EVERY
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OK
Anna Maguire

Every Thing Is OK

When I am sad, I make jelly. Usually Rowntree's Raspberry Jelly which is 34p from the Tesco Express near to where I live, but if I am a bit low on funds I have been known to make strawberry Tesco value jelly cubes. It doesn't taste as good. I don't know why. When I compare the packaging they have exactly the same ingredients and values. Maybe it's to do with the quality of the gelatine; the hoof of the cow, how free-range they are. I try not to think too much about what gelatine is when I am making jelly. It doesn't help. I like to make jelly because it is easy (especially if you have a microwave) and you can put different things in it: fruit (pomegranate is a favourite because it bursts in your mouth the way frogspawn would), toys (usually the ones from kinder eggs), sweets (like gummy bears or skittles - these usually sink to the bottom). Also it is tasty. Especially at three in the morning, or if you have drunk too much the night before.

One Tuesday, I was having a mid-morning jelly-snack when I stopped abruptly with the spoon half way to my mouth. I

was ingesting the progeny of my feelings. My flat-mates were ingesting it too, as well as anybody I invited over to my house. A bit like the way some parents fry up the placenta of their child with chili and garlic and host a placenta party. I was storing my problems in a not completely solid mass and then eating them. I figured this couldn't be good for me spiritually or metaphysically, but I shrugged and put the spoon into my mouth and swallowed the cold mouthful letting it slide down my throat. It was how I imagined snakes ate mice.

I made a lot of jelly when we first moved into the flat. I think that was stress-related jelly rather than sadness-related jelly though. I was trying to work three days a week in a Bursary at a private school, and the rest of the time concentrate on everything else I wanted to do. It started out all right when I was still going out with my boyfriend because he was good at making to-do lists, and had taught me their value early on in our relationship. When we broke up I still tried to make to-do lists, but they wandered off the point a bit. 'Pay energy bill' would come before 'take over the world' with no incremental steps or clues as to how to get there. Also, I felt rebellious about the to-do lists. Just like I felt rebellious that I'd cut my hair short largely at his suggestion. Anyway, it was clear that we were on the rocks because I had been making jelly.

What else could you put in jelly? Why not store my literal problems in that pink jiggling mass also? A credit card for example, if you have been spending too much money recently, or a letter you would like to send to someone, but should really think about first. I go a little red every time a letter or email I have regretted sending rises to the surface of my mind. It is never the first that I regret, always the ones that

start to form a chain. I find it hard to figure out exactly what I feel about a situation whilst experiencing it. Usually I figure out what I had really wanted to say about a week later, but by that point it is always too late. I always respond immediately. Once I thought I was in love with somebody, but eight days later I realised I had just been very angry at them.

I spent a week making jelly one spring, but it was an unusually hot spring, so in my memory it was the summertime. My repertoire expanded to orange and lime, I even made my very own cider jelly. I had broken up with the first love of my life. I hoped he was the first and not the only.

'Goodbye. For a long time good-bye'.
'I can't believe you don't love me anymore'.

'I had hoped I might get ill, so you'd realise you couldn't do without me and -'
' - well that's not very healthy'.

These were some of the things we had said to each other. At first I felt elated. I was soaring! I was free from something; I was no longer going to be diluted by somebody else. Then Patrick died. Patrick was my flat-mate's boyfriend. He died of a rare cancer of the stomach. When he went into hospital back in February, they thought he might have appendicitis. I don't know whether the various hospitals screwed up and failed to recognise his illness in time. It's not something we talk about. We do talk about Patrick though. I never visited him in the hospital. My now ex-boyfriend picked me up at 23:42 from the first place I had turned into when my other flat-mate, Rosie had called me. It was a McDonald's. It was

the 10th of June. He took me back to his house and we played tap the frog on his iPhone. Then we had sex and I cried.

Our flat was empty. Lily had gone home to her parents. We all visited, sometimes in pairs, but usually on our own. We cried together, but there was a void between us. How do you flatly describe emptiness? It's a palpable nothing. It doesn't make logical sense. But it was there in the shininess of her skin, and the way her voice had lost all of its force. The way she smiled with a smile fixed firmly in the past.

> 'What he carried with him, was a lack, something like a lack of air, of proper behavior in his lungs, a difficulty that he supposed would go on forever'.

I read that once. In an Alice Munro short story in The New Yorker. My boyfriend had given me a subscription to it the Christmas before. It was his favourite magazine, so it was to be mine also. It is a good description I think.

Two weeks later, there was the funeral. One week after that, Rosie and I picked up Lily from work and walked back to the flat with her along the canal. We made a banner and tiny pizzas to celebrate her return to our relatively new home. We had just moved in three months before and this was our first flat after having spent three years studying together. 'It's directly across from a homeless shelter and a meth clinic, and a stone's throw away from the Metropolis strip club', we proudly told our parents. The bedrooms were small and the kitchen was mint green. When our landlord first showed us around he shook his head at the kitchen saying that he and his wife had painted it that colour in their youth when they

had first moved to London and that they had been foolish. During the year we lived there he kept threatening to repaint the kitchen white, or eggshell. When we told him we liked the kitchen the way it was he looked dubious and then sighed mournfully.

