

Counter Service.



Guilt

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Editor in Chief:
Joshua Hamlet

Editorial Assistant:
Sarah Boisjoli

Designer:
Matthew Feddersen

We take submissions of any kind, really.

Counter Service is a platform where we like to talk about what happens around the table and the edges of the food world. That doesn't mean you have to talk about food, but most likely it will come up in your submission at some point. We look for fiction, nonfiction, personal essays, poetry, playlists, photography, graphic design, vignettes, obsession pieces, illustration, and profiles of people/places/things/ingredients/etc.

Each issue does revolve around a central theme, but largely this theme is a guideline and not a rubric. If you feel so inspired to write/photograph/design something and it doesn't fit our theme, let us take a look anyways and we'll make it work some way or another. For examples, peep us on our website for the latest issue.

hello@counterservicemag.com



Cover image by Bruce Studios

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A note from the editor

Guilt sneaks up on you. Guilt welcomes you to the party and keeps you at home. Guilt makes you spend too much money. It plays games with your head and accompanies you on the way home. Guilt sinks deep into your stomach and is slow to digest. Guilt sometimes never shows up.

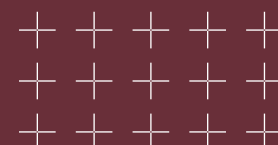
When I think about guilt I think about those guilty pleasures I indulge in late at night. I think about the banal binaries of good and bad, right and wrong. I think to stories of “he overindulged” and “she just couldn’t help herself” and “they just didn’t quite get it.” And I think of the self-imposed anxiety wrapped around food, drink and being “correct” when it comes to ingesting the two.

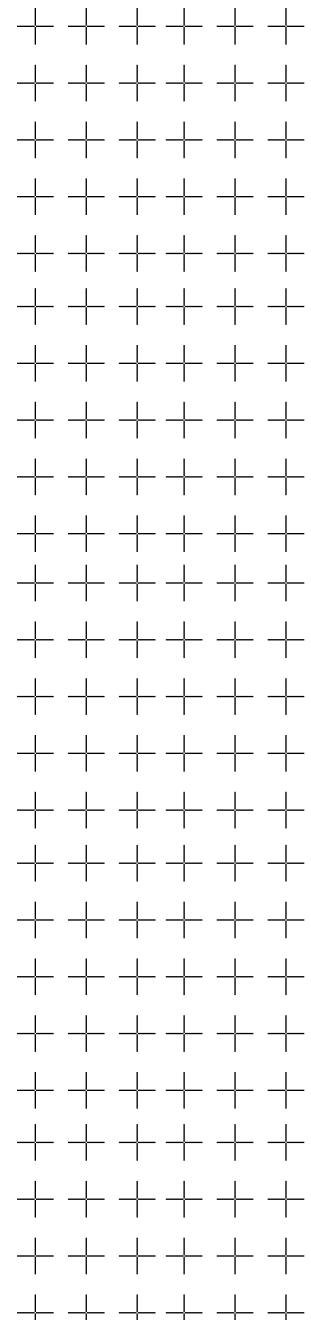
In this issue our authors and artists sit down and have conversations with GUILT and how it shaped key food experiences; the guilty pleasures, clandestine meetups, underperformance, disinterest, not listening to their bodies, and grappling with saying “no”.

I am once again, so proud to be working with such creative and dedicated hospitality humans.

Please do note: all proceeds from this whole volume, VOLUME II: MEAT, SERVICE, HEAT and now GUILT, will go directly to those Counter Service contributors who have been affected by massive layoffs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

XO





In-Room Dining

Travis Dorsey

Hotel rooms can be turned into kitchens, too—
did you know that?

Remove the bed and other extraneous furniture.

Install a small combination fridge/freezer, a
speed rack to act as pantry.

Now, a table, some appliances, bowls and
other miscellany.

It's best if at least one window opens.

That way the hallways won't be flooded with the
smells of your delicious cooking.

And your neighbors, strangers, will be less likely
to lament the staleness of their room service.



Guilt

Sarah Boisjoli

The first time we see each other outside of work we go to Antarctica on Hudson Street too early. It's summer and I'm wearing a mini skirt. I walk in with my first Mister Softie of the season, and sit next to you. I fumble when you hand me a drink and drop some ice cream on the top of my thigh. You wipe it off with your thumb and then keep your hand there while we finish our drinks. You have to leave after that and the next day at work (as you resolutely avoid eye contact) the cocktail waitress tells me she ran into you having dinner with your girlfriend and her mother in the East Village. I don't buy another Mister Softie that summer.

A while later we meet at Milano's. We order two whiskeys and I'm too distracted by trying not to spill it on myself in that too-narrow space to notice that you've ordered a bag of chips. When I kiss you, you taste like

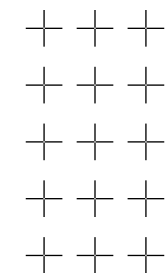
Frito's. I know that when she kisses you later, you'll still taste like Frito's.

Months later you ask me to meet you at Billy Mark's West near Port Authority. You've made a game out of finding the seediest bars in Manhattan. I tell myself that my high threshold for the lowbrow impresses you, so I play along. I sit at Billy Mark's alone (not alone, there are twenty or so men) for just over an hour before you show up. A man named Robby asks me 5 times if I "want some of his nuts". When you sit down, you throw half of a handful of peanuts from a bowl on the bar in your mouth before you offer your excuse for being so late. She's your excuse. I don't kiss you that night.

When I refuse to meet you at yet another dive bar you call my bluff and ask me out to dinner. We meet at Blue Ribbon Sushi in Columbus Circle. You live in the Village (with

her) and there's a Blue Ribbon on Sullivan Street. Years later, we become regulars on Sullivan Street and the Maitre D comps our meal our first time back after getting married. A month later, drunk, he does it again. You don't correct him.

I convince myself that given some time, I'll get you out of my system. I leave for Paris for two weeks alone. On my last day I have lunch and a split of Champagne in St. Germain before my flight home. I land and meet a friend for drinks. We run into you and her with her friends drinking Ace of Spades. When I move in, in the process of finding a home for my things, I come across a heavy box filled with cards and photos from her (and another one). I drop it melodramatically in the plastic trash can in the kitchen. The cat hisses at me and the metal Ace of Spades logo that decorates the front of the box falls off.





Mother Tongue

Mindy Cardozo

“I call the discourse of power any discourse which engenders blame, hence guilt, in its recipient.”

—*Roland Barthes*

In Tokyo as well as Miami, my family goes back three generations. We went South as carpetbaggers and East as proselytizers. In the interest of not passing on either narrative, my parents never baptized me, and we “got out of dodge” when I was two. They were determined to shelter their kids from something I was assured I did not want to go on when I begged not to be left behind: the “Guilt Trip.” I imagined a guilt trip to be something like a secret portal to the number counting portion of the Electric Company, maybe out of some vague associations with the word “trip,” but they assured me it was no place at all. I slowly gathered that a guilt trip was something grandparents did to parents when they defied them as adults, so I took my parents’ advice: I didn’t go there. Had

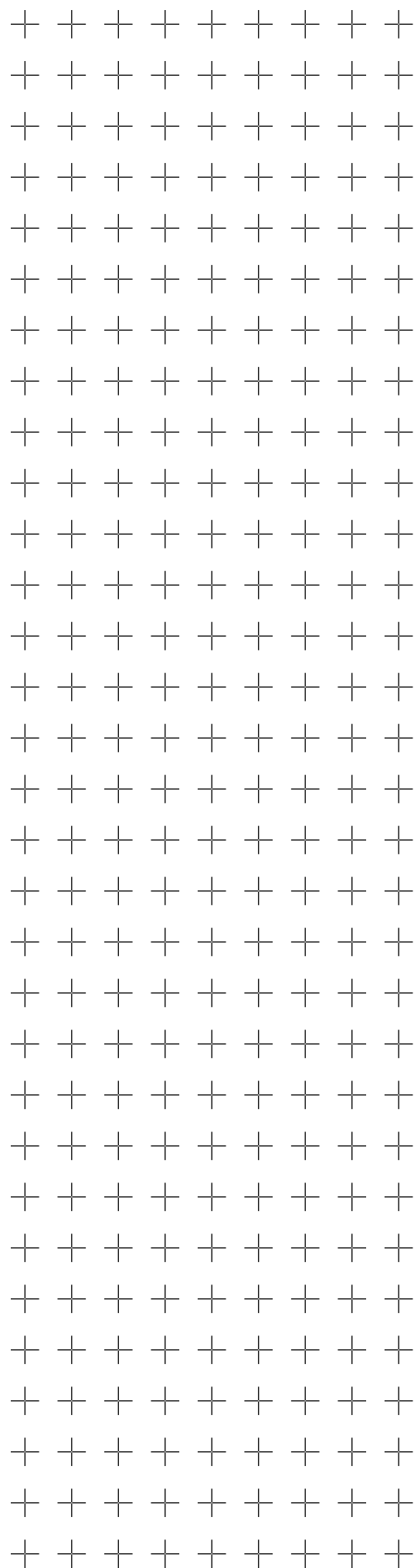
this essay prompt been about shame, I could produce volumes about my relationship to that emotion; guilt, however, is something I know I am supposed to be ashamed to confess that I just don’t really... feel. As soon as the windup begins from a person who would like to activate my guilty conscience, a force field drops down and the conversation is over. Of course this has provoked numerous accusations of “sociopath,” and less printable diagnoses, and I understand the frustration provoking this response, but a childhood without Judeo-Christian backed parental nagging doubled down by a college education organized around post-structuralism helped me acquire an acute allergy to the language of guilt. Mostly. Recently, I’ve been reading about the idea that we have a second nervous system in our gut, and I find this persuasive, because although I was able to unthink guilt from a moral perspective, somehow it still got to me through another channel: through food.

