

# *Rooftop Literary Supplement*



*September 2025*







Edited by Joyce Laurie  
Layout & Photography by Joyce Laurie  
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## *Table of Contents*

Editor's Note  
**Joyce Laurie**

Smoke Day  
**Alexandra Tey**

Cupid, Frontiersman  
**June Villers**

Skin  
**Samantha Barrett**

Homily  
**Viv Cartagena**

That Wouldn't Happen To Me  
**Emily Zhou**

The Accumulative Grief  
**Sloane Murphy**

McDonalds Experience  
**Chloe McCormick**

# Editor's Note

I won't talk your ear off. If you've read my editor's notes in the past, you know what I'm about. No big ideas here, only this: this little zine is a companion to *Figure It Out*, the reading series I co-run with Emily Zhou.

We started it, on a handshake deal, in Spring 2024. It was clear to us then that we had all the raw materials for a good event: a broader scene of what some might call "events transexuals," who would show up to anything with a DJ set; friends who wrote but either lacked an audience or had not presented to one in a while; many more friends with a taste for reading; a few favors we could call in; access to a rooftop space where we could all see the sun set over Ridgewood (one million thanks, as always, to June.)

The result was something we were proud of. And yet save for the rare reader with books to sell, the only things our attendees would leave with were memories. I've been on a print culture kick lately, so: enter the *Roof-top Literary Supplement*, which will feature little bites of writing from *FIO* alums, upcoming readers and hopefuls. I'll aim to publish it when I can and distribute it for free.

I ask that if you take one, you give back somehow. It doesn't need to be much, maybe just giving these writers your time and attention. Maybe bring a sixpack or some snacks to the next *FIO* (since procuring our PA, the only money involved is the boxed wine we buy.) And if you're feeling up for it, try throwing an event like *FIO* yourself. It doesn't need to be a reading — many folks around here have their own specialties — but if you're looking for pointers on that, Emily has a guide on her blog *Anecdota*, titled "new ideas as they are being created."

I suppose everything I write ends with a directive to make an event, a publication, a piece of writing. I think I'll stop doing so when I feel like we're centered in a culture we deserve.

much love,  
Joyce

## Posters from *Figure It Out* Season 1

### Readers, in order:

**May:** Jeanne Thornton, Katie Lane, Willem Helf, Charlotte Bancroft

**June:** Noel Barrera, Mapes Thorson, Alma Avalor, A.V. Marraccini

**July:** L.A. Leere, Jesi Gaston, Eve Morgan, Violet DiMarzio

**August:** Bran Walker, Jaye Chen, Cat Fitzpatrick, Lex Walton

**September:** Holden Seidlitz, Ben Rose Porter, Mia Arias Tsang, Leyla Çolpan

**January:** Aurora Mattia, Sarah Cummins, Anton Solomonik, Emily Zhou



# figure it out figure it out figure it out figure it out

readings by  
jeanne thornton  
katie lane  
willem helf  
"charlotte bancroft"

dj sets by  
austerity measures  
surprise guest

5.23.24

7pm

dm for address

byob



## figure it out #2

June 18

8:15pm -- 11pm

dm for address (ridgewood)

byob



Readings by:  
Noel Barrera  
Mapes Thorson  
Alma Avale  
A.V. Marraccini

DJ set by Hannah Account

## Figure It Out!

community  
film  
gallery  
curated  
by  
k.s. ross

dj  
set  
by  
microfossil

readings by:  
l.a. leere  
jesi gaston  
eve morgan  
violet dimarzio



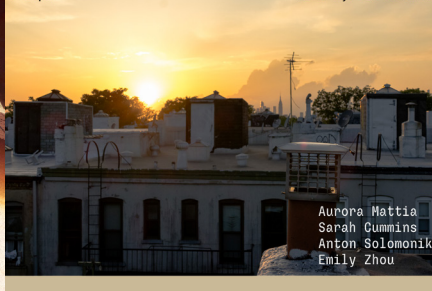
thursday july 18th 7:30pm doors

byob  
ridgewood, dm for location

## FIGURE IT OUT WORKS IN PROGRESS BY TRANS AND QUEER WRITERS WINTER SPECIAL

January 16  
7:30pm

Topos Too  
5922 Myrtle Avenue



Aurora Hattia  
Sarah Cummins  
Anton Solomonik  
Emily Zhou

## Figure it out #5

featuring  
holden seidlitz  
ben rose porter  
mia aras tsang  
leyla godpan

dm for address  
9-26 // 7pm  
BYOB

community photo gallery  
courtesy of  
futsch light & emulsion



# Smoke Day

Alexandra Tey

*For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night.*

*- Joan Didion, "Los Angeles Notebook"*

**June 6, 2023**

We are visited today by a plume from up north. Warm and hollow, the light of a sallow sun casts the city in an unearthly glow. I taste the fire, taste the trees.

Quebec's boreal forest is burning. Significant areas of Alberta and Nova Scotia are also burning. Certain U.S. states are burning as well, though for the most part they are the states that usually burn, and they are burning to a lesser extent than in the average year. By the end of the summer an apocalyptic fire will devastate the Hawaiian town of Lāhainā, but on this day in New York, it only looks as if the world is ending.

The tones—brown, yellow, orange; warm gray, dull ash—resist description. On a smoke day the sky is the color of an empty laugh. Sunshine takes on the uncanny pallor of a cheap sunset lamp. With the sun dimmed eclipselike, a robin's evening song rings out in midafternoon.

A water droplet lands on my head and I look up: no rainclouds, no air conditioners. By the time I come inside, the drops are all spattering over the sidewalk. It is rain on the ground, but the sky was wrong. All wrong. No clouds, just smoke.

An ad for a travel booking website on a screen above the downtown entrance at the Eighth St./NYU subway station: "You were made to transcend time and space."

Through all this I am writing, always writing, in a pocket notebook that I will fill in four days. When the nib of my ballpoint pen rubs against the paper it feels like scratching an itch.

Brendan cautions me as I exit my apartment building. "Someone passed out on 14th Street," he warns. I should stay out for as little time as possible, he says, and run the air conditioner all night.

I was taking classes that summer. The girl to my right is shopping for Governors Ball tickets. The girl on my left is looking at Microsoft Office subscription plans while typing in both her Notes app and Google Docs. After class I talk with Alicia about how classrooms have changed with



certain shifts in perceived social obligations around the pandemic. We are both perplexed by how people can show up to summer classes and simply decline to participate. We are the two most active students in that class but during the lecture she was doodling and I was writing this.

