

## Hello, drab world

Disillusionment. That's the one word that comes to mind when I consider this chapter of my life. And a feeling of isolation – one that I've never experienced on such an intense level before. This was my language to describe something for which I had no frame of reference, until the other day when I was bingeing TED Talks on self-love, loneliness and coping with the monotony of life (it was a particularly gloomy day, I'll admit) - and evidently I had searched all the right key words to lead me to the term that seems to encompass all of the above. It struck me like a bolt of enlightenment, if you will. This thing I was facing was, in fact, a thing. My misery had company. Other people my age were having the same struggle. They call it the 'quarter-life crisis' – a period in your mid- to late 20s that marks the onset of adulthood, and brings you crashing down to a desolate earth.

### Is This It?

After this epiphany I took to Google and found various definitions of the quarter life crisis (QLC):

An entry in the [Urban Dictionary](#) describes it as follows:

*'When the world should be your oyster, but is really your Inferno. A period of time, right after high school to late twenties, where you are expected to perform and act exactly like the other adults who are ten years your senior or older, yet more than likely no one has taught you the basic ideas and attitudes of how to be successful in the real world.'*

An article in [The Muse](#) had this to say about it:

*'Simply put, a quarter-life crisis is a period of intense soul searching and stress occurring in your mid 20s to early 30s. 'It's the crisis of having to transition from a kid who is told what to do and does it and gets rewards – to an adult who has to figure out everything for themselves.'*

A clinical psychologist in an article in [The Guardian](#) described it as:

*'A period of insecurity, doubt and disappointment surrounding your career, relationships and financial situation.'*

Finally, according to [Psychology Today](#):

*'While mid- and late-life crises are often triggered by important life events [...] quarter-life crises often lack provocation. Our career is chugging along per usual when a simple question falls from the sky and shatters our OK routine: "Is this it?"'*

I found a lot of comfort, not only in these relatable explanations, but also in the countless testimonies of other young adults from all over the world who were clearly being confronted with the same dilemma. Suddenly it all made sense.

## **When Shit Gets Real**

After graduating from varsity I took a gap year to travel and au pair in Europe. Upon returning home at the age of 25, the pressure of finding a job and starting my career was overbearing, to put it mildly. By then I felt like I had already fallen way behind everyone else my age. Fast forward a year and there I was, working an 8-5, mindless job that literally anyone could do because it was the first best thing I could find with my minimal work experience (a *McJob* of sorts). I was staying alone in a crummy little flat at the butt-end of Obs and practically still living like a student – except it wasn't cute anymore, because instead of my limited funds going to double brandy and coke specials and quiz nights at *Aandklas*, it was going to rent, electricity and household cleaning supplies. Hell, even having WiFi in my flat was a luxury I couldn't afford until just this year.

***'We're constantly reminded that our lives can be better...'***

In the space of three years I went from being a care-free, zealous girl who was fully *carpe diem*-ing her way through life to a tentative woman, tormented by the tedious, soul-destroying burdens of adulthood. One of my journal entries from a while ago captures this sentiment: 'I feel like life has lost its magic and I'm just going through the motions - mindlessly. I feel like life is running away with me - yet quickly going nowhere. I feel like I'm losing myself - but to nothing in particular.' On top of that, I was alone, left to fend for myself and navigate the relentless onslaught of responsibilities solo, because society (and our own pride) tells us that in our late 20s, we can't go running back to the comfort and financial safety of our parents and caregivers when shit gets real.

## **A Symptom of Expectation**

The transition period from our student years into adulthood has become prolonged, due to high living costs, less job security, a lack of affordable housing and lower incomes. On the other hand, we're living in a society defined by unlimited access, opportunities, and possibilities. We're constantly reminded that our lives can be better, we just need to make it happen. Like it's that easy. But in truth, it's not. We have no idea where to start... So instead we fall into a

Netflix-and-wine-induced coma. The QLC is a symptom of this horrible contradiction. According to the [Harvard Business Review](#), there's an indication that today's young people are suffering more from this crisis than previous generations and that 'the average age for the onset of depression has dropped from late 40s or early 50s, where it was 30 years ago, to mid 20s.' The article goes on to say that, 'One's late 20s and early 30s, from an emotional perspective, are the worst part of life. It's during these years that people experience the most negative thoughts and feelings'.

### **Average to Okay**

Social media doesn't help one bit either. Throughout my mid-20s, I've often struggled with thoughts of not being good enough, being mediocre and insignificant, thanks to bedtime Insta-stories. The article in [The Muse](#) says, 'Perhaps one of the biggest culprits [of the QLC] is comparison – a common practice of rating your progress against the lives, careers, and relationships of those around you.' Nowadays it's so easy to live vicariously through- and get caught up in the highlight reels of others. You can easily lose sight of yourself and where you're headed if you're not anchored by your own strong sense of individuality, worth and goals.

It's just been survival for me up to this point. Learning how to live with myself and love myself. I've gone through more dark moments in the last few years than ever before. But now I see that it was necessary for me to hate life before I could learn to love it again, raw and unforgiving as it is, rather than for the fantastical picture I've had in my head throughout my cushioned, protected formative years and student phase. I know what it takes to be an adult now, or at least I know much more than I used to, and I've gone through the toughest part of adapting to that. I'm no longer fighting it or struggling with the fear that I can't manage or look after myself, nor with how tedious it all is.

***'You learn to appreciate what life is actually about - the small things...'***

And hey, it's also comforting to know that, according to [Lifehacker](#), 'The dilemma tends to affect a certain type of person the most: *those who try*. If you're driven to succeed, have strong ideals, and set goals you want to achieve by certain points in your life, you're a prime candidate for the disappointment and confusion such a crisis often brings,'. Also, psychologist Dr Nathan Gehlert [says](#) the typical sufferer is 'highly driven and smart, but struggling because they feel they're not achieving their potential or feeling they're falling behind.'

The QLC is a second emergence from the womb – being faced with the ugliness and fundamental loneliness of life, and the hard fact that it will be shitty almost as often as it's not. But it's great for creating perspective. You learn to appreciate what life is actually about - the

small things, like drinks after work with colleagues, a particularly pink sunset, or when the plant on your windowsill you thought you accidentally killed starts blooming again.

Also check out [@quarterlifepoetry](#) on Instagram for some bite-sized hilariously relatable poems.