As an undergrad, I spent my days on campus either in class or studying in the library, taking short breaks to drink vending machine coffee and chain-chewing gum to quiet my grumbling stomach. I had Japanese class five days a week, and endlessly recopied kanji strokes in the correct order during any seconds of down time. That year, Winona Ryder had been on the cover of Rolling Stone wearing nothing but her collarbones and a pixie cut under denim overalls. I couldn’t unpack the loosely Sadean “Venus in Bluejeans” caption, but somewhere between this image and my weekend viewings of CNN’s “Style With Elsa Klensch,” I began to find the tanned full thighs of the sorority girls in my classes repulsive, as I watched friends from high school assume without any resistance the “Freshman 15” as if it were some womanly right of passage. My long curly hair became an embarrassing link to the absurd amount of energy I’d spent throughout high school trying to pass as a cheerleader, so I cut it off.

Most nights, I waited tables, and aside from the T.S. Eliot-obsessed drama goths in my English class, the women at my restaurant job were unlike any people I’d ever met. They wore piecemeal vintage dresses,

fishnets and combat boots. They colored their hair to make it darker. Their tattoos were messy and they let their underarm hair peek out. The pastry chef could often be spotted in the wee hours teetering to work on her rickety bicycle in a tutu with a cig in her left hand. My heavily (self)pierced floor manager got an A+ in her notoriously difficult class on Derrida. They were gorgeous and clever and they drank red wine and played pool with the kitchen staff after work. Everyone seemed to be sleeping together with very loose distinctions around gender. No one had a car. I was years younger than any of them. I traded my mall clothes in for vintage cords and cardigans and a tube of “Vamp” Chanel lipstick. I barely drank. I blushed deep red when one of the women hit on me, even though I’d been raised by a pack of lesbian moms following my parents’ divorce. I got straight A’s. I knew I wasn’t like them, but as I slowly figured out that they were punks rather than hippies, I cautiously began assuming their ways. The “alternative” discourse they were creating gave me my first persuasive understanding of how utterly uncool the power drag of mainstream entitlement was, through their ugly pretty small acts of dropping out.

I was still an outsider to the outside, so I began my crossover with solitary and rather frigid and confused acts of defiance. If I indulged in mainstream practices of decadence, my body would out these faux pas (guilty!). My desire for actual “freedom” was making me my own private cop: a literal body guard to desire. Suddenly it appeared that none of my heroes were so gauche as to have actually consumed food: David Bowie, Patti Smith, Angela Davis, Joan Didion, Edie Sedgwick, Simone Weil, Mick Jagger, Nico, PJ Harvey, Jane Birkin, my gorgeous friend Tammy who sliced the desserts at work, the girls reading fat novels in the weird back corner of the attic cum study hall over the reserves library, the boys in zippered boots and dress pants whose forearms and biceps were the same size. I desperately wanted to participate in this collusion. I can imagine few things more persuasive to a thoughtful young person than the grotesqueries of a sports forward state school to incite a burning



desire for nonconformity, but I was too shy to consult my friends on what I read as practices of disidentification, and so the productive potential of something like veganism became a slippery slope into the guilty solipsism of anorexia.

Meanwhile, I was nose deep in my first years as a student of Japanese. My grandmother had gone to Japan as a missionary right after the war, and taken my mother and my aunt with her, so Japanese was not not my mother tongue, but the approach I took, attempted mastery, was competitive, just as my relationship to my body had become competitive. I imagined Japan to be everything North Central Florida was not: what could be more outside than going halfway around the globe to study a romantic non-Romance language with unfamiliar grammar patterns and a phonetic writing system that was more like pictures than the meaningless abstraction of letters? Unlike Roland Barthes, who wanted “to be a primitive, without culture,” I craved fluency, conversion, and alternate histories.

So I spent my junior year of undergrad in the Kansai region at a small school between Osaka and Kyoto. Vaguely understanding Japan as a Buddhist country, I thought culinary issues would be the least of my worries, but I quickly learned that vegetarianism was more likely to be interpreted as rudeness than an ethical stance. Meals were often paid for by well-meaning acquaintances, as food was prohibitively expensive. I delighted in the visuals of cold but perfectly beautiful banana yellow slabs of sweet egg and the translucent pinks and reds of tuna draped over glittery platforms of rice, bound in tight seaweed sashes like tiny edible geta or a geisha sliced through at the waist. I held my first mouthful of raw octopus, chewy like a strip of double-sided tape, softly under my tongue as it began melting before I could sneak into the bathroom and slip it into a trashcan: babysteps of transgression. In the window of every restaurant gleamed plastic molds of each possible dish in incredible detail: tempura of giant shrimp, curry rice, tiny pouches of fried tofu stuffed with sticky rice to placate fox spirits and small children, soft serve in shades of green (macha)

Mom

Quinn Rose Levine

Becoming a mom in the time of Instagram brings the pressure up big time. Everyday I scroll through my instagram, now flooded with moms my age posting their idealistic lives, their kids crafting, hiking, eating homemade yogurt and all the while their mom is a fashion designer living in her handcrafted house made by her hot husband or smokin wife. Somehow, motherhood has become a competition. Don't get me wrong, my instagram is chock full of perfect images of my two little ones playing in the snow, making necklaces out of wooden beads and eating local washed rind cheeses in our Hudson Valley home. But, there is this constant state of slight panic and guilt, just bubbling underneath my skin on a daily basis, that I am not doing enough for them. It is now completely impossible to not compare yourself to people you have never met before. Keeping up with the Jones' went from your neighbor to the entire world.

Mom Guilt comes in many forms. There are moms that have to work 40 hours a week and miss out on morning drop off at school or bathtime. There is the guilt of moms that can't breastfeed and feel like they haven't given what is said to be "best", too much TV, too many sweets, not enough time outside, getting frustrated at them when you've had a bad day, the list goes on. We all know that childhood is so fleeting and every moment and day we can never get back, it is only natural that we, as parents, beat ourselves up constantly.

I work from home as an event and wedding planner, my company is growing and during the busy season in the spring and summertime, my head is buried into my computer. My 4 year old and 2 year old are back home from school or daycare by 3pm and there is still a lot of work to be done. On goes Paw Patrol, the most mind numbing show on TV.

Cartoons these days for children are psychotic. They are so fast and furious but keep their attention for hours. It is horrible. So, I put it on the TV anyway so I can get back to a rental company order that needs to be in by 5pm but the client hasn't fully confirmed whether or not they want stemless flutes. "Mama, I'm hungry!!!", comes from the living room. I grab 2 Frozen themed mozzarella sticks from the fridge and toss them at my TV zombie children. Here comes that feeling, "Oh god, they had processed garbage food all day today and they are on their 5th episode of Bubble Guppies. I am such a bad mother." Finally, the email comes in "confirmed" ...stemless. I shut my computer and snuggle up to Wylie and Oscar and give them the biggest hugs. We head up the stairs for bathtime, then Wylie "reads" Oscar bedtime stories and tells him she loves him. In those moments, nothing else fucking matters.