Nevertheless we learned that the ozone layer hole created by chlorofluorocarbon chain reactions in the polar stratosphere was, unlike most every other environmental harm, resolved by a largely successful international agreement, in part because one threat it presented—skin cancer—would have, for once, disproportionately affected pale-skinned people in the Global North: Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Several acquaintances had been tweeting earlier today about the smoke. One noted air quality index readings of 158 in New York; 104 in Pittsburgh. “anyone else feel rly bad bc of this?” another wrote. I can’t decide if my head hurts or if I’m just thinking about it hurting.

I don a white N95, the kind I had worn on smoke days in high school in California, with two elastic yellow straps that secure it around my head. Inside my mask, my throat dries; outside it, my eyes sting. I perceive a faint tingling on my exposed arms as my certainty in my ability to distinguish between sensations real and imagined diminishes.

The air tastes like home. Like the days when we went out wearing masks for the first time. Aerosolized botanic and domestic matter, carried south across the Bay to where I lived.

“People who live with fires think a great deal about what will happen ‘when,’ as the phrase goes in the instruction leaflets, ‘the fire comes,’” Joan Didion writes in “Fire Season.” “People mumble as leaves crumble, fire ashes tumble,” her daughter Quintana writes in a fourth-grade poem.

A friend on Instagram, writing over a photo of the smoke day sun: “There’s something otherworldly afoot.”

A brisk breeze down the street sweeps me back to my apartment.

On the way to a bar called Purgatory that evening I am grasped by a sight outside the windows of the L train: suspended in the sunset, the Canadian smoke suffuses the cemetery in unearthly absolute glow.

After a few drinks we wander out back, up a gravel driveway, onto the train tracks. Having found a lighter on the patio but, being a nonsmoker, having no cigarettes to ignite, I tear a piece of paper from the notebook and light it aflame on the rail.

Ash puts their lit Marlboro Golds in my mouth for me to not inhale, Fault In Our Stars-style. Later on the back porch of their ground-floor apartment, however, I require little persuading: barely a sip of cigarette, but I draw in a breath. I puff out. Smoke emerges surreal from somewhere below my eyes. Enters my field of unbelieving vision. A strange

small rush fades into the blur of late-night half-drunken delirium.

On the L train home with Trace I read *Nevada* and they read *Let Me Tell You What I Mean*.

### June 7, 2023

“There’s a place that’s even worse. There’s a place called Hell,” the street preacher in Washington Square Park testified beneath hostile skies, his words amplified by a speaker attached to his waist. “Bubbling burning flesh,” the doomsayer’s fanny pack echoed. “Psychological torment.”

I had woken from restless sleep late that morning to sickly peach light splayed across my walls. A series of Citizen notifications on my phone: Someone had been struck and killed by a bus not far from my apartment.

More people have masks on outside today. The preacher wore two. The smell suffuses mine, seeping into my nostrils, my lungs. My thoughts slow; connections falter. In the park a Chimney Swift flutters overhead, snipping a labored arc through the haze. Sparrows jostle for discarded chips on the rim of a trash can. An unseen man’s cough rings out over empty streets.

I hear it said that breathing a day of outdoor air in these conditions is equivalent to smoking a pack of cigarettes. I find—a pleasant surprise—that the previous night (the first time tasting the moistened paper of a shared cigarette, the acrid glow following the breath, ) had not killed me. I am somewhat amused to realize that that had been what I was expecting.

Another Citizen notification: “Hazardous AQI in NYC / Recent Air Quality Index readings have currently risen above 400, a level deemed unsafe. Everyone should stay indoors, if possible.”

That day we all walk around embodying consequences. Going down the street I take into my body bits of trees. Testimonies to casualty dispersed and, elsewhere, physically reintegrated.

I register a slight nausea.

Late that afternoon I walked to the scene of the accident. I stand in front of an empty bus pulled over on Broadway. A few idle cops. It probably wasn’t the same bus but there was a stain on the pavement in front of it. Two plainclothes pull up in a silver sedan with flickering lights and chat with the uniformed officers standing by the sidewalk. After a few minutes someone drives the bus away.

### June 8, 2023

A lot of things are normal again today—the sort of statement that, in being made, acknowledges the unstated need to dispute a sense that things do not feel normal.

A siren rises up as I step outside. Cloud formations are faintly visible today, evidence of lifted haze. “Two milligrams of what? Huh. OK. Is it prescribed?” asks a man on the phone walking down Third Avenue.

As a teenager, Joan Didion would type out Hemingway stories to try and figure out how his writing worked. The smoke has been clearing but I still can’t make sense of how a city changes in the shadow of fire so I get out a yellow legal pad to write out “Los Angeles Notebook.”

I briefly consider taking up smoking, at least when I’m drunk. That night of the first smoke day Trace and Ash, cajoling me into having a taste, had joked about how drunk cigs don’t count. A lot of people say that drunk cigs don’t count but they’re all joking. I think that everything counts and I’m not joking.

That night on the G train platform I realize with a pang that, without knowing that I had been doing it, I had been navigating to Classon Avenue.

E., who had been the only reason for me to take the G train, had lived off Classon Avenue. E. had smoked Marlboro Golds and had been the only reason I had ever bought cigarettes.

Within a couple days I will have purchased a pack of Marlboro Golds. I don’t mean to start smoking but maybe I’ll be able to give them to girls at bars. After all, I already have the not-quite-empty lighters I found discarded at Purgatory. I’ll be able to say that I don’t smoke but I carry these around anyway. I won’t know exactly why but I will secretly, shamefully hope that others will think I am mysterious or troubled or selfless. I will insist (futilely) that my eccentricity is not affected. What is genuine, though, is that the mechanisms that guide my actions are unknown to me.

I stop and check my phone to remind myself of the name and G stop of the girl I am actually headed to see. On the train I run into two acquaintances who are on the way back from Kellogg’s after Metropolitan. They see that I’m reading *Nevada* and I admit that I got my copy at the Strand. We laugh about it all.



# *Cupid, Frontiersman*

June Villers

We meet at the gallows. Her crime? Shooting a man dead, back turned, cold blood. Hot stuff. Mine? Horse thievery. Before she cuts my rope loose, she asks me why I want to live, anyway. I tell her, I want to see my horse again. She scoffs a little, like it's a joke, but it's not. She cuts my rope loose anyway, and she lets me come with her, even though I don't think I ever asked. We go to my horse that night, and I find her in the abandoned farmhouse where I left her, my beautiful black-maned girl. She's happy to see me. Me and the girl with the Peacemaker on her hip ride double from town to town—always to the west, always toward the ocean, always toward the setting sun. My baptismal name is Susan, but she calls me Betty. I call her Joshua Tree. She kills without thinking. I shake my gun with her like I'd do it too, but mostly I help sew extra pockets into our pantlegs. Our legs jingle with the sound of necklaces and rings and family jewels as the lawmen chase us out of town again, and again, and again.

