might have mucked with my circuitry. I mean, it’s a long time to take any kind of medication.

Maybe it’s time an experiment was held. I mean, health is important to me, and maybe there’s something to be said for natural hormone balances. *Maybe.*

But I definitely do not want to get pregnant. I guess we will have to use condoms for a while, until I can research alternative modes of birth control. Jes will love that.

**8.40pm.** As predicted. ‘Condoms,’ Jes said, in the kind of tone people usually reserve for phrases like ‘brussels sprouts.’ Or ‘rat poison,’ or ‘nerve gas.’

‘Just for a while,’ I said, placing a drop of lavender on my pillow. ‘Until I research alternative forms of birth control.’

‘I take it you’ve ruled out trying for a baby then.’

‘I am thinking about it,’ I said. ‘But I am also thinking about getting this book written, and sold, and preferably the next one well on the way before’ – I hesitated, then said, ‘Look, I’m taking the first step, yeah?’

He sighed, and put his hands behind his head. ‘I guess. But isn’t there some other kind of birth control option?’

‘There actually aren’t that many effective, non-hormone-based options,’ I said. ‘And I think it takes time for your hormones to go back to normal. It’ll be like when I stopped paying heaps to put lighter streaks in my hair, to see what my natural colour was like. It did come back, but I had to grow it out.’

‘It is a nice colour,’ Jes said, toying with my hair.

‘Exactly. Who knows what I’m like on an unadulterated cocktail of natural hormones? Maybe my libido will triple.’ I reached for my special sleep mask, a large silk head-bandage-like affair that seems to have a pregnancy-preventing effect in its own right.

‘Maybe,’ Jes said, sounding like he thought there was nothing less likely in the universe.

‘And anyway, now I’ve made up my mind, I want to do it now.’

‘Big surprise,’ said Jes. ‘You, making a decision and wanting to move instantly to implementation phase? Who are you and what have you done with my wife?’

I laughed and whacked him with a pillow. ‘There’s no need for impertinence.’ I gave him a kiss. ‘And nothing wrong with efficiency.’

Now, to restore body to natural state. Simplicity itself.

## Thursday 10 January

**8.10pm.** I may have only a couple of years left in me that I can realistically sustain this schedule before I slump to the pavement and need towing away like one of the half-dead plague victims piled on the cart in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. This is partly why I am pushing myself to achieve work and financial goals (hello career as personal finance blogger, author and all-round guru! ... ANY MINUTE NOW IS FINE, ARE YOU LISTENING, PUBLISHERS?) Really must focus on this, and yet ... as though the Christmas catch-ups that *had* to happen in December weren't only just done with, the invitations for January and February are already rearing their heads. And like a Hydra, for every one you cut off, two more grow in their place.

## Saturday 12 January

**4.30pm.** Went to lunch for Jes' Nan's bday. Given all the Christmas dos have only very recently happened, we ran out of conversation pretty quick. So I opened my big mouth and mentioned to Jes' sister how excited I was to go get a new lipstick, because I'd finally nearly used up my current lipstick after a year working on it.

Lili is a makeup lover, almost as glam as Aubrey, even though as a TV reporter Aubrey is professionally glam. She looked at my cloudy and scratched little tube with distaste and asked why I didn't get a new one now?

Can partly blame extreme minimalist vlogger Light By Coco for my obsession with minimalism in the beauty department. But it's not just a vague yearning to be like the (thin and beautiful) Coco; in general, half-finished tubes of anything have begun to stress me out. Clutter in pantries and bathroom cabinets leads

people to forget and devalue what they own, then they have dirty cupboards full of expired and duplicate purchases difficult to see. Then once every year, or two, or ten, they throw things out en masse with contents still inside containers that could have been recycled if clean and empty.

I don't even like having one new and one backup packet of same item in the pantry, so end up cooking weird meals just to finish things.

Even Jes not aware of this, simply thinks I like cooking really experimental foods; to explain to Lili would sound bonkers. So I sort of mumbled ineffectually, which I think Nan took to mean I was living in poverty, because she creaked up from the table and waddled off into her bedroom, reappearing with three tubes she'd bought on impulse at a Nutrimerics party despite them not really suiting her (exactly the kind of behaviour that stresses me out). Immediately the two halves of my personality went to war: thrifty side thrilled, Light By Coco side horror-struck. Thrifty won; plus I do love that feeling of being mothered and grandmothered by Janka and Nan.

Tried to see if Lili wanted one of the lipsticks but she said 'I only use MAC' with a decisiveness I can only dream of.

Opened my mouth to see if I could offer one to Janka but she was getting up and said, 'Daniel, come and help me get the sweets.' His nan and Janka are the only ones who call Jes by his real name; even his dad calls him Jes.

I'll give the unopened ones away on Buy Nothing, but now feel must use up the other. Only have myself to blame.

Lunch dragged and I've run out of time for blog post. I must keep numbers up this year to prove established audience when pitching book.

## Tuesday 15 January

Jes is off on his first flora survey for work this year. Some site outside Newman. He was complaining about how hot it would be but after another day in frigid office I think that kind of heat sounds pretty good. Thankfully a short trip – 3 days. Could not help but think, when kissing him goodbye, that it might be the last time I do. Anything could happen. I know this is irrational but I can't help it.

'Be careful,' I said, hugging him to me in bed.

'I will, sweets,' he said.