Means of escape

C. Jason Moran

Two boys stand in the kitchen
One is you and one is me
Lovers simmering

While duck hearts and dinner beets
Nestle in a pan
Can't tell the pieces apart

The hiss of oil
And a juicy perfume
Flare around you

Neck bent up
A heavy pulse beats in
The chamber of your throat

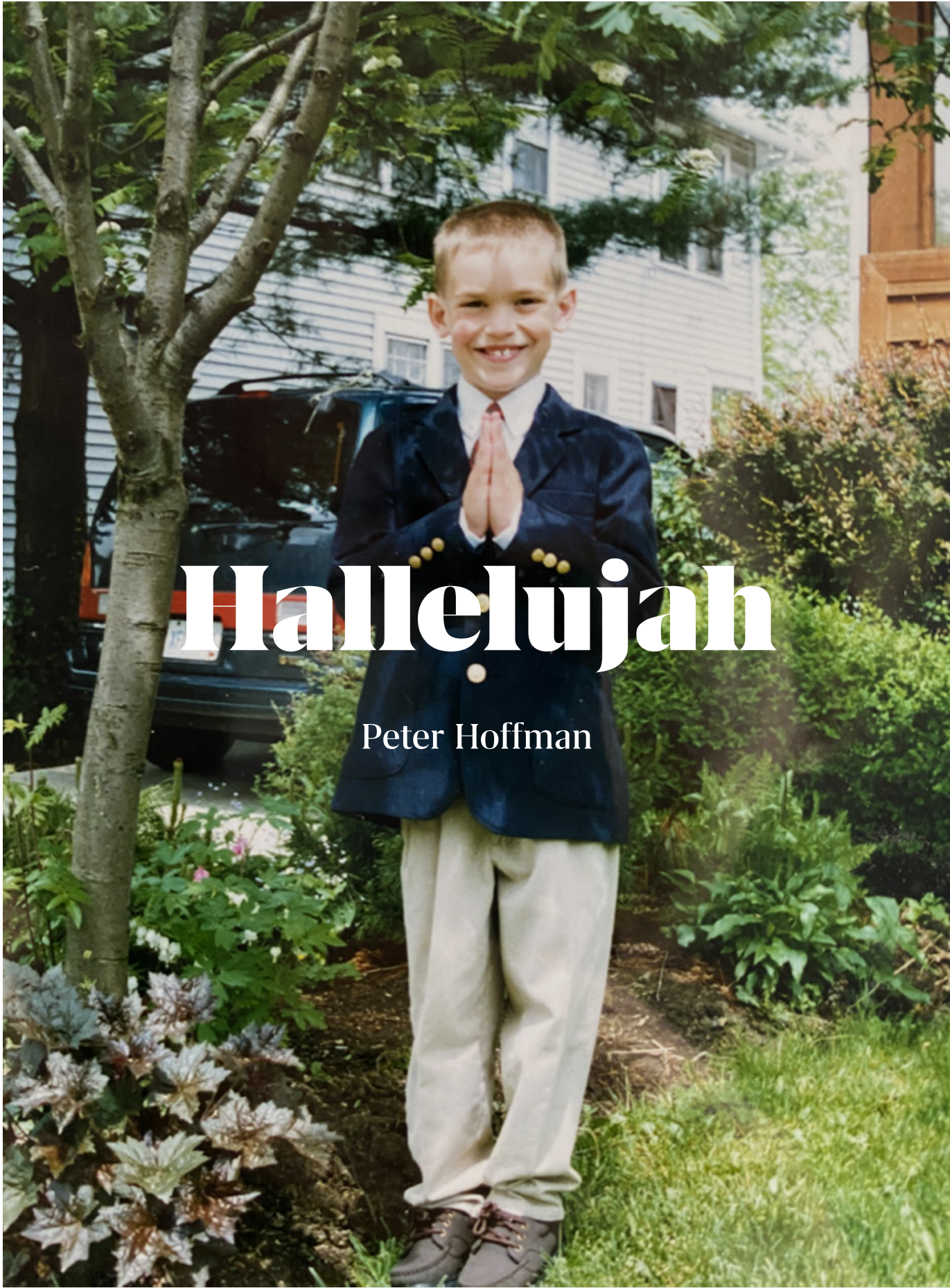
The stove sputters
And I draw away from
You and your flat feet

Reasonable men
Right-thinking men
Would avoid this heat

But you dial up the gas
Remorse melting on your brow
Let that sorrow furrow

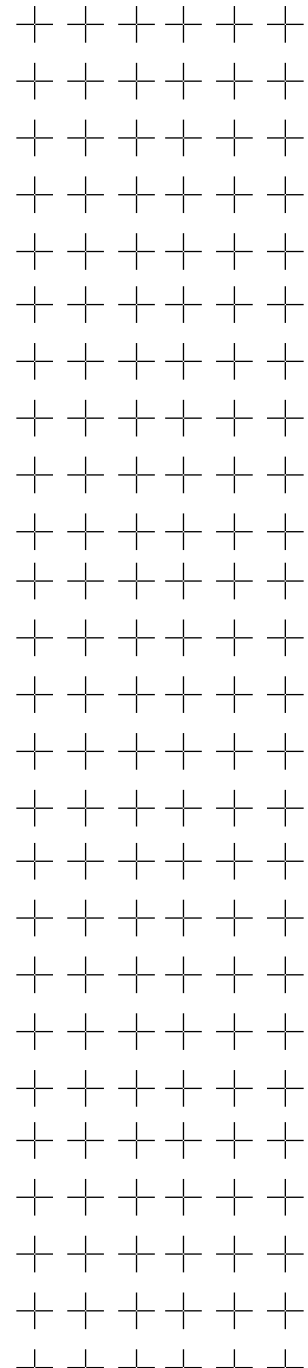
While I drown
You out, take you back
To where we swam
When I met you

And bury you there
In the sea
Give you a good brine.



Hallelujah

Peter Hoffman



If you, like me, were raised in a Catholic household which instilled the importance of God, church, virtues, and general “goodness,” and were sent, from the time you were five, to Catholic school which reaffirmed and drove home those same importances, then you may find yourself, like me, to have an extreme adult case of enduring, incurable, irrevocable Catholic guilt. The guilt’s apparition arrives at very unexpected times, much like Our Lady of Lourdes or Jesus in that slice of toast, for small misdoings that certainly don’t mean much to those to whom these crimes were committed but nonetheless, you still feel bad for not responding to that email from last week and wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and won’t fall back to sleep until that email is responded to. While these (oft imagined) guilts can overtake your body mind and soul, I have made it a point to never, not once, feel guilty

about one thing and I implore you to do the same: Don’t feel any remorse about the beautiful act of eating.

I’m not advocating for gluttony here (after all, that is one of the seven deadly sins and therefore would definitely cause a Catholic to feel justified pangs of guilt) but rather I believe in indulging yourself and taking care of your fantasies.

You want an extra helping of cake on your birthday? Go for it. A bottle of Sauternes because you want to try it, even if it’s outside of your price range?

YOLO. Food is meant to be shared and enjoyed. It’s meant to teach and cause emotion and satiate. If you happen to break your diet because you absolutely needed a pint of ice cream instead of fruit, tomorrow is a new day and you’ll live. Rejoice and

be glad in your decisions. Don’t hide them in shame. Don’t beat yourself up! We are meant to forgive those who trespass against us, and we should apply the same to ourselves. We will still be delivered from evil!

I am lucky enough to travel to France somewhat often, a place where I come dangerously close to flirting with gluttony. On a recent trip, I was digesting a long day filled with my favorite French foods: a perfect pork terrine, tender steak au poivre, apple tart; briny mussels and stout sweetbreads washed down with rice pudding. The next morning I stuffed myself with my daily bread and butter and after sampling some vin chaud at my favorite café, genuflected into the Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. As I marveled at the city’s oldest church, my Catholic boyhood didn’t demand recitation of The Act of Contrition. Rather, I whispered a soft “Hallelujah.”

On the Insides of Eggs

Lyz Pfister

The perfection of four egg halves,
which had previously been two
whole eggs, broken open

on whole grain toast.
An expansive morning, deceptive
winter sunlight warming

inside the windows.
I eat my eggs.
Hiding behind closed doors,

three men with whom
I share this space.
I am alone

with the contested floral carpet,
the drum set, the hookah
still set up with last night's coal.