She asks me one day, whispering into my ear as I hold the horse's reins, whether I've ever thought of starting a family. I tell her, That's a new question for me. I tell her, I don't know. She says, That's okay. She says, I was just wondering. We're stuffing our pockets at the next town when a husband and father lunges at us with a knife. My finger twitches. I kill a man for the first time. She looks at me different. That night, we wander out into the Mojave and look up at the stars, and I feel like the night sky is going to open wide its gaping maw and suck me up and set me back somewhere that's home, someplace I came from but was not born, somewhere nice, somewhere with horses. Joshua Tree doesn't ask me questions anymore. One day, a sheriff's bullet grazes our horse, and she starts limping. We're getting into California now. It's greener here. We bring the horse out to a beautiful pond overlooking a beautiful field, and we put her down. Kinder that way. Next town, bank teller shoots me with my back turned. Joshua Tree kills him, then weeps.

# *Skin*

Samantha Barrett

Later, on the bus back home, she wished she had said:

*In cows sometimes they install a thing called a cannula, which is like a port-hole opening in the skin to the entrails beneath, and if there was one in me I would let you slip your hand inside me and hold the wet hot dark parts of my body, and perhaps this has already happened.*

But that was too much; too much by far.

# Homily

## Viv Cartagena

There we all were, hands joined in prayer. And you know,  
One sees a virtuous thing  
One sees a vicious thing  
In the adoration of a certain saint  
Body bound all treeways and rich in arrows  
Canonized by virtue of his martyrdom  
My beloved siblings, *heyyyyy*  
My beloved siblings! They behold his portrayal, captive within a mobile  
phone's display  
And my beloved siblings proclaim:  
Lo! He's just like me!

Sometimes you have the worst dream of your life nestled between the  
supple bosom of a pretty good week, actually, thanks for asking.  
Visions of sexual sacrifice, dramatis personae like high-carbon Japanese  
kitchen knives flaying, spatchcocking, dicing slumbering bodies into  
bite-sized pieces.  
Sleep deprivation is applause, clapping hands like foggy responses and  
bags beneath beautiful eyes.

I am in a conversation now. I decide to try something new so I do my  
best to brag in as flamboyant a manner as I can conjure. Invocation lives  
within intonation.

I say: "I often will eat the spiciest food I can because that day I was able  
to best my grandfather's capsaicin tolerance was one of my life's top  
three Killing King Laius moments. Most other decisions I make in life  
are more in the "Queen Jocasta" side of the equation."

Through my most grievous moral hangover, and plenty of the normal  
kind too. Speaking of my deeds feels like a naughty word (spat out be-  
tween consenting adults) with all the phlegm-heavy righteousness of a  
histrionic drink order.

I petition the pale walls of every bedroom I find myself in, the sup-  
ply-demand of attention, affection, of sharing moments, of later recol-  
lection and remembrance together while locked eyes change hue and  
saturation, glistening all with chords and brush strokes.  
Please let them not be cheapened.

Please know this is exactly where I want to be, and where I want you, if our wills are in consonance.

I think, after a cigarette: People have so much to say.

“I sent a message to the revolver I left back home

And signed it off with

Wish you were here”

“Yeah, I’ve always preferred face to face communication”

I imagine what your eyes would look like if I begat a fist-shaped hole in the wall and I smirk. I never really did that kind of thing when I was younger and that’s what makes it seem so wicked sick. I imagined all this at a really unfortunate moment in the middle of our discussion. So I say: “Tell me more.”

With my body wriggling and writhing and withheld all agreeable, easy smiles cheapening the value of proper oxygen-rich laughter. “Are you nodding because you get it, or because you’re trying to be liked?” Beats me, dude. Notable exception for bitching and moaning. Confession of sins. The selfsame thing, I say, but promotion is everything. On the other hand, opening LinkedIn feels like a 1+2 combo castration hysterectomy.

I step away from the booth and begin measuring my skull in a bathroom covered with stickers about genitals. I am not doing this for any untoward reasons, just so that you can better picture my dimensions while you abuse yourself.

Maybe it’s six drinks, maybe it’s six kind words, but in a genuine moment I say something like:

We’re preserving something without possession

Dreams adrift in formaldehyde

Pickled punk rock

Palpate with pointless emotion

Subclinical wanderlust in daily flirtation with diagnosis.

Onward, towards a wistful wasteful wilderness, but I’d guide you by hand walking through the underbrush, if asked, and I can wait. Skin tingling, tail swishing to swat away stings from a cluster bee hive.

The exact words escape me but that was the gist of it.

I’m told we sleep between pages in a well loved softcover

Chapter titles like

Pornography and pregnancy scares and PREP prescriptions,

Femme, Butch, Boy, Girl, Neither, Both, Dilettante, Special interest,



Angelic, Demonic

Staying the course, circling around, burning the ships at unknown shores.

And there are more leaves by the hour, written by the residents, all together.

Footnotes of shows and salons, collabs, rehabs, meltdowns and hook-ups, weddings, funerals.

The image of God is an image of a creator. And I love you for that.

And so I hear your words and I see what you do.

And

All of this, each this we possess and share,

I know it hurts like hell

But it's just like heaven.



# *That Wouldn't Happen To Me*

Emily Zhou

**\$400**

Tuesday. Iris was waiting for Tiffany to get out of the shower, reclined on a suede couch, texting her girlfriend.

*this apartment is fucking outrageous oh my god  
it feels like it's expensive to breathe in here*

Her girlfriend, who was at work, texted her back:

*She's paying you for this, right?  
Like, you deserve to get paid for doing this work.*

Iris was in the middle of typing *yeah we'll see* when Tiffany opened the bathroom door.

"Okay! Sorry about that."

She was gorgeous, Iris thought, in a way that most of her friends thought of as unapproachable. "A doll's doll," Maeve had said, which didn't mean anything. But, well. She had put on jewelry and done her makeup and it took her from being beautiful to being otherworldly. She stood there looking expectantly at Iris, who suddenly felt dumb and inert sitting there. Already awkward.

Iris rummaged in her tote bag and found the pockmarked leather case for the camera toward the bottom past the books and notebook and phone chargers. Tiffany watched her, still standing apprehensively by the door to the bathroom.

"How do you want to do this?" Tiffany said as Iris fumbled with the ancient latches.

"Uh. I don't know. I mean, like, you should get comfortable. It's up to you."

"Okay!"

Tiffany glided across the room and sat in a lyre-backed wooden chair across from where Iris was getting set up.

"Here?" Tiffany said.

"Yeah, sure," Iris said, still trying to extricate the camera from the slightly sticky case.

Tiffany smirked, or maybe that was just her face.