For two months I didn't make jelly. I don't think I had ever been this sad before, and maybe making jelly was for peripheral sadness rather than core sadness. We three functioned as if on autopilot. Lily started smoking again and Rosie developed insomnia and had panic attacks. I felt OK. The only time I cried was when I saw my ex-boyfriend with whom I had slept with four times since breaking up. Each time I saw him, water would leak out of my eyes. It was like a physical response to seeing his face and hearing his voice. I had to take a picture of myself after one of these meetings because I thought it was remarkable how much I looked like a frog when I cried.

Then he went to New York for an extended holiday. Rosie, Lily and I did what we always did, except everything felt full of effort. When we were having a good time, we felt the strain of wanting to keep that good time going for as long as possible, to stretch it to breaking point, until it snapped and we had to start again. We made strange decisions based on this, like driving to a place called Wem where a friend of ours was holding an exhibition. We drove in traffic for eight hours listening to a hastily compiled mix-tape, which meant a lot of the songs were badly picked - the refrain 'What's Your Flava' repeated over and over again, rather than breaking into the rest of the song and 'Organ Donor' by DJ Shadow. When we got home, my voice was hoarse from all the shouting over the

music, the laughter that was on the verge of hysterical, the smoking out of the window whilst stuck in standstill traffic.

We also cycled a lot of places together, before my bike got stolen. I'm really only a fair-weather cyclist anyway, so it was good that it was stolen before the winter. I was able to save face. Once we cycled to a weekend street party down the canal from where we lived. It was hot and we were all grumpy with each other but were trying not to show it. It was at about this time that I started using moulds. I had gotten a promotional jelly mould of a Rowntree's Jelly Baby when I was stocking up on jelly cubes, and it seemed silly not to at least give it a try. After I had mastered the big jelly baby, I bought three original vintage glass jelly moulds from the Internet. These were made of thick glass, and they were pleasingly heavy. Not like the original plastic jelly baby mould. I started making layered jelly - all different colours - I did the Italian flag once (making special champagne jelly for the white part).

My newfound skill was climbing up the list of skills that I had accrued that year. Hair cutting was one of them; I also had quite a good aim. Conversely however, I had never been any good at measuring distance or space or time, or estimating how many people had been at a certain place, a party for example. Actually, measuring the boiling-water to cold-water ratio had been a problem initially in the whole jelly-making process. I had decided a while before that measuring wasn't for me. I never made food that required exact measurements, favouring stews, egg-fried rice, omelettes. I never made deserts. It all seemed too complicated and also, I didn't really have a sweet tooth. Except for jelly. So initially I just poured water, eye-balling what looked right for the jelly, which was

also a problem because I was really bad at making that call. The first jelly I made didn't set. It went slightly viscose; it was basically a gelatine smoothie. I poured it down the sink. As my gelatine based exploits became more complex, measuring became an essential part of the process, so I am glad that I got the hang of the measuring cup.

When he returned from America I invited him over for jelly. Or Jell-O. I wanted to make him an American flag jelly surprise. It turned out it was possible thanks to Kraft:

> 'Chilled in a flag-shaped mould, a COOL WHIP and lemon gelatine mixture separates layers of red and blue gelatine for a special patriotic treat'.

I was proud of my newfound skill and wanted to show it off, to show I had been doing something in the months he had been gone. Also, the more effort I poured into the jelly, the less likely it would be that I would cry, I thought. It turned out my physical response was wise to my jelly-ruse and the minute I opened the door my face was wet.

After the American-flag-jelly-tears, we stopped seeing each other. We didn't make the decision to do so together; we just kind of stopped getting in touch with one another. The tears on their own, or the American jelly flag alone would have been fine, but together they were embarrassing to both of us, almost obscene. For a long time I felt a horrific sense of loss when I thought about him. It wasn't like a normal break up. It was like I also had that lack of air, but this couldn't be true because he was living around the corner with a new beard and a new girlfriend. It was like a phantom pregnancy;

a phantom grief. Since breaking up, I felt like I had gone on an adventure. Like a child running away from home in their nightie with a backpack full of snacks and their favourite toy, and now I wanted to go home. But home had been destroyed by a hurricane, a volcano, vicious and violent African insurgents. Home had been ransacked, raped and pillaged, and I couldn't go back. I could only return to the shores across the river and look on at the still-smoking wreckage.

I spend less time on jelly now. I ate most of that patriotic treat alone in one sitting, at the table in the mint green kitchen, listening to the swearing of the homeless and the drunks who hadn't made it back in time to the shelter for the 10:00pm curfew. I ate all the stripes, and then picked off the blueberries posing as stars. I hadn't been able to fit all fifty stars on my scaled down version, only sixteen. I left the pockmarked red square on the table and went to bed before the others got home, knowing that it would be gone by the morning.