I remember the eggs
as they fell from my hands
into scalding water,

pregnant with their own
private lives.
The men slumbered on,

as I thought, too,
of the test wrapped up
in toilet paper, stuffed

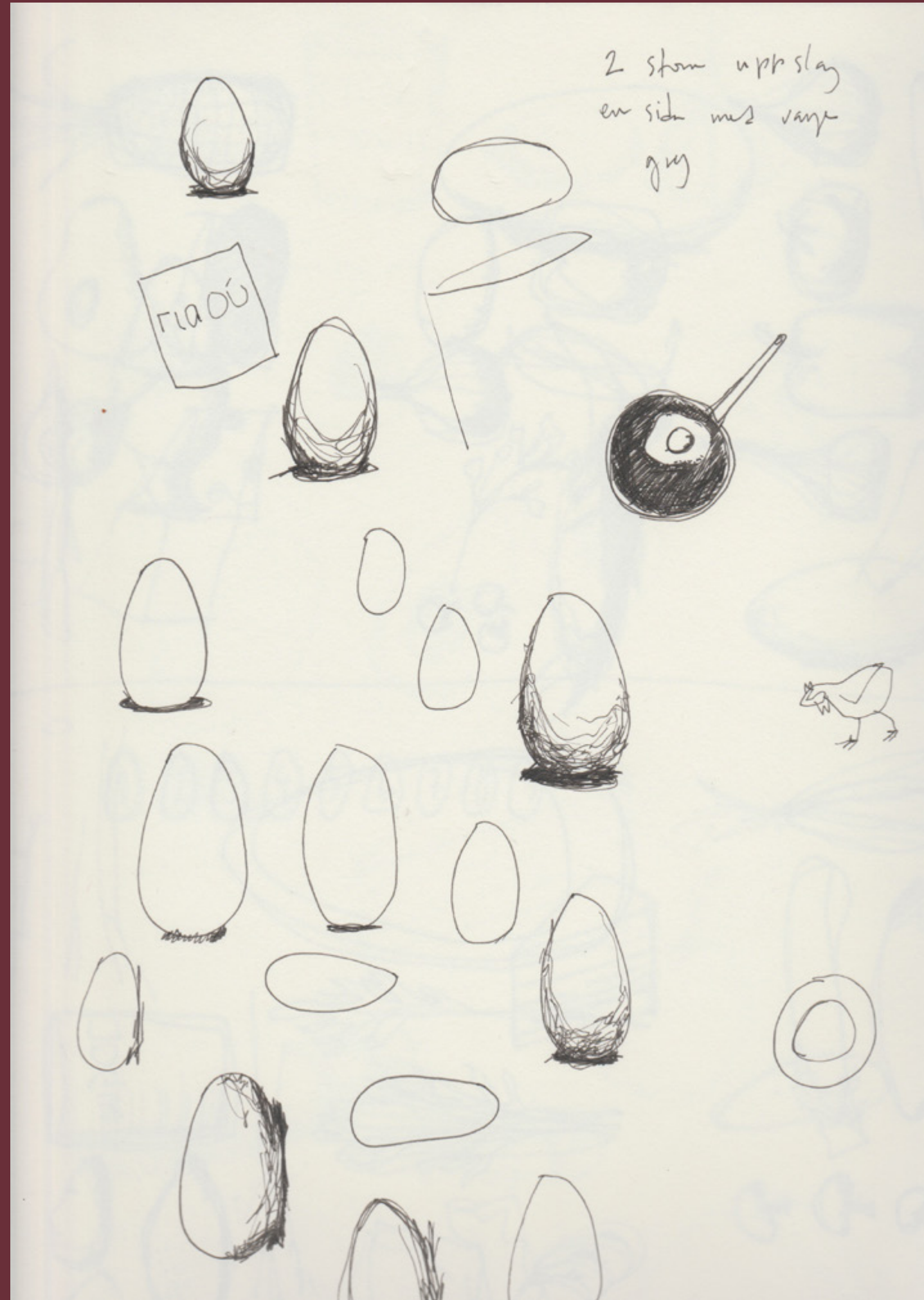
at the bottom
of the bathroom trash can,
a thin blue line.

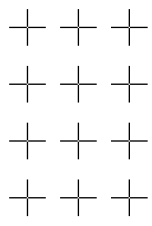
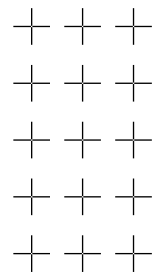
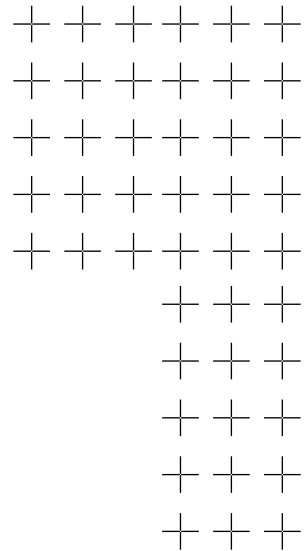
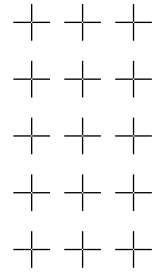
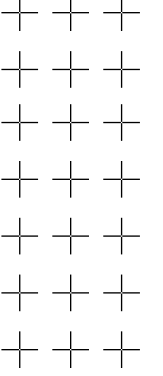
One egg cracked on contact
with the boiling water,
a filament of space furrowing

inside the shell, impenetrable
no more. The other
eggshell like a stone wall.

But broken open on the toast
each bright yolk
revealed itself the same.

Illustration by Anna Thieme





Sausage Fingers

Paulina Pinsky

The wind whistled through the long grass in bumfuck Vermont. My eyes started to itch, coated with pollen, but the view was so beautiful: mountains undulating along the horizon, thousands of tiny white flowers in full-bloom. In the middle of an open field, Max and I sat on the edge of a wooden platform he built with his best friend three summers before. I had met him on tinder only four days prior but agreed to leave the city and come. A weekend in Vermont with a beautiful man as a second date? Why not? I didn't think too deeply about the fact that I would be in a house filled with all of his childhood friends. He slid his hand on my thigh. His sausage fingers thrilled me: could it mean—I stopped myself. It is unwise to have expectations, especially when it comes to penis size. I wrapped my fist around one finger like I was his newborn. Any time either of us moved, the platform tipped like a seesaw.

The sun shined. He pulled his finger from my grip and said, "I'm emotionally unavailable, I'm not looking for a life partner from Tinder, and I'm questioning my sexuality. You know, radical honesty."

I ran my hand along the grain in the soft wood and regretted teaching him that phrase. Clouds began to form overhead. I wanted to say, "You waited until after I took a bus for six hours to tell me that?" But he averted his eyes and I broke through the smog with a smirk instead. "Well," I said. "I'm here. Might as well make the most of it."

So we kissed. Then we laid back and looked at the clouds pooling overhead. "Dudes don't get my dick hard like you do," he whispered in my ear.

"Do you think it's gonna rain?" I replied.

He sat up. Pulled out a sausage finger and swiped it against the air like he was finger painting the wind. "I think so."

He kissed me. We never talked about his sexuality ever again.

We got on our hands and knees before we felt stable enough to stand on the platform—it tipped one way, then the other as we made our way back to the truck he borrowed from work. I opened the passenger door, slammed it, buckled my seat belt. For the first time, I set eyes on the blaring, bright red sticker that read PHOTOVOLTAIC in bold white letters on the glove compartment. I asked, "What does Photovoltaic mean?" He smiled to himself. "It's a joke," he said. I still didn't understand and I definitely didn't find it funny. "We have to put those stickers on every few feet of pipe so that if there is a fire, firemen know not to chop through it."

I found the answer semi-satisfactory, but I still didn't fully understand. It is only later that I looked it up: "relating to the production of electric current at the junction of two substances exposed to light."

Two substances exposed to light: a hand full of sausage fingers wrapped

around the truth. The electric current between the two of us hit me like lightning. Now, "radical honesty" cracked the clay that baked in my chest. Shards of ceramic, where there used to be a delicate set of china. I wanted to do was to use him as a defibrillator: One of his hands above my heart, one hand below: **CLEAR.**

I could still feel the electric current, but I couldn't un-hear what had been said. I was still alive, but I would have much rather been struck dead by lightning than picking up pieces of something that never really existed to begin with.

His shoulders were less hunched. He grabbed his phone, looked at me with baby blue eyes and said, "Do you know Lizzo?"

"Do I know Lizzo! Of course I know Lizzo!"

He started the car. We drove over the already compressed long grass. I rolled my window down, I started to trace the wind with my finger tips—careful not to let a tree snap my wrist off. Max started to sing, off-key:

*Cause I'm my own soulmate
(yeah, yeah)
I know how to love me
(love me)
I know that I'm always gonna hold me down
Yeah, I'm my own soulmate
(yeah, yeah)
No, I'm never lonely
(lonely)
I know I'm a queen but I don't need no crown*

Similar Taste

Mary Casella

He's not handsome by conventional standards.
But neither am I--
or maybe I am *handsome*--but not beautiful.
And anyway

I remember getting flush
the first time I met him
in the basement
next to the coffee maker.

But after
I didn't think anything of it
every time he stopped by the shop

"just to check in".
Charming, confident, aloof--
I can't pinpoint why exactly I find him so sexy.

Drawn to him.
Maybe it's that we have similar taste
in things.

Or each other?
And I honestly don't know what I want from
him.
Just to share--
my thoughts, a movie, a bite, a drink.

A fuck.
Maybe it's the way his hands feel on me.
Firm.
Or his lips-- small,

but sweet tasting, and somehow always cool.
I think of him--

Peeling and eating away at me.

Just like the foreign fruit
from his constant travels.
Craved. Enjoyed.

Then tossed away?
My friends all say he doesn't deserve me,
but he takes me.

And I let him.
In his arms.
His hands.
His mouth.

Hanging heavy--the peak of letting go.
He knows just when to pick
me, soft and tender skin.
Too long, I fall--bruised.