The camera didn't look like much — a black rectangle of leatherette-covered metal with a door on the front and some knobs on the top. Once Iris had extricated it from the case and found the roll of Tri-X in her

bag, she gently lifted the stiff metal latch on the side of the camera that opened the back to reveal the take-up spool and the folded bellows.

Tiffany didn't say anything, didn't look at her phone or anything. Just kept looking at Iris with what could be curiosity. Probably she was mentally preparing. Every so often Iris looked up briefly and saw her sitting there with one leg crossed over the other, in a black dress with a long slit down one leg, ridiculous for 10 in the morning, with that Mona Lisa smile.

With the film loaded, Iris pressed the button on the top of the camera that opened the door. With alarming speed for something that old, the bellows unfolded with a snap and the little lens ringed with metal dials and levers suddenly faced the other girl head-on.

"Whoa," Tiffany said appreciatively.

"Right?" Iris said.

A year ago Iris and her girlfriend had been in an antique store in Cape May and Iris had pointed out a folding camera similar to this one, a Super Ikonta from 1953, behind the counter. "Isn't it cute?" was all Iris said. Her girlfriend had bought one online for way too much money and had spent even more money getting it fixed before giving it to Iris on her birthday. Iris was embarrassed, and still was.

After she tested it, Iris posted on her instagram story —

*let me take pictures of you  
on The Contraption*

Then a picture of the unfolded Ikonta in a sunbeam by her window, looking old and strange and beautiful and out-of-place next to her laptop and disorganized carabiner and a half-empty plastic cup of iced coffee.

*for the cost of a roll + processing (\$30)  
they might not be good*

Her girlfriend had objected to that last line, and the fact that Iris wasn't charging for the pictures beyond breaking even. "You're a good photographer," she said to Iris, who mostly took pictures of her girlfriend's cats and her naked girlfriend.

"I just want to practice," Iris had said, which was true. In any event the only person who responded was Tiffany, who said she "needed some new headshots."

"Tell her you charge for headshots," her girlfriend had said. "Literally, that's a normal thing to do."

She hadn't. Now, looking through the viewfinder, she wished she had. These were going to be great. There was Tiffany with her face and her shoulders. With the black-and-white film and the old lens they'd come out making Tiffany look like an important person from the past. Like, a

model, or an artist, or a model who was an artist. She aimed the lens so that Tiffany was framed between the doorway and a big plant by the window, thought briefly about parallax, decided that didn't matter, aligned the rangefinder window, triple-checked the aperture and shutter settings.

Click. Beautiful. Click. The same picture, five seconds apart. Ten shots left. Iris lowered the camera, at a slight loss and trying to make it look like she was thinking.

"What are you like, going for?" Iris said.

Tiffany cocked her head slightly to the side.

"What do you mean?"

"Like, what sort of pictures do you want?" Iris said.

Amateurish thing to say. She was never going to get more than \$30 out of this, which she realized belatedly would be nice. Rent was due in a few days, which was starting to feel concerning. What did people charge for headshots, anyway? A hundred dollars?

"These are for, y'know, LinkedIn," Tiffany said. "You know, like something that isn't like, a pre-FFS picture that someone took when I graduated from college."

"Oh, okay. You know these are like, black-and-white, right?"

"I didn't," Tiffany said, without changing her tone of voice.

"Is that, like, okay?" An internal cringe.

"Fine," Tiffany said flatly. "Do you have color film?"

"Not on me," Iris said. "I, uh, I've been, like, focusing on black-and-white lately."

"Got it."

And she didn't say anything else, but posed again, her head turned to the side slightly. Serving face, or whatever the straight girls said. A face that had been expecting a camera, suggested an angle. There was a scroll of Chinese calligraphy on one wall, above a wooden chest of drawers. Get that behind her, Iris thought, fully in-frame, not obscured by her long fine black hair that cupped one cheek.

She scooted her ass four inches to the side on the couch. "I think these are gonna be really good," she said. No response.

*Click, click, click.*

Unbearable silence. The hum of the world coming in from outside. A fire truck went by with its mournful wail.

"How long will it take to get these back?" Tiffany said.

"A few days."

"Okay."

Iris moved again, almost just to do it. Through the viewfinder: Tiffany's face and down to the middle of her chest, in the background the arched doorway with a beaded curtain that led to her bedroom. She had nice tits. Would it be bad to include that in the frame? She angled the camera slightly higher. Tiffany didn't move, didn't look at the lens.

*Click, click, click.* She moved again. Tiffany, head-on, symmetrical face,

Mona Lisa. Tiffany shifted her eyes to face the lens but didn't smile. *Click*. Then to the side again. These were all going to be really similar, probably one or two useable ones. She wondered if she should be saying anything, telling her what to do. It felt impossible.

*Click, click, click, click*, done. She sat down and rewound the film, then re-opened the camera back.

"I think these are going to be really good," she said again.

"I'm excited to see them," Tiffany said, not visibly relaxing in any way. "Thank you."

"Thank you," Iris said, and it came out more enthusiastically than she hoped it would. Once she got the film out of the camera she hurriedly left.

### **\$430**

Outside in Williamsburg she checked her phone. On Instagram, Iris's acquaintance Caspar was working on the West Coast this month and needed someone to take care of Trudy, a French bulldog.

*need someone to care for this angel  
while her daddy's working for the knife  
off Bedford/Nostrand  
paid, ofc.  
QTPOC to the front*

That last line, Jesus Christ. Iris thought that was probably the ugliest dog she had ever seen, too. Like a wad of chewing tobacco. She messaged him *interested!* and took the J train to the film lab, where the bored-looking tech took her order for medium-res scans, no negative pickup.

"Are you guys hiring, by the way?"

The tech blinked. "Sorry?"

"Uh. Are you, like, hiring? For a front-of-house person?"

"Do you have experience?" he said flatly.

"With what?"

"Have you worked in a lab before?"

"No. But, uh, I can learn. I'm good at learning things."

"Let me check." He turned in his swivel chair. "Yo, Mike? This person wants to know if we're hiring."

"No," the guy who was clearly Mike shouted back from behind a tall white machine. "We'd be lucky if this place is still here in six months."

People weren't exactly lined up to have their film developed here. After eyeing the row of Mamiyas in the front window display, Iris hustled back to the J train. On the platform, she checked her bank account. Looked bad. She should see if her girlfriend was around tonight, maybe they could cook dinner together and leave her dwindling supply of rice and eggs and tortillas and cheese for the home stretch.

*hey baby, you around tonight? I could use a cozy night in, maybe we could*



*cook together*

Where was she going to get \$400? \$430, now that she hadn't gotten money from Tiffany yet. This might be it, she thought, like she thought every month for the past eight. Back to the outer suburbs of Boston with her yelling parents and no car.

