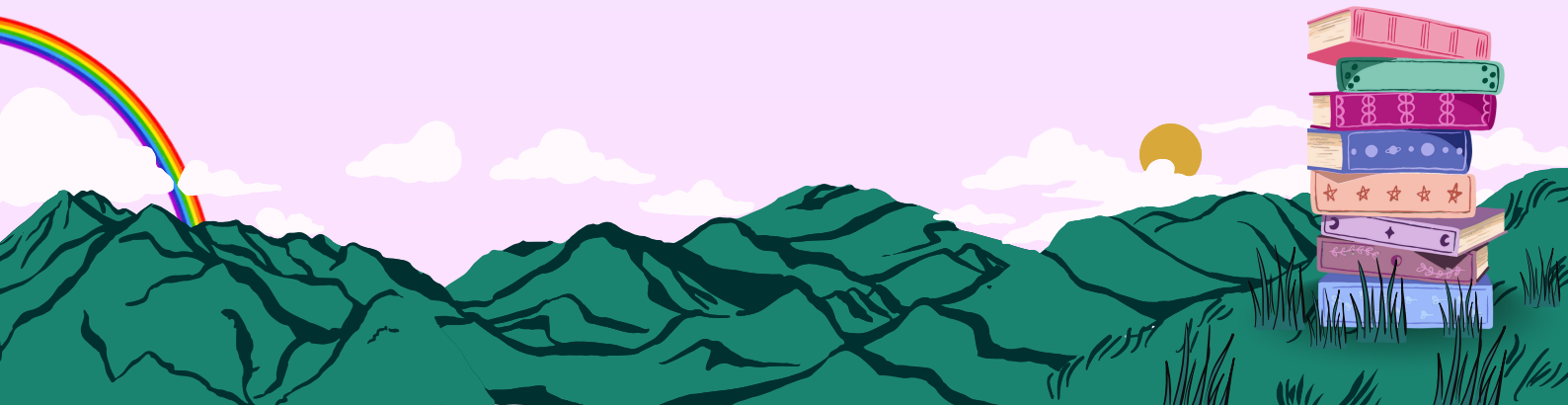


MIND

Kate Nahu

When I was little I wanted to be put in boarding school. I was obsessed with *Malory Towers* and *Harry Potter* and would read my tattered copies until the pages had to be taped back in. I was in love with the idea of living in a fancy stone tower (I was convinced all boarding schools were not only very fancy, but very old), away from nagging parents, somewhere I could completely remake myself. Any vague glance at my subconscious would reveal what actually called to me: the idea of forced proximity to others my age. I yearned to have a roommate, someone who'd be won over by my winning personality (or just succumb to liking me since we'd be sharing a room). Together we'd get into all sorts of mischief, raiding the kitchen, exploring the grounds, throwing paper planes at teachers. Everything, I decided, would be better at a boarding school.

Because everything wasn't better at home. I'd quickly caught on that I was different, weird. My body didn't fit me right and my stomach bigger than all the other little girls (I'd stuff pillows down my shirts so my tummy wouldn't feel as big after I took them out). Worse than my body was my behaviour. Because I was weird, the label of freak fitted better than my uniform, and stuck. I didn't like the correct little girl things, I talked too fast blurring my words together, my clothes were eclectic at best; I was (figuratively) a walking scab. I'd accepted this, but thought that at a boarding school people would be able (aka forced) to look past my unique (deformed) personality and catch a glimpse of my heart of gold.



Obviously no one did and by the time I was grown up enough to realise that my failure to be normal wasn't one of a 'soul' (the very essence of me which someone would recognise as a kindred spirit and fall in love with) it was too late. For a while I became obsessed with cults. Many library books were issued, documentaries watched and biographies purchased. I was desperate to be in a cult. *But why?* People would ask, incredulity drawing out their words. *You'd be indoctrinated. It wouldn't be youuuu.* I wanted to clap my hands and grin like a little kid. That's the point! It wouldn't be me! In an ideal world some Jim Jones or Charles Manson or Hopeful Christian would kidnap me from school and force me into their cult. Indoctrinated, I'd work with the women in the kitchen until my legs gave out, embroider Bible quotes until my fingers bled, and have children until my womb was delivered with one of them. But in the end, none of the pain (and probable abuse) would matter, because I would be one of them. Completely indoctrinated, all my weird beliefs and behaviours washed away by the purifying light of some random man's teachings. It would be the opportunity to backtrack where my mind had gone wrong, the misfiring neuron pathways I'd left too long, the habits and personality quirks (flaws) that had long since become **me**.