Dolce far niente

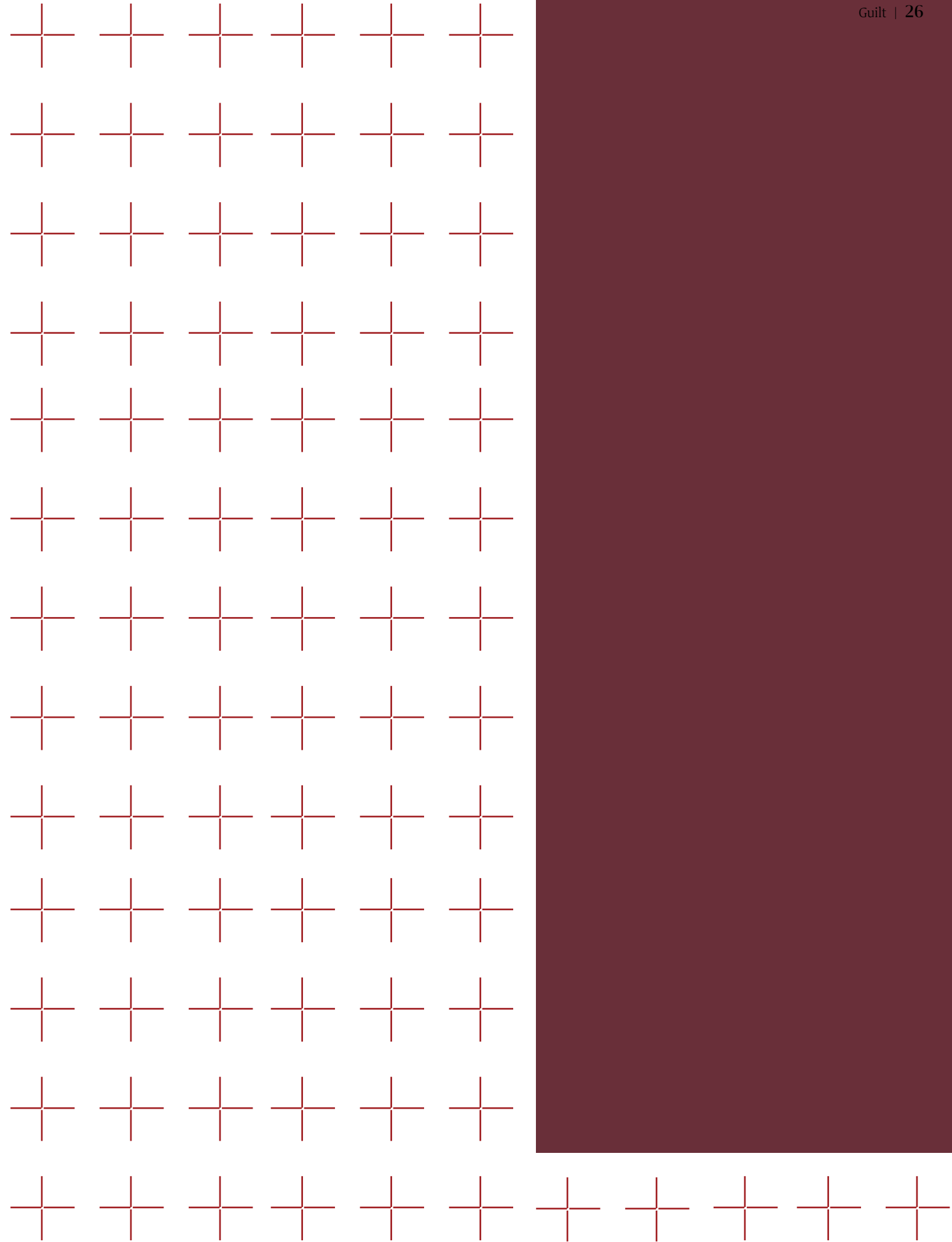
Lauren Gerrie

"Dolce far niente."... The sweetness of doing nothing. For three weeks in early June, I lived and cooked on the island of Pantelleria. A dream destination floating between Palermo and Tunisia in the waters between the Mediterranean and Tyrrhenian Seas. The first and the last week of my stay dedicated to work, but the sweet filling left me to do whatever whenever I wanted. I love a daily routine, the dancer the chef the doer in me. I challenged myself to create the most indulgent schedule, stick to it, thrive in it.

- Sleep in
- Make coffee
- Drink coffee
- Make more coffee
- Journal
- Jump rope
- Yoga
- Dance
- Swim in pool
- Drive to market
- Grocery shop at market
- Drive more
- Jump in ocean

- Swim in ocean
- Tan
- Tan
- Tan
- Drive more (I love driving, especially manual on winding cliffside roads that overlook an endless ocean)
- Swim in pool
- Snack
- Fruits & Vegetables, Cured Meats, Local Cheeses, Potato Chips, Peanuts, Tarallini (quite possibly the best fucking cracker there is! Seriously though, they are addictive little savory circular biscuits flavored with olive oil, pepper flakes, fennel seeds.)
- Drink prosecco
- Drink beer
- Get Stoned
- Explore
- Hike
- Swim in Pool
- Tan
- Tan
- Tan
- ... this brings us to about 4:30pm when my most favorite part of the day was quickly approaching. The 10 minute drive in my Panda Fiat

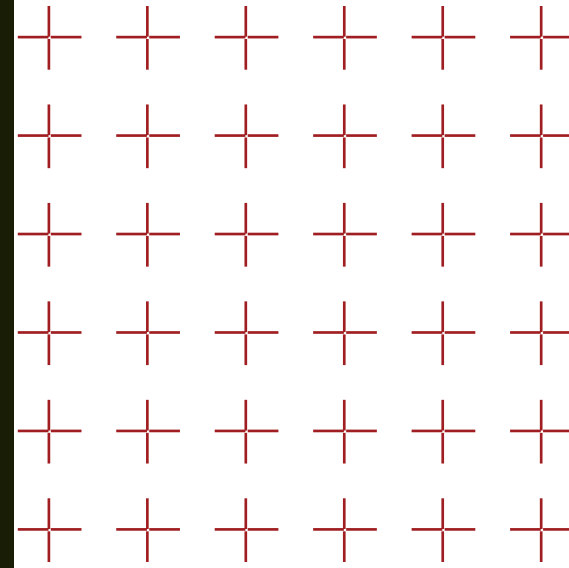
spent pondering what today's flavor combination would be, until I arrived at Gelateria Katia nestled in the stone walls of Castello Barbacane overlooking a picturesque port. I love gelato, deeply and truly. Loyal to pistachio and hazelnut, I decided to force myself to try new flavors each day during this week. It was a real challenge, every time I caught a glimpse of those green and tan hues I could hear their flavor explosions screaming at me to return. But no, there were so many unique varieties to sample. Juicy Cherry & Walnut, Caper and Oregano Dark Chocolate, Pear & Ricotta, Fresh Melon, Wild Strawberry & Cream, Espresso & Chili Flake, Apricot & Milk, Fennel Frond & Candied Bulb, Lavender Yogurt!!! Two Scoops. One Cone. The salt air adding a delightful balance with each lick. Looking around, I was not alone. I was surrounded by others finding true and simple pleasure in the indulgence of gelato. We were all together, guilt free, basking in the sweetness of doing nothing.



Saying No in Hospitality:

Transforming Guilt into Power

Jasmine Senaveratna



A recent call to my father, a retired chef, ends with him saying, “Don’t disappoint Daddy.”

I hang up, and sit in silence. It hits me hard, the reality that I subscribed to a lifetime, personally and professionally, of pleasing others, and fearing their disappointment if I cannot or do not want to.

This feeling is not a surprise, but a milestone; if I’m being honest, I’m tired. And after a decade in hospitality, I’m starting to see that in serving others, my last priority has been myself. I take a long walk in my memories, collect and spread them at the round table in my mind.

The memory is vague. Disney World, 1993. A seated spectacle at Universal Studios, in the audience with my parents. I’m swirling around my own head in sensory overload when the emcee picks participants out of the crowd. All of the sudden, Winston swings me up on his shoulders, attempting to increase my chances. I am out of the loop, caught up in the bangs and booms, in a sea of children, parents, sounds and vibrations. But I recall my father’s efforts, pushing to the front, stretching his body vertically higher than his 5’8” frame, for me to be seen.

I was not picked, and to be honest, I didn’t care at the time. However, Winston’s disappointment was physical, palpable — and *that* I did care about. I remember his shoulders sinking, the puff of his usual proud body deflating. I internalized the disappointment as my own, and wanted nothing but to make it better. *If he could be happy, then I’d be happy, too, or happier.*

I have re-lived this moment so many times on the floor. In the swirls of service, the constant murmur of music and voices (the years take away the volume, no?), the perception of someone’s disappointment quickly zig zags through the room to my heart. Like a pang between two heartbeats. A missed opportunity to proffer wine, swiftly replace a dropped fork, or seat the anniversary couple at the corner table reels me into the same mental space experienced more than 20 years ago: I am not you, but feel you, and your disappointment. I feel guilty you’re not happy. I can make it better, let me make it better.

In my restaurant world, I know and love that I wholeheartedly care about people and attend to their needs. And to my benefit or detriment, over-empathize. However in other aspects of my life, I critically analyze the roots of that skill and how I have watered them. If my youth were a

VHS tape, and you could see and hear beyond the jagged fast forward lines, we’d see baby Jasmine told countless times to do something and then do it without question. To avoid the guilt I felt from the disapproval.