When Caspar responded Iris almost jumped out of her seat on the train.

*hi! yes, would love to talk about the possibility. are you free to come by tonight?*

And then an address that was nowhere near the Bedford/Nostrand stop. A job interview for dogsitting. Okay.

She texted Tiffany: *dropped off the film! I'm excited to see the results. if you want, we could redo that with color.*

Tiffany didn't respond, but immediately a Venmo notification came in for the \$30, the camera emoji. Okay.

A text from her girlfriend: *yes baby that sounds lovely. what time? one sec, gotta figure out some plans*, Iris texted back, and then another DM to Caspar: *what time?*

No response from Caspar all the way home. Going on 1:30 PM now. She flopped down onto her bed and put the Ikonta, safely in its case, on her desk next to her injection supplies from that morning. She was out of film. She reposted the thing on Instagram. It's not like Tri-X was all that expensive, but she was short \$400. Something like a dollar-fifty a shot on that thing. The numbers clashed against each other in her head.

Caspar responded at 3:42 PM. Iris had been fiddling with her resume on her laptop, still in bed, moving the margins around and changing single words.

*Self-Employed (copy editing, video editing, podcast editing), December 2024-Present*

*Studio Assistant for Angela Harris Wilson, May-October 2023*

*Barista and Cashier, Irving and Stockholm Coffee Company, 2022-2024*

*Internship, Niesler Gallery (Boston), Summer 2021*

It didn't add up to anything. It basically said, "I am irresponsible and I get fired a lot," which was true. When Caspar texted her, *hey so sorry about the delay! does 8:30 sound good? I have dinner plans but should be back by then*, she responded immediately:

*yeah no worries! sounds good!*

She should, at minimum, shower. She went to the other side of her apartment to the one bathroom and Ivana was in there, blasting that one Clairo album with the water on. Probably shaving her whole entire body again. She had another client that night. She went back to her bed and didn't get up again until 7:30, at which point she rushed to the bathroom and hastily shaved her face and ran a brush through her hair before running out.

*hey baby*, her girlfriend texted her, while she was on the train. *do you still wanna come by tonight?*

She didn't respond. At 8:45 she came up to the brownstone where Caspar lived.

"Hello?" said Caspar's voice, crisply, through the intercom.

"Hi, it's Iris," said Iris.

"Ah, yes. One moment."

And then a pregnant pause, long enough for her to relax, before the buzzer sounded and Iris pushed, too late, when the door had already locked again.

"Shit. Fuck. Shit. GodDAMMIT! FUCK!"

Someone on the street whipped his head around to see her at the door. She buzzed again.

"Did it not work the first time?" Caspar said. Did he sound annoyed? She couldn't be sure.

"Sorry, yeah, could you buzz again?"

No response. In a few minutes the door opened and he was standing there, wearing a striped shirt and a bandanna, looking like a gay pirate.

"C'mon up."

The whole way up she was doing math in her head. Another outrageous apartment. She sat on a green leather couch in the corner next to the bay windows and the fiddle-leaf fig.

"Sorry I'm late," she said.

"You are," he said simply. "Don't worry about it. Can I get you water? Coffee? Beer?"

"Uh, nothing," Iris said.

"Suit yourself."

He got himself a beer from the fridge, something with a beige minimalist design on the can, and sat across from her, leaned forward.

"Where's the dog?" Iris said dumbly.

"She should be coming to visit us soon," Caspar said, sipping his beer. Elbows on his knees. "How've you been?"

"Really bad," Iris said, without really thinking about it.

"Oh, shit, I'm sorry," he said.

"It's fine," she said. "Having a down moment."

"I get that," he said. "This summer has been rough, I think."

"Yeah," she said.

An awkward silence. The dog wandered into the room. God, she was

uglier in person. Nothing behind those eyes. She got halfway toward them and then flopped down on the black-and-white arabesque rug. Iris could hear her breathing from here, heavy and labored like someone who just had to do an unexpected sprint.

"There she is," Iris said without enthusiasm.

"There she is," Caspar agreed. "That's her spot."

"I see."

"So, she's a low maintenance diva," Caspar said, still looking at the snorting dog. "Gets fed twice a day, same thing both times."

The dog sneezed.

"She likes to be walked in the morning," he went on. "Then again around noon, and then after dinner and once at night."

"Got it," Iris said.

"I usually take her to Herbert Von King," he said. "She's got some dog friends there, regulars who all get there around the same time. Her bestie is a border collie named Frankie, they're always play-fighting."

That was a fifteen-minute walk from here, Iris thought. Okay. "Do you go there every time?"

"Yeah, generally. Sometimes if I'm not feeling it, or if it's disgustingly hot like it's been for the last week, I'll just take her around the block until she poops and then bring her back inside."

Something Iris didn't like about Caspar is that he acted like you were interrupting him whenever you said anything. A little affronted, stiffer whenever he talked again. He wouldn't be here, she thought. Just her and the hideous dog he loved more than anything for some reason.

He went on to talk about toys and the vet's phone number while the dog stirred and waddled over to where Iris was sitting, sat down on its haunches next to her, staring at her plaintively. She was wrong about the eyes. They could at least communicate I want something from you.

"And that's about it. I'll be gone for all of August, basically, back on the 28th, probably real late. Anything else?"

"Uh, payment."

The affronted look again. "Right, sure. Does a hundred dollars sound good?"

Iris looked around at the apartment, tried to identify the designer of the kitchen table. At one point she knew these things, now it just made her depressed. That was fine. Probably, it was a Chinese knockoff of some Danish guy. "Sure," she said.

"And there's a ton of food in the fridge," he said.

Trudy, who had been sitting there in silence, barked so loudly that Iris jumped. It was like an explosion. After a pause she barked again, louder and longer.

"Tru, Tru," Caspar said, not moving. "No! Bad dog."

More barks, and she was jumping up onto her knees. He finally got up from his chair and pulled her off roughly by her collar.

"I'm sorry," he said to her. "She takes some time to get used to people."

"We have that in common," Iris said, her heart hammering in her chest.

He hurried into another room and came back with the spare keys. Trudy stayed sitting there, scrutinizing Iris with those dead eyes.

"Can you pay me up front?" Iris said when he got back.

He didn't seem to comprehend for a moment. "Um, sure. I guess."

He said it all slow, too. He got a brown leather wallet out of his jeans pocket and produced a worn \$100 bill, held it out to her with a limp wrist. She had to stand up to reach it.

"I'll be leaving really early on Saturday," he said. "So you should get here around 9 or 10, that would be ideal."

"Okay."

Trudy barked again. Iris jumped again, and stood all the way up this time.

"I'll see you on Saturday, you little troublemaker," Iris said with clearly-fake lightness.