'Drive safe.'

'I will!' He said, disentangling himself. 'Ceels, I got to go.'

'Promise!' I said.

He leant back in and kissed me. 'I promise.'

Sorry Diary, but I will be writing in this horrible-looking red ink for the foreseeable future. Jes brought home a pile of those bi-colour red and blue biro's from work, the kind where you slide down a little knob to change the colour. Believe he's done it on purpose in defiance of my secret wish he would just get one pen and refill it.

I feel like all the blues are going to get used up and the reds never will, so I am going to use them up here. It's not very pleasing to the eye but they are only my eyes and so it does not matter.

## Wednesday 16 January

**8am.** Forced to abandon running and get train to work for a few days, have got a sore knee. Already miss river, in which you only ever see things that seem right, and make you smile: like

birds banging fish brains open on rocks, and pelicans gliding around. Instead forced to look at fellow humans holding phones. Opposite me, a pale-pink, plastic-covered phone has a small, gilded heart hanging off it, a monstrous impracticality that holds my gaze, so that I then notice its owner's perfect shellac nails: a precisely matching pink. Purposeful? I imagine her pay cheque, all funnelled straight into manicures and phone cases and haircuts and clothes, while planet rots and neighbourhoods erode and her pay-cycle-dependent future solidifies before her as she gazes slack-jawed into her phone.

**8.10pm** Used extra time gained from getting train to ring Dad. Mentioned knee for something to say, then regretted it.

'It's all that running. You should go to the doctor, get it looked at.'

'I'll go to the doctor when you do!' Mum used to make us both go.

'Fair enough. Did you have a nice weekend?'

'I guess. We had to go to Jes' folks' place on Saturday. And then I had to do a blog post. Then Sunday was all chores. Sorry I didn't get to see you.'

'That's all right. Nothing's changed with me.' He sounded a little down.

'Come see Granddad with me this weekend,' I said.

'Maybe.'

'Come on, Dad,' I nagged.

'I'll have to look at the diary, darling heart. Check with me later in the week.'

I know there's nothing in his diary. I hate how he hardly ever goes and sees Granddad. I know Granddad is his father-in-law and he forgets who Dad is half the time, but we are supposed to still be a family.

**Thursday 17 January**

**FEB/MARCH ENGAGEMENTS**

- Granddad x 2
- Writing Seminar
- Dad x 4
- Petula
- Jes' parents (x 2?)
- Grandparents x 2
- Lili and Bennett
- Date night/s?
- Artist date??

**7.50pm.** Back to running today. I knew I should give the knee a bit longer but feel so sluggish and paranoid about losing fitness. It hurt a bit, but overall not too bad.

As I was looking at the calendar for Feb and March trying to see how to make it all work, the phone rang. My stomach gave a nasty jolt, but it was Aubrey, so I answered it.

'Hey!' Aubrey said.

'Hey,' I said. 'How's it going?'

'How are YOU going? You sound like you got something up your butt.'

'Don't worry about it. What's up?'

'Nothing much. Just saying hi. I feel like it's time we caught up, the two of us.'

'This is true,' I said, my heart sinking.

'When are you free for the pub?'

I consulted the calendar. 'How about the second?'

'Of February?'

'Yeah, of February. It's the first weekend date I've got free in Feb.'

‘Really? What about a weeknight?’

I can’t do stuff on weeknights. I just can’t. Aubrey doesn’t understand, she does shiftwork all the time and is used to having no routine, seems to thrive on it. ‘I’m getting up really early at the moment. I’ve got to get the manuscript finished by the first,’ I said apologetically.

‘Who says?’ Aubrey said, but there was a smile in her voice.

I hesitated, but she put me out of my misery.

‘OK. The second it is.’

We hung up and then the phone rang again. Thinking it was Aubrey ringing back, still gazing at my calendar, I didn’t look properly before swiping.

‘Hello?’

‘Oh hi, Celia, it’s Dominic!’

My heart plummeted. I worked with Dominic for so long at Anglicare. He has always been a beautiful soul. And now he is another beautiful soul with cancer. Why do all the best people get cancer? And last time I spoke with him last year, we said we would catch up.

So of course I can do lunch on Feb 10th.

At least Jes is back tonight.

**9pm.** Jes noticeably bronzed. Love seeing him afresh when he gets back from site, his long dark curls and dark lashes. People talk about my dark hair and eyes but he is really beautiful, with his square jaw and twisty smile and bandy legs. Oh I love, love, love, love my husband. Feel sorry for people who don’t seem happy in their marriages.

Turns out sex with a condom ain’t so bad either.

I didn’t bring up what I have done to our social calendar. It’s already past bedtime.

## **Friday 18 January**

**8.15pm.** Managed to say no to booze (!! ) in afternoon despite Mariel brandishing it under my nose. But in classic case of decision fatigue, cracked and ate a handful of Maltesers, as Kizzy was offering enormous box around the office. Felt incredibly sinful. Haven't eaten Maltesers since I was a kid and used to eat them at the movies. Feel New Year's non-resolutions re: social commitments and now diet quivering, in the way a poorly balanced pile of stuff does the moment before it crashes down around your ears.

## **Saturday 19 January**

Feel overwhelmed by jobs to get done on weekends so in addition to Next Actions list will jot down a little schedule to refer to on Saturdays and Sundays. To automate decisions and minimise stress.