As a child, there’s necessity and practicality in this response: eat your vegetables, brush your teeth, do your homework, etc. Let’s call it well-intentioned conditioning. But time passes, I learn how to wipe my ass and be civil, and the questions seemingly evolve into directives I choose to follow. *Take three language classes, it’ll enhance your SAT scores; Go into the medical field, it’ll pay off; We’re giving you this additional (huge) task on top of your floor duties, because we know you can handle it (without increase in pay); You can close an extra night this week, right?*

I have allowed life and work to be a series of directives, as opposed to questions or opportunities in which I’ve had agency. In the beginning, acquiescence and letting my id/ego go was great; flowing with the needs of the floor, kitchen or guests felt less bumpy. It became too easy to obliterate my sense of self. *Everyone is happy, because I’m here to facilitate their needs. I am the vessel, the vehicle.*

Can you work service after admin duties? *You got it.* We need an extra

CLEAN PLATE CLUB

Flannery Klette-Kolton

I once watched a woman lick her plate at a restaurant. Actually bring the plate of food to her face, and tongue the juices. My friend Joe and I grasped hands in shock under the table as we settled into the unexpected dinner theater display. I could have used her technique to pick my jaw up off the floor.

Looking back though, who am I to judge? Personally, I prefer to eat with my hands whenever possible. Food just tastes better that way when it is already blended with your own pheromones. There is something nostalgic and naughty about licking your fingers. And this woman, she was in complete bliss and delight. She was authentic in her joy. Uninhibited. Unashamed. So much so as to not

waste a drop. That is a beautiful thing. I would never want to strip someone of their joy of eating, and all cultures employ different techniques. I mean... why fuss over a fork when you have a face? Utensils are just another thing to wash. And they are hardly efficient when it comes to the last juicy bits of a sauce and the bread basket is empty.

The truth is that I have always been good at cleaning my plate. Let me rephrase. I was taught to be good at cleaning my plate. "Don't waste food there are children starving in Africa." "Take what you can eat and finish what is on your plate." "If you want more steak, finish your peas." Even Dirty Dancing began with Baby wanting to send her leftover pot roast to Southeast Asia. And she won at life BIG time getting to bone Patrick Swayze in the 80's.

As much as I love food, and I do, I know that leaving food behind is ridden with guilt for me. This is compounded with the fact that as a personal chef I spend about 30% of my life washing dishes. I don't mind, the hot water is soothing. But the part I don't enjoy is cleaning the catch drain in the sink. Seeing the last bits of food unenjoyed, soggy, and wasted. Scooping it up in a dripping mess and transporting it to the nearest trash

can, so the water can once again drain properly. Or, if the sink is already jammed, you are elbow deep digging blindly in the murky waters for the clogging culprit. In terms of kitchen task dislikes I rank it up there with picking thru half spoiled herbs that smell like grandma's breath. But even more disheartening is clearing a plate into the trash, and seeing what your guests did not finish, and letting that reality sink in. Wasted time, wasted ingredients, wasted energy. What a waste!

You can call me a human trash can, garbage disposal, whatever, but I do a good job at cleaning plates with my face first. Often times pushing past comfort or the knowledge of being full. But like really, how can you leave that ONE BITE?? It is almost infuriating. Is that supposed to be cute? I don't get it. I would not want the guilt of wasting, or wishing later that I had finished something delicious. One last bite. One more chance to soak in the creativity of the plates' creator, one more chance to be inspired, to feel full, fuller, to fill the void. To be complete. My eating methods may be less efficient for fear of being less well mannered but this chick had the right idea. My compliments to the chef.

By Bread Alone

Eva Harder

There is a moment at the end of church that I dread every Sunday. After the congregation has sung songs of worship and the pastor delivered a sermon, a church leader will stand in front of a plain wooden table that holds a single loaf of bread, two large goblets of grape juice, and a small plate of gluten-free wafers: communion.

As someone who can't eat gluten, I should be happy to have a gluten-free option, but as congregants rise from their seats to partake in his holy ritual, indecision grips me. If I dip the wafer in the juice, I risk getting sick from the bread's cross-contamination. I could skip the juice altogether, but what if the wafers have milk? I'm allergic to that too. Sure, I could just ask, but then I would have to be that person.

And I am so, so tired of being that person.

It is somewhat strange that, though much of my life is dictated by two things most of the world believes is nothing more than a marketing scam—God and food allergies—it is the latter the people greet with far more skepticism.

“Are you gluten-free by choice?”

New friends and coworkers often ask me this question like they're trying to suss out who I voted for in the last election. Of course, what they really want to know is if I actually have Celiac Disease or if I think going gluten-free will make me skinny.

The short answer is that I will never know. Though a test came back negative nine years ago, my doctor either didn't explain or didn't understand how difficult it is to accurately diagnose the disease. Abstaining from gluten for even a short amount of time can make a test come back negative, which is why doctors urge you not to give up gluten without getting tested if you suspect you might have Celiac. Meanwhile, the medical community has finally begun to accept that Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity is a legitimate condition and can sometimes

produce symptoms more severe than Celiac Disease itself.

A few of the doctors I've spoken to in recent years think it's likely I have the disease, but being tested would require me to eat bread every single day for a minimum of six weeks and possibly as long as six months—and not a single doctor has recommended I put myself through that. Besides, whether I have the disease or not, the prognosis for my symptoms is the same: avoid gluten for the rest of my life.

It's just easier to tell people I have Celiac Disease, so I do. It's entirely possible I'm lying about it.

“What happens when you eat gluten anyway?”

This question typically comes at a dinner party, when someone zeroes in, hawk-like, on the fact that I'm not eating bread like the rest of the guests. (Do you really want me to tell you while you're eating green pea soup?)

Sometimes I demure politely, referring vaguely to “stomach stuff.” But if they really want to know, and if there's time, I tell them the full story.

When I was a senior in college, I woke up one morning to see my stomach swelled to the size of a basketball. I had never before been that bloated in my life, but I chalked it up to a particularly impressive “food baby.” It lasted for weeks.

When I texted a photo to my sister, she responded immediately. “That's what I looked like when I was six months pregnant,” she said.

I had just spent the last two years getting in shape, eating whole wheat pasta, and going to the gym often enough to lose 60 pounds, but my new clothes wouldn't fit around my protruding stomach. I

had spent all that time seeing my body change and bend to my will, and now it was rebelling, morphing into something I could no longer influence or change.

As time wore on, the list of symptoms grew: A sharp, cramping pain down the side of my swollen stomach. Inconsolable constipation. A tightening of my airways and inability to take in deep breaths. Insomnia. Brain fog. Fatigue.

As bad as those physical symptoms were, it was the psychological symptoms that truly scared me, though I didn't find out until much, much later that gluten was likely part of the cause.

At 21, I had never experienced anxiety, depression, or panic attacks in my life. But that year, I had four separate panic attacks that appeared at random, crushing me in confusion and an unnamed loss. I started to view the world as if I was slightly disconnected from reality. Attending an outdoor lecture on Shakespeare, surrounded by trees and classmates, I had the distinct sense that the air around me was tenuous and not something to be believed. I worried I might snap.

A counselor would (and did) say the stresses of graduating college had brought on my newfound anxiety, and I'm sure they played their part, as did heartbreak from an unhealthy romantic relationship. They were no doubt important pieces of my slow psychological unraveling. But I had no idea that depression and anxiety are some of the most common symptoms of Celiac Disease and Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity. Today, there is a growing awareness of the massive role that one's gut microbiome plays in mental health, lending scientific legitimacy to a concept that is obvious intuitive, yet often scoffed at and castigated as new age or only fit for mommy blogs: what we put into our bodies affects our brains—big time.

After two months of visiting doctors and skipping class because I didn't feel well, my gastroenterologist suggested I get

tested for Celiac Disease, a condition I had only heard of only once before. I prayed for it to come back positive. I didn't care if it meant I couldn't eat bread; at least it would be an answer. When the test came back negative, however, I felt defeated. As I sat in my doctor's office and once again went over my symptoms, I started to cry. Not from pain, but from the frustration of knowing something was wrong with me but not being able to identify what.

His gaze was stoic. "Is it vanity you're worried about?" he finally asked, convinced my only issue was a bit of bloating. He diagnosed me with IBS and a possible stomach infection, then sent me on my way with a packet of antibiotics.

Without an official diagnosis, I started to live in fear of food, terrified the chicken sandwich at lunch or crackers in my cabinet might be slowly poisoning me. Eventually, I began taking Nyquil at dinnertime just so I could pass out instead of dealing with another night of being hungry. By the time I graduated college, I had lost more about 30 pounds in three months. I got mono. I abandoned all post-college plans for teaching English abroad, as I had wanted to do for years. Instead, I moved in with my sister and watched my body slowly waste away, ashamed at the fantasy I used to have when I was younger about getting so sick I could lose weight without going to the gym. I spent that summer sleeping fourteen hours a night and numbly watching hours of TV.