"See you, Iris," Caspar said, with a tight-lipped smile.

He followed her to the door and closed it before she was all the way out.

## **\$300**

*hey baby*, she texted her girlfriend on the stoop. *can I still come by? is it too late?*

It was almost 9:30. She wondered often if people really saw what was going on with her. She felt like she was just radiating angst. It probably wasn't that no one noticed, just that they couldn't do anything about it. Even people she was close with, she felt like she spent so much time pretending that she didn't want to scream.

Everyone's got their own thing going on, and who was she to downplay that? Millionaires wish they were billionaires, probably, that was a real emotion. You couldn't get rid of that reality without getting rid of everything. It had nothing to do with her.

*yeah i'm at home*, her girlfriend texted her, and that was it.

On the B46, Iris got the scans back from the lab. That was quick. She should have thought a little bit about parallax. She fiddled with them in Lightroom and sent four of the best ones to Tiffany right as she got on the J train again. Tiffany heart-reacted them but didn't say anything.

She unlocked the door to her girlfriend's apartment and went up the stairs, fiddled too long with the lock on her apartment door. There were two deadbolts, some holdover from the 80s, and she always forgot which key was which.

Her girlfriend was on the couch, some spreadsheet in front of her on her ThinkPad. Iris sat down next to her and kissed her long neck.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Have you eaten?"

“No, I was waiting for you.”

10:23 PM on the stove clock. “Shit, I’m sorry.”

Her girlfriend put her laptop on the coffee table, carefully, and turned to face her. “It’s fine,” she said. “Let’s figure something out, though.”

They ordered a pizza online. \$37 dollars after tip. As always, her girlfriend didn’t mention the money.

“How was your day?”

“Fine,” Iris said. “I did those pictures of Tiffany. I already got them back, actually, on my way here.”

“Can I see?”

Flicking through the 12 photos on Iris’s phone with a cracked screen, her girlfriend lingered on each one, zoomed in on the scans until the screen was full of pixels.

“These are great. Like, really great.”

“Thanks.”

“This is on the guy?”

The guy was what they called the Ikonta, a pet name that Iris had started using but was now mostly exclusively used by her girlfriend. “Yeah.”

“It’s crazy that it’s 70 years old.”

“I know.”

“You should really charge for this. I would pay more than \$30 for this.”

“I feel like I might start doing that after I’ve posted a few of them. You know, so people actually know what I do.”

“Has anyone else asked?”

“No.”

“You should post them, then.”

“Yeah.”

She texted Tiffany *hey, is it okay if I post those on IG?* while her girlfriend returned to her laptop.

They started watching *Girls* while they were waiting for the pizza. Hannah starting her job at GQ, realizing she’s surrounded with failed writers, crying in her cubicle. Going home and being mean to her boyfriend, falling asleep on the couch after resolving to write for 3 hours. It was funny.

“That wouldn’t happen to me,” Iris said.

“What do you mean?”

“I wouldn’t feel bad about having a job like that. I’d just do it.”

“Sure.” Did she sound annoyed, or just tired?

When her girlfriend went to bed, she sat in the living room of her girlfriend’s apartment, lit by the one mushroom-shaped lamp. Thinking about money. Below the panic, anger. Every single one of these objects in this apartment was out of her reach, maybe forever. But who was she to think she deserved any of this? She thought, at one point, that she could go against the grain, become someone who didn’t live by the rules. She didn’t know that this was what it would look like. But she should have.

She should just ask Ivana how it was done. She felt stupid for even



thinking it. At the thought, she abruptly went from the couch to the table. Her girlfriend's leather bag, with her work laptop back in its little padded sleeve. She reached into the bag. Lip gloss, chapstick, a lighter for some reason, shredded and crumpled-up receipts. And the wallet, a leather tri-fold. She pulled it out.

There was her girlfriend on her passport card, her Illinois driver's license, her company health insurance card, a loyalty card to a wine shop around the corner. Four out of the ten little line-drawing bottles punched out with a hole punch the shape of a wine bottle, the negative space overlapping imperfectly with the drawing. And cash. A perverse impulse overcame her and she took all of it out, counted it. A fifty, a twenty, a ten, and six ones.

I'm sorry baby, she thought, and took the fifty out, crumpled it in her pocket next to the \$100 from earlier. And with a nausea gripping her innards she calmly washed her face, brushed her teeth, took her progesterone, and quietly climbed into bed next to her sleeping girlfriend, who was snoring, not unpleasantly.

## \$250

She woke up in a panic. Her girlfriend was gone. 11:28 AM. Shit. Okay. She opened her calendar app and saw nothing for the next few days. Vague guilt at sleeping in, a feeling that she should be doing something, that the better version of her was doing something meaningful and felt no doubt about it.

She put on her girlfriend's clothes, ate the rest of the pizza, dicked around on her phone, masturbated to porn of a woman pouring canola oil on another woman, and walked to Café Morel.

Avery Lynn was behind the counter pulling an espresso shot. Iris waited until Avery was done with that and went up to the counter.

"CORTADO FOR ANGELIE," Avery yelled. "Hi, Iris. What's up?"

"Not much," Iris said.

"What can I get ya?"

"A caprese sandwich and an americano with oat milk, please and thank you."

"Coming right up," Avery said, not even swiveling around the payment screen. Iris sat at the counter while Avery worked.

"I saw your photos of that girl Tiffany," Avery said.

That morning Iris had zoomed in on the scans and again went back and forth on whether or not they were any good, what that even meant.

"Oh, did she send them to you?"

"She posted them," Avery said.

"Oh, shit."

She looked at Instagram. There they were, in a carousel of six images, with no caption, no tag. Without thinking, Iris posted them to her story with the caption *Tiffany on film by me :) let me know if you want portraits!*

It was a little passive-aggressive, she guessed, but it worked. Likes came in instantly. She put the phone down.

"They're good," Avery said. "Could you do some of me?"

"Sure," Iris said. "Hey Ave, is this place hiring?"

"No," Avery said. "Who's asking?"

"Me," Iris said.

"Hmm, tough," Avery said. "You have like, an art background, right?"

"Something like that."

"You won't get anywhere with that self-deprecating attitude."

"I really need money, girl."

"Do you have anything expensive you could sell? Or someone you could ask?"

"I think so," Iris said.

"I'll keep an ear out," Avery said, and handed her the free sandwich and coffee.

After she finished it, buzzing off the caffeine, Iris took the train to Midtown, looking at ebay searches on her phone.

The man behind the counter at the camera store couldn't have been that much older than her, but was already balding a little and had acne.

"It's been completely overhauled," Iris said as he rotated the machine.

"The advance mechanism and the bellows were completely replaced."