But as months of my new obsession passed and more research was conducted I came to a horrible conclusion. It wasn't going to be enough. Sure, people were constantly being indoctrinated, but even more escaped. They deprogrammed themselves, or were deprogrammed by others. Cults were raided, and survivors told they had been indoctrinated. All those people and all those years put into changing them, all of it erased in moments. Because if the indoctrination was that easily unravelled (even if you needed therapy forever) it wasn't worth it. By now I had realised how wrong my brain was.



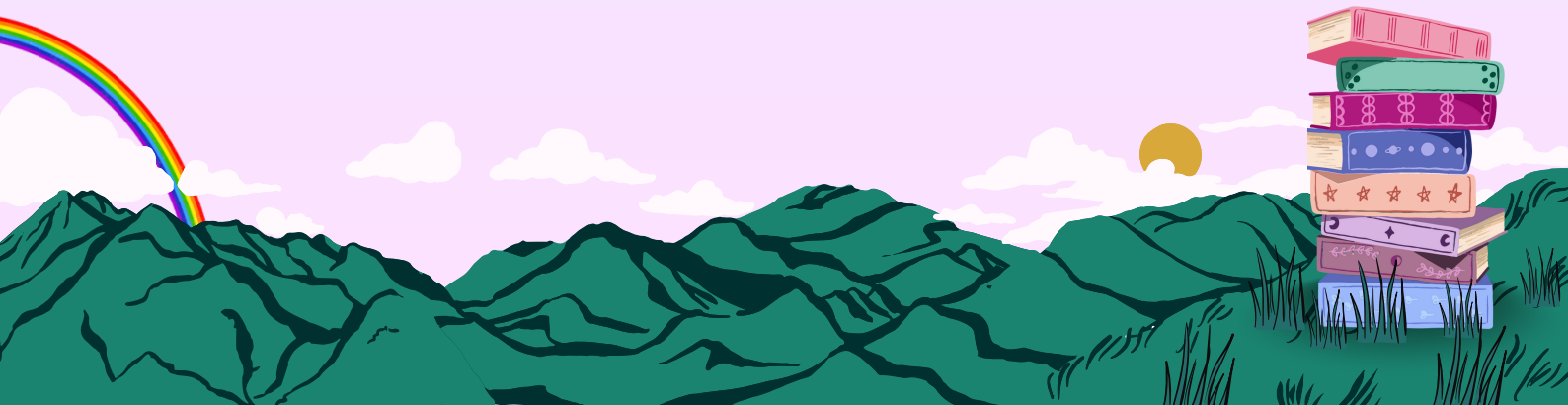
How damaged it was by a life of flawed thinking. Nothing bad had ever happened to me (a distant aunt's death was my life's biggest tragedy), but incorrect neuron pathways had still developed. The only possible reason was that I was weird because *I* was weird. Like how water trickling down a bank eventually becomes a river, my faulty neuron pathways had been set in stone before I'd had a chance to realise they were there. I'd strung all my hope on a cult's reprogramming being able to put a very permanent blockage in these rivers and form new ones, but apparently no matter how much work was put into changing them it wouldn't be enough. There could always be a storm.

Unsurprisingly, 'The Revelation' messed me up. Until then I'd either had something to blame or something to hold out hope for. *My soul's pure, it's just no one can see it! With enough work I can change!* But the truth was as starkly clear and repulsive as a skid mark. It was something wrong with me. It always had been and there wasn't any point trying to change, because I couldn't. Thanks to 'The Revelation' life stagnated. I could no longer stare at the ceiling and think of a bright and wonderful future, since I knew there wasn't one. I had to sit. See the glances. Feel the disgust as I heaved my ill fitting body onto a seat. Cringe violently when I said something off or fidgeted too obviously. It was a sluggish, exhausting hell, so of course I leaned back on what I always leant back on: an obsession. But this one wouldn't be hazy and far off, something to dream not do, but a decisive and reasonable course of action.

Plan:

Conditions-

- Alone
- Hot and Summer
- Large quantity of honey



Method

1. Strip clothes
2. Cover in honey
3. Lie outside

Personally, I found it entirely reasonable, the piece of paper I'd written it on was like a charm clutched in my fisted hand. Stripping myself of clothes was not only symbolic (casting off my earthly shell/discarding the makeshift shield I guarded my body with) but practical, how can you smear honey on yourself if you're not naked? The honey, again, practical. We usually had honey, probably not enough to cover my entire body, but I could supplement in some golden/maple syrup (even nutella if I was feeling adventurous). Once smeared, making care to coat any facial orifice heavily (eyes included), I would trod sticky steps into the garden -refer to condition 1- and lie down on the grass. This is where -condition 2- would be important. The Summer heat would beam into my sticky body and (thanks to climate change) I'd soon be sizzling. The scent of delicious, sweet and juicy me would waft across the garden, up into nearby trees and down into the earth. And finally - step 4 - of the method would initiate. Up from the dirt, unable to resist my sickly sweet scent, earwigs would wriggle, bringing along their beetle and aphid friends. From nearby ant hills streams of little black bodies would scurry, trees spewing various species and sizes of scuttling spiders. For the first time, my body would be doing something useful. I'd be a miracle to all these little life forms; a buffet sent from God. Across and into me they'd wriggle. My stomach, once just large and repulsive, would be a benefit, more fuel for the bugs; my arms and legs providing incubation for the countless eggs soon to be laid.



Bugs would infest every part of me, which is where the excess honey (maple/golden syrup - nutella) applied to my face would come into play. To my facial orifices (eyes included) hundreds would crawl, burrowing into my skull from various different entrances. The slow journey from skin, past skull and muscle, into brain would be one of tortuous anticipation. The joy of waiting for something so long, just to wobble on the terrible precipice of almostttt happening. Finally (finally!) they'd reach my brain. The excessive glucose which had been held hostage and was going to be wasted on fueling me (me?) would be bitten into by the bugs. The stored ATP could be converted into energy for 1000's of lives (joy of joys!).

I would die. Obviously. My body was to be consumed, used as hatcheries and incubators. Eventually my bones would be all that was left. Even then, the earth would reach up and suck them under where they could be used as anchors for roots to grow, tunnels for beetles, and plant fertiliser. Every part of me would be used, helping perpetuate the circle of life. It wouldn't have mattered how wrong I was in life, all the potential I'd never had, because I would be giving back.

Currently, I'm lying in the midday heat contemplating this. I've been staring up at the sun so long the world's become infected with painful white spots. I can feel the grass pressing against my back and little rocks dig into my feet, a faint breeze molests my skin. The world feels prickly, and tastes of hot saliva. In my chest a hairball of air is forming. It grows against my will (I am attempting to be morose) and is now pressing against my lips. A string of air wheezes huffily out and I manage to maintain my composure, eventually relaxing slightly. Something brushes against my arm and air spews from my mouth. A wet, phlegmy, and out right disgusting laugh (?) ricochets from me.



The world silences, stops, stares and in shock gasps ‘*she didn’t.*’. The thought doesn’t help and I’m howling louder, and wetter. The sun flashes something at me in morse code and I howl back. I can sense the waiting eyes of the bugs around me, wanting my wriggling form to stop vomiting noise and go back to cooking calmly. I look at them and cackle.

Everything about this, I want to sputter, is just so stupid. The bugs, the sun, my stupid useless body, is just so dumb. My years of hopeless conformity for what, to be eaten by bugs? I heave myself to a sitting position, sticky skin trying to pull me back down and stare straight up at the sun. It flashes something again, I wave back. I pull myself to my feet and stumble to the porch door, dropping ‘my plan’ (for Christ’s sake) on my way inside. Before slamming the door I turn to stare out at the patio. I’ve left a trail of golden/brown (NUTELLA) liquid in a human shaped imprint on the ground outside, with messy footsteps leading inside and out. In my wake many bugs have, indeed, risen to the surface of the earth and are feasting on where I lay. Not on me though, I snort somberly.

My sunbaked high is beginning to go, gifting me a headache. I might have heatstroke, I vaguely murmur, which sounds about right. Something as dumb as lying in the sun, coated in various sugary syrups was only ever going to have one real outcome, and death wasn’t it. I sigh, high completely abandoning me in the helpless breath. Obviously I knew that, like how I knew no cult leader was going to abduct me or boarding school fix me, but that perfect, easy future had felt so tangible. Dangling in front of me like a sickly sweet fruit, ready to burst if I didn’t reach out. Wrap my fingers around it’s delicate skin. But like any fantasy, it rotted away after inspecting it too closely. I didn’t want to go to a boarding school to escape my parents. I didn’t want to be eaten by bugs. All I wanted, all I’ve ever wanted, was to be fully embraced for who I am.



Honey drips from my fingers, mixing into the carpet as I stare out at my sticky human-print on the grass.

Outside, bugs squirm in ecstatic bizarre jumbles over patches of honey, a tūi tweets from a tree, and the neighbours dog pisses in a bush: the world is a very silly place.

Tomorrow, I will try therapy, today I will clean the carpet.

And then, I will find someone who doesn't just look past my brain, but loves it.