Finally, in early September, eight months after my symptoms began, I stumbled upon a salacious, poorly written book warning of the many dangers of gluten. Wheat Belly has been rightly criticized for its hyperbolic tone, but it described exactly what I was feeling. So I tried going gluten-free. And it changed everything.

It took about three or four weeks for healing to begin. Slowly, my digestion returned to normal, and I would never again take for granted the relief of a good shit. No more bloating or stomach cramps, just a normal, slightly rounded stomach. Slowly, my energy levels became strong enough that I could start going back to gym and on runs, the

euphoria flooding me as I dashed past houses and trees in the warm afternoon sun. Best of all, my sanity returned, with my reality now feeling as firm and stable as it had for the first 21 years of my life. The heartbreak, the quarter-life crisis many Millennials dramatically endured in the wake of the Great Recession, these weren't yet cured and would still take time to abate. But I could now manage those losses without worrying the ground beneath me would turn into quicksand.

As I began to avoid anything that might contain gluten—bread, cakes, pasta, soups, sauces, condiments—I didn't feel deprived. I felt saved. Even now, eight years later, when I'm on a jog in the park or wake up with the morning sun, I marvel at the clarity in my head and the strength of my body, instantly flooded with gratitude and relief. People are always so aghast when they discover the limitations of my diet. What they don't understand is that health is so much easier than sickness, and that the challenges I face have nothing to do with cravings.

"Is it hard being gluten-free?"

This is the question people ask me if I have successfully convinced them that 1) I am not a terrorist and 2) I have a legitimate health condition. But it's complicated. On one hand, eating a piece of bread sounds as inviting as putting my hand on a hot stove. I know too well what seared flesh feels like, and I have no desire to relive the memory.

However, I have learned that my diet seems to be extraordinarily difficult for one distinct group of people: those lucky enough to have no food allergies whatsoever. Though I try to laugh off headlines like "How the gluten-free movement is ruining our relationship with food", sketches from Jimmy Kimmel, or a joke on Modern Family and South Park, these seemingly harmless digs help spread the notion that gluten-free diets have done more to harm to the cultural fabric of America than the Kardashians family—which is dangerous for my health in more ways than one.

First, there is the actual, physical danger. Not all restaurants take food sensitivities seriously, a painful discovery I've made on numerous occasions. I once found myself halfway through the best gluten-free pizza of my life before a shooting pain in my stomach made me realize the server's mistake. In a 2001 Lancet study that followed Celiac patients for 20 years, researchers found that eating gluten only once a month—even if they didn't experience immediate symptoms—increased patients' relative risk of death six-fold.

But the real challenge, for me, is the social isolation and embarrassment I experience on a regular basis. I hide my food allergies from new friends for as long as possible, knowing it will change their perception of me. I avoid dinner dates and always opt for drinks, dreading the dance I do with every restaurant I encounter. Even after I've called ahead, spoken with a manager, and read countless reviews, I am often still met with servers who never received proper training on how to handle food allergies. My friends have patiently endured a server running back and forth from the kitchen as many as four times to check on various items. Usually, I just order a salad. Even then, it may come back covered in croutons or cheese.

Thanksgiving, birthday dinners, vacations—all things that are supposed to be joyous occasions have too often been for me sources of anxiety and fear. Do I tell them my restrictions and risk ridicule, or say nothing and risk getting sick? Sometimes it is easier to decline the invitation than make that choice. Though I am much less embarrassed to announce my food restrictions than I used to be, it is never effortless, especially at work. My job requires me to travel extensively to conflict regions, and I have experienced the shame of declining the lasagna at a diplomatic lunch as well as explaining why I can't eat bread to people living in an active war zone.

At an office party once, a coworker asked if I had tried the cake.

"No, I'm fine," I told him.

"Oh, come on," he persisted. "You should just have one piece!"

He brandished a fork at me, determined to make me partake in his poison.

"No, really, I'm not hungry."

"A little bite won't hurt! You don't need to lose weight!"

Finally, I snapped. "I am allergic to practically every single thing in that cake."

"Oh, sorry," he mumbled, and I knew instantly I was the one who had gone too far.

It is such an instinctive human gesture, to share with someone a bite of our favorite dessert ("You have to try this!"), to give as gift the thing that is so primal, not just to our survival but our experience of pleasure in the world. When I say that I can't eat gluten, I see clearly that it is the person offering me the pastry or the cake who is being denied. People love to give. By being unable to receive, I rob them of something essential to human intimacy.

On a trip to Italy a few years ago, I made the shocking and beautiful discovery that bread didn't bother me there. For some reason that remains unknown (and sadly didn't translate back in the U.S.), I could eat pasta, pizza, and bruschetta without any symptoms or sickness. I was overjoyed not by the ingredients, but by the fact that I didn't have to read every single one jus to feel safe.

Many critics have argued that this hyper-paranoia of what is in our food is creating its own type of health problems, not to mention a cult-like following of disciples in search of the perfect diet that will lead to non-existent perfect health. They certainly have a point.

Growing research on the mind-body connection tells us that emotions can regulate or exacerbate inflammation in the body, while social isolation and loneliness are some of today's biggest public health threats. I know from experience how easy it is to slip into hysteria. When I found out that it was wheat that was harming my body, an

innocuous grain I'd been raised to believe was the cornerstone of health food products, I felt betrayed. Eventually, I began to view all ingredients on my plate with suspicion, like a hardened detective interrogating an innocent school teacher. Did you hear that too much kale can be bad for you, and spinach too? And what about almonds, or flaxseeds? If wheat was responsible for my sickness before, maybe something else is responsible for my fatigue now. Of course, it could just be age or stress or even loneliness.

The cruel, unfair irony is that people with Celiac Disease or gluten sensitivities are more likely to have other sensitivities, dairy being the most common. When gluten enters the bodies of those who can't tolerate it, the protein attacks the parts of the intestines that contain lactase—the enzyme that digests lactose. In my own life and the research I've come across, I've learned that gluten being an issue for someone can be an indicator that there may be other sensitivities to come. I tested positive for a tomato allergy four years ago, and I spent a solid two years denying it. I already had to give up milk and bread; I could not and would not give up anything else. But as headaches persisted, as my intestines began to scratch at my insides in an echo of what happens when I eat gluten, as I left every restaurant feeling mildly hungover and exhausted for days, I had to accept it.

Still, I wonder: Which is worse, the sickness of the body that comes from the wrong ingredients or the sickness of the soul that comes from denying too many? Is a salad really that much better for you if it's eaten alone in front of the television, away from the communal table? Am I really sensitive, or am I just weak?

I know these are all supposed to be small problems, laments of middle class white women and stalwart supermarket snobs stocking up on probiotics from Whole Foods like manna. But this country has a long history of telling women their illnesses exist solely in their minds, and male doctors are more likely to dismiss a female patient's symptoms as imagined or psychosomatic, as reported by The Guardian, The Atlantic, and U.S. News and World Report. Instead

of investigating and asking why and taking seriously the rise of food allergies and autoimmune diseases or disorders around the world—which disproportionately affect women—this country does what the medical community has historically done to its female patients: ridicule them into thinking that their illness is nothing more than fantasy.

If having food intolerances has taught me anything, it is that bread is about so much more than yeast or water or flour. It is culture, social cohesion, and identity. It is the staff of life. In Latin, the word "companion" translates to "with bread." And on the rare occasions I reminisce about being able to eat gluten, I don't ache for pepperoni pizza or the smell of freshly baked bread—though those are top contenders. What lingers in my memory is the last night I spent in Florence as a sophomore in college, when I ordered pear-stuffed pasta with my classmates and stumbled into a secret midnight bakery that sold pastries in a dark alley at 2:00 a.m. It's the ease of road trips and deciding to grab brunch at the last minute, being an adventurous eater who will try anything, reaching over to a friend's plate to taste their food as easily and intimately as if it were my own.

The Bible teaches that man cannot live by bread alone. It is not bread that I miss, but being able to break it with people I love.

Sometimes, when I'm out to dinner with old friends and the breadbasket arrives, they look at me guiltily as they take a slice. "Sorry," they say. But I don't need them to apologize. It's enough that, at least around them, I don't have to.

It is in those small moments that I am able to partake, despite my limitations, in the divine and holy miracle of communion.