"Beautiful," he said. He was in some kind of reverie, like he was dancing with a woman under moonlight or something. "These things are really underrated, you know."

"Yeah, totally."

"Just moving on to something a little more modern?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said.

He lowered the camera and looked at her, suddenly all serious. "Well, I think I could offer you \$200 for it," he said.

Her heart sank.

"I mean, it's been, like, completely overhauled," she said again, letting a little bit of pleading come into her voice. "It's, like, in the best condition you'll ever find."

"Yeah," he said. He looked away from her, down at the camera, sitting on the glass countertop above the case full of other cameras.

"I'm sorry, the reality is that we have to sell it for a profit. You could probably get more money for it if you sold it online."

"Okay."

"We can offer you \$250 in store credit."

"\$200 cash is fine," she said, reaching in her tote bag for her wallet.

"Pleasure doing business with you," he said, and seemed to mean it, if that was possible.

He picked the camera back up and started fiddling with the aperture dial he had just checked.

"Thanks," she said. "Are you guys hiring, by the way?"

"I don't know," he said, not looking up. "You'd have to check the web-site."

"You have to put the focus back at infinity before closing it," she said as he was trying to close it.

"Oh, shit, good catch," he said.

"You almost broke it," she said. "That would have ruined it."

"Yes, you're right." He looked uncomfortable. "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

No one in line behind her. Seemingly no one else in the world but her and everyone at their job. She turned around and went back into the heat.

## \$50

It was a relief, having one less thing that she wished she was better at. She deleted the Instagram story with Tiffany's pictures. She should focus on getting a job anyway.

*hey baby I had a really tough day*, her girlfriend had texted her. *do you have evening plans? I'd love to cuddle up with you.*

*I'll be right there*, Iris texted.

She went to an ATM to deposit the money, realized she had to go downtown to the bank branch before doing that, took the 6 train after hopping the turnstile, got there right before it closed. Then back uptown, transfer to the L. All these people, coming home. She didn't look different from them, probably, but she felt like she was surrounded by little green men from Mars.

"Sorry I'm late," she said when she came into her girlfriend's bedroom.

"It's fine," she said. She was laying in bed completely naked, the AC blasting.

Iris obligingly took off her pants and got in bed next to her.

"You need anything?"

"Not really," she said. "Ugh."

For the next forty minutes, she poured into a disorganized tirade about her whole day going wrong, starting with when she left the house that morning. The manager who was micromanaging her, the coworkers who were rude to her, forgetting her prescriptions had to get picked up and not having the time to get there, her feet hurting because of the shoes she bought with her money, her friend from college getting mad at her because she had to reschedule plans, her feeling that things were spiraling out of control.

"I'm sorry," Iris said, over and over. "No, that makes perfect sense," she kept saying.

Her bank account had \$1150 in it, with \$1000 about to be deducted from it in two days. Then, she had to figure out how to eat and stuff. \$150 is two grocery runs. Even with the food stamps she hadn't applied for yet, she would be eating beans and stuff. And there was the rent for Septem-

ber to consider. Oh God, she would be at that fag's boho-chic apartment for the whole month, too, in a neighborhood where she hadn't optimized her grocery store runs. She would just walk the dog and apply for jobs, that was it. Enough of it and it would come to something.

Once the whining was over they lay there for a while, Iris stroking her girlfriend's thighs absently, her girlfriend's hand in her hair. Iris felt a thousand miles away. She was starting to get cold.

"I got you something," her girlfriend said after a while. She hauled herself up from the bed and bent over to look in that black leather bag. Iris's heart jumped a bit, but either she hadn't noticed or didn't want to say anything.

"Here," she said, handing Iris a box of Tri-X. 5 rolls. She worked in Midtown, she must have gotten it from the same store.

Iris took the box and set it next to her. "I have to tell you something," she said, the nausea gripping her again.

"What's up?"

A pause. "I sold the camera. Today."

"Oh."

She sat down on the bed next to Iris, picked up the film.

"It's okay. I can return it."

"I'm sorry."

Her girlfriend scooted away from her. "Why? Did you need money?"

"Yeah, I did. I was short on rent."

She put her hands behind her head, which felt to Iris like it was a little much.

"You loved that fucking thing."

"I know. I did."

"Jesus, dude. That was like — that took a long time. I kept it secret from you for like, four months."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"You know you can just ask for this from me, right? How much were you short?"

"Like, \$200. That was how much I got for it."

"Okay. I spent way more than that on it. What, did you take it to a fucking pawn shop?"

"No, but... I..."

All I have are luxury and deprivation, she thought, melodramatically. Never normal things. Never a normal life. Everyone wants me to cosplay as a rich person to make them feel better, and they help me do that, but they can't help me any other way. But she knew that wasn't right. They just didn't see her, or assumed she was taking care of it, or that someone else would. Someone like her girlfriend, who loved her. She realized half a second too late that she had trailed off entirely. She must have been making a face, because her girlfriend softened hers a bit.

"Can I give you some money? So this doesn't have to happen?"

“Yes. Yes. I’m sorry.”

“Okay. How much do you need, my love?”

“I don’t know. A lot.”

“A lot.”

“Fifty dollars.”

“Two hundred.”

“No.”

“Come on.”

“Fine.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too. Thank you. Sorry.”

**\$0**

In the bathroom, with her phone on 5% battery, she wired a thousand dollars to her landlord and filled some ages-old Venmo requests. She deleted the pictures she took on the Ikonta from her phone. Pictures of her girlfriend sitting next to the window, smiling, the silver light bleaching out her freckles. A picture of her friends sitting on a roof. The cat curled up on a pillow. A blurry, underexposed photo of herself in the mirror. They suddenly seemed like artifacts from a time of her life where she didn’t like herself, a time she decided was now over. (Much later, she’d wish she still had them.)

She had another month, she thought. This would have to be when it all changed. Starting now. She’d go out into the other room and finally fix her resume, start sending out the applications like a machine gun.

Her phone died abruptly while she was absentmindedly scrolling Instagram. When she stood up everything got a little blurry for a second. She steadied her hand on the doorknob and pulled. It didn’t move.

She sat back down on the toilet, got back up, pulled again, harder. It was stuck, the knob was just rotating in its socket.

“Hey baby,” she said.

No response.

“Hey, baby, I’m stuck in here. The door is stuck or something. Baby? Baby!”

Silence. She thought about screaming or kicking the door, but couldn’t find it in her. She sat on the floor instead. There was a little window above the toilet, and just barely over the top of the light well a sliver of late-evening sky was visible. She sat there and waited.





# *The Accumulative Grief*

Sloane Murphy

“You remember that summer we thought the government was finally gonna kill us? When I was drinking and you were on all that shitty coke? When we finished that bottle and that sixer and I told you that sometimes, I could see the future?”

“Not really? Which summer was that?”

“The one after the one where you stopped talking to me.”

“Right. When I cut my hand on that bottle after that party! I was trying to clean up while I was fucked up or something.”

“Yeah! You were wearing a bandage and bleeding through it over the pool table at Patti’s.”

“Remember that guy who started talking about how he couldn’t take the dope withdrawals at Patti’s? The bald guy with the sob story and the creatine muscles?”

“ohmygod, yes, but that was at Delilah’s. And he was just blaming his ex wife for his addictions! He asked me if I had ever prostituted myself I think? And I was like what do you think? This was back when I was skinny.”

“Stop comparing yourself to how skinny you were at twenty three, dumbass. You’re a thirty something year old woman.”

“And you’re a decrepit crone.”

“Yes, but in my youth, I was quite beautiful. I had many suitors.”

“I thought we put a ban on your transatlantic accent in ‘31.”

“I figured if I let it sit for a few years, you’d forget about the ban.”

“And yet I still can’t play Come On Eileen on the Touch Tunes?”

“Will you give me the accent back? ‘Cause I’ll cede Come On Eileen.”

“Never.”

“Remember that boy that we hated?”

“The one who always hit on us, or the one who never asked a woman a single question in his entire short life?”

“The second one. I forgot about him dying. Makes it feel less fun to bring up a mean story.”

“Were you gonna bring up that night when I made out with him because I was fucked up about Edie or something?”

“Yeah. Remember his video essays?”

“I’m gonna be so real with you, no.”

“Why do I remember them, then?”

“Do you think anyone remembers us?”

“Nope. Ain’t that beautiful?”

“What were you gonna say earlier? About when you could see the future?”

“Oh yeah. I was thinking about that night, because I’m pretty sure this is the future that I saw.”

“Huh.”

“I’m out of smokes, you got any?”

“Yeah.”



# *McDonalds Experience*

Chloe McCormick

Sara says they've ruined the McDonald's experience. She keeps talking about this, 'The McDonald's Experience,' like it's some sacred ritual we've forsaken; she goes, "the McDonald's experience is just awful now," and then she always laughs to herself and says "this is such an American thing to complain about," like she's not mad, like she doesn't immediately roll back into "it's so fucking annoying, these fucking kiosks, it's so solitary now, you don't talk to anyone anymore, the whole fucking thing takes at least twice as long as 'hi-I'd-like-a-McDouble-and-a-small-coke-and-a-McFlurry-and-a-yadda-yadda-yadda,' the fucking load times are all too long and all you ever fucking do anymore is wait around until you hear the girl at the counter go 'eleven twenty-three' and at most you smile and nod and leave and the whole fucking thing just feels awful now." The sick thing is that I agree with her, I just don't have the energy to be that mad.

Me and Sara get McDonald's maybe once a month, we're always too drunk to forget if we should be boycotting it, "six dollars is fine" even when it ends up being close to thirty. I think it's weird that they all have flags now, like they're state cafeterias or something. We must've been around Myrtle-Wyckoff when I pointed this out to her; by coincidence, it was just the third or fourth McDonald's flag I'd seen that day. It was around 3am and for some reason we'd been in Manhattan— and for far too long at that. The air around us must've fallen asleep an hour or two prior, pitch dark, living quiet, sometimes a rolling of tires or rushing train, sounds that perk up late in the night, few sentences dropped but "they've all got flags now," then: "well the whole fucking experience is just terrible..."

Mary's phone wallpaper says "YOUR LIFE IS BETTER WHEN YOU TAKE YOUR RITALIN." I think it came from me. At brunch I told her about Sara's McDonald's thing, it came up from something stupid, I don't know, I shouldn't have said it, Mary still gets weird about Sara if you ask me. She went "Sara M or Sara J," even though she knew I was talking about Sara J, only Sara J would get stuck on something like this, Sara J's one of the most neurotic people we know. Or at least she's up there— fierce competition springs out every day; I own a mirror too. And Mary says, like always, "I do love her, but that girl is fucking crazy." I asked her if she's ever noticed that half the time we say 'I do love her,' it already means 'but that girl is fucking crazy.'

You're supposed to be a person who talks to other fucking people and that's how the whole industry works, what fucking restaurant are you ever going to where you don't talk to people, and now at McDonald's you just



fucking stand there, you're just a fucking body in a space not even a voice or a brain or any of that shit, you just take up fucking space until they call your fucking number and then you leave in exchange for more bodies, more spaces, more numbers, no fucking words, fucking McDonald's.

I don't think Sara J is that crazy, for the record. Mary's just extreme about other people. She's normal, everyone else is too crazy, or too stupid, or too irresponsible, or too stuck-up, too coked out, too prudish, and it's all okay, that's just how they live their lives and usually they make it work, that's Mary's mantra and she keeps it to herself. She told this to Sara J once, who already knew. Mary's crazy, says Sara J, and Sara J's crazy, says Mary. They dated for a hot minute last Winter and learned all this about each other. In theory it was amicable, their relationship has as much love post-breakup as it did pre-breakup, but the big difference now is that they take any opportunity to soak up gossip and spit it all over the floor.

Sara J saw Mary across the floor of the same gay bar we're all always at two or three times a month, me, Sara J, Mary, Sara M, Lucy, Gia, Wren, Cleo, Diana Rudy, Cassidy, Kathy-Katherine, Leona, well, all the people you usually see at these things. Sara J told me Mary's been schmoozing it up with this girl Elena Green, whose real last name is Greenberg, "but she's low-key about it because she's old money rich or at least New York old money rich and doesn't wanna seem that way," and that Mary's been schmoozing her to get an 'in' with her dad's company, and there's venom in all this, layers of familial-financial-social judgment, and I tell her, "Sara, none of us are working for each others' dads." She takes a beat: "half of us barely even talk to our own," and then we laughed, and it bubbles up and breaks us out of the moment, because this is the kind of shit we're all in together, and even if all that stuff about Elena Green is true, she's still at this fucking gay bar with us.

And anyways, I saw Sara M a couple days later, and she told me Elena Green sucked off Leona in the bathroom, and that all that stuff about her dad is true, by the way, and that Sara J and Mary went home together, shocker, and they "just processed," that's what Mary told her the next day, but Sara M didn't really believe it and neither do I. It would be a lot more fun if they fucked. Listen, whatever they've got going on will boil over by the end of the Summer. By circumstance, it usually does. We all go back to the same gay bars and clubs and house parties and rooftops and living rooms and bathrooms and bedrooms and beds and mouths and asses and pussies and tender, loving arms, don't we?

Sara M tells me she and Mary talked about me, and that Mary loves me dearly.



*ed. joyce laurie*