CHEAT MEALS

FIRST

Smoked Fish Kimbap
PEACH MART

American Burger, Coke Classic
BARE BURGER

Suadero, Pastor, Rajas con
Crema, Sauvignon Blanc
CASA ENRIQUE

Duck Wings, Lobster Salpicon
Tostada, Chilaquiles, Striped Bass
Black Aguachile, Overproof Margarita
ATLA

Roasted Peanuts
STUDIO

SECOND

Table Beer
THREES BREWING

Haemul Pajeon, Bulgogi,
Yuk Hwe, Dubu Kimchi
INSA

Sauvignon Blanc, Prosecco & Paletitas
GHOST DONKEY

Kanom Jiin Jay, Phat Bai Horapha
UNCLE BOON'S SISTER

Brooklyn Lager
SPRING LOUNGE

Cheese Board, Margherita
Flatbread, Tuna Melt, Vermentino
CITY VINEYARD

FIN

Salame Piccante
SANTA PANZA

Kannagara, Tourist Season,
Narragansett Lager
DUTCH KILLS

Cheesus Christ, White Truffle
Fries, Coke Classic
BLUE DOG COOKHOUSE & BAR

Vespa Bianco
OSTERIA DELLA PACE

Coconut Green Curry Wings,
Tan-Men Veggie Lovers Ramen with
Chashu Pork, 1875 Pale Ale
TAKUMEN

Two French Sisters
RAMONA

Sensual Bedfellows
MAGAZINE BAR

Milk and Honey Greenpoint Blonde Ale
SUNSHINE LAUNDROMAT

Prisma Sauvignon Blanc
SYNDICATED

Pizza with Green Olives,
Onions and Sausage
ARCHIES

Normandy Butter and Bread with
Boquerones, Cicero, Bianchetto
OPS

“CHEAT MEALS” catalogues the meals shared throughout Anonymous’ extramarital affair.

Yes, and?

Mallory Melander

The following pictures of snowy mountain ranges in the distance, tree lines, and slope side meals in progress were from a trip that was perfectly improvised. I should know, I planned it with my life + travel partner, and, as of last week when I listened to Amy Poehler's book on audible, I am now an expert on the Improv comedy principle of "Yes, and."

Give the bit (or trip) positivity and momentum, remain open to all directions and possibilities, including those suggested by your trusted partner. Please continue to read to figure out how to improvise your way out of vacation guilt.

Did you know that lift tickets and equipment rentals (INCLUDING HELMETS) for two adults over three days is \$500 cheaper in Megeve, France (Mont Blanc) than tickets and equipment rented in Stowe, Vermont?

Yes, and even though I am a Vermonter, ever since my mom sold the farm and the cows, there is no longer a comfortable family home for two adults to crash on a week long skiing trip, so we would have to rent a hotel room for all or part of our stay in Vermont?

Yes and, hotel rooms in Megeve, France are nearly — ok this is the only one that's a stretch but remember that \$500 we saved with the tickets and rentals — comparable to their Vermont-y counterparts.

Yes, and they are so, so much more charming.

Yes, and if we pooled our credit card points those hotel rooms we were worried about are a little bit less worrisome.

Yes, and sometimes, Norwegian Airlines lets you fly to Paris for the same price as a round trip Amtrak ticket to Hudson, NY.

Yes, and did you know that Paris is on the way to the Alps?

Yes, and do you know of a million places to eat and drink and be happy in Paris?

Yes, and French country trains can sometimes be shit, and sometimes you get stuck in a French country train station after an afternoon of merriment and the world feels a little dark.

Yes, BUT* another train will always show up at some point to take you away.

Yes, and do you know about room service and the feeling of drinking a bottle of Mondeuse in your bathrobe after a long day of travel with nothing to do but look forward to the next week, the next year, the next ten?

Yes, and have you ever even had a tarte à l'oignon for 6 euros at a chalet that is only accessible through a ski path through the woods?

Yes, and is that total happiness, or is that just part of it?

It's cool to not let anxiety get the better of you sometimes, and to know when you are feeling lucky and happy and that things work out every now and then.









Love letter to a second-degree burn

Rachel Knox

Dear Saturday, December 7th,

I was grateful to come in at 6:00 instead of 4:00; I had deadlines and assignments and the extra two hours meant I got to go to the diner and eat rubbery eggs and over-buttered toast instead of chugging a green juice and calling it breakfast. I read the special holiday cooking section in a booth – a mirror-layout foldout full of color photos and column after beautiful Roman column of recipes that called for all of my favorite ingredients: salted butter, confectioner’s sugar (like I’m part of a guild, special enough to have an exclusive sugar milled to my precise requirements), dark brown sugar, light brown sugar, peppermint extract, xanthan gum (like a mad scientist). After I luxuriated over my recipes, I walked home, three blocks down 5th Ave, left at the park, past the woman selling arroz con leche, past the bakery and the liquor store to 45th. I filed my assignment, put on a clean shirt, packed my headphones and train book and lip balm and spare gloves and water bottle. I got to work two minutes early, clocked in anyway, clucked over the new bar mats, hung my coat and scarf and changed into clogs. Service went fine: push the shrimp, one tartine all day, don’t forget Dave and his boyfriend and his sister and her friend are coming at 8:00, save them the good

four-top. The last table of the night was a group of women from North Carolina; their brick-red lipstick and multi-colored dreads and shopping bags energized me, they ribbed me about being from Florida, asked who made the black-eyed peas, teased each other about splitting the bill and me about closing up around them. As far as closing shifts go, it was a dream. Door locked at 10:59, neon switched off at 11:00, exact closing time. The porter is done before me and he and Dory, the line cook, head out to share a cigarette on their walk to the train. I’m almost done, everything ready to go, except for the ice bin.

How I usually burn the ice bin is I take the scoop and shovel the ice into the middle segment of the triple sink. I turn the hot water on, let the faucet do the slow work of reducing the pile of ice to liquid. One of my other duties, though, is to clean the coffee machine. The coffee machine has a big urn, one that holds about two gallons of coffee or hot water at around 200 degrees. Coffee cools fast, and no one wants cold coffee. Running water through the machine does the double task of cleaning and sanitizing the machine and storing enough hot water to melt the entire bin of ice left over at the end of the night – which, if left, could harbor bacteria and all sorts of detritus you don’t want in your drink. After

sanitizing, I usually run the two gallons of hot sani-water into the ice bin from the top of the bar, the spigot its own little Niagra.

This Saturday, though, I’m distracted. Tomorrow is my father-in-law’s 80th birthday, one I have to travel many miles to attend, one I am missing more deadlines to be a part of, to answer the battery of questions a dynasty of Floridian Jews has in store for me, a shiksa (worse, actually: a shiksa raised by an Evangelical family of rednecks) who loves their golden boy. I’m answering a text from my husband about which train to take when I turn too quickly and catch the cuff of my long sleeve on the coffee urn. It rotates the urn 90 degrees and directs the spout of boiling water onto my wrist and back of my hand, soaking my long-sleeved thermal shirt sleeve and trapping the scalding water against my skin.

I am all alone and my skin is melting. I run to the kitchen, behind the bar area, and take my shirt off as fast as I can. My skin is sending up clouds of steam, like a fucked-up dream or a Tom and Jerry cartoon. My sweatshirt is hanging on the coat hook nearby, so I put it on my bare body over my bra, taking care to avoid touching the sleeve to my hand, which feels like some extraterrestrial giant has a magnifying glass trained onto its surface. I walk back into the bar saying “oh fuck oh no oh fuck”

to no one, under my breath and then louder, and shove my mangled hand into the half-melted bin of ice. I hear it audibly sizzle, and think, that can’t be a good thing. I think about my FoodSafe training, run the faucet until it’s cool, not cold, and put my hand under the flow. I think about much it would cost to take a cab to the hospital, who will lower the corrugated iron gate and lock it after me (no one, there is no one else, they trust me with this responsibility, if I pass out will someone step over me to rob us? Will anyone find my body? There is no one else there is no one here I am closing closed alone).

I FaceTime my husband: “Hey, I think I really hurt myself...” The skin on my hand is red and shiny and starting to expand and wrinkle. I can tell it will blister. He gives me some practical advice and then his phone dies and I’m *beep beep beep*-ed into solitude again. I wonder if I can make it to the ER and be processed in time to get a good enough night’s sleep so that my husband’s sister won’t remark on the bags under my eyes (“She always looks so tired! Can’t you take her on a vacation?” she will say, to my husband, not to me, between the caprese and rollatini). Instead I take deep breaths and talk myself off a ledge and slowly, carefully put on my coat, making sure I make no contact with my withered, steaming hand and collect my things. I drop the slowly, carefully counted bank and deposit it in the safe and close it with my elbow. I take two latex kitchen gloves with me, shove them in one pocket, and close the front door with my left hand. I start to lower the chain that lowers the iron grate, my heart pounding. I hate lowering the grate, it’s always the worst part of my night, it is so creaky and rusty and it lowers in fits and starts like a teenager learning to drive a stick

shift. The grate is too heavy for one hand and the chain gets momentum and careens out of my control and I have to grab it with my other hand and it jumps across my scalded, thinly gloved palm. It hurts so badly that I gasp and almost vomit. I pause, exhale, collect myself, and finally lower the grate all the way to its resting place. I go to lock the padlock and realize the key is missing. I look in the secret combination-lock secured key cup for it, but someone has changed the combination. It used to be B-A-S-E, but it’s not working. I text my boss and my coworker with my left hand. I sit down on the concrete and cry a little bit. After a quarter of an hour they separately tell me it’s been changed a few days ago, to W-I-N-E, but they totally forgot to tell me, so sorry, everything ok? I lock the grate.

It’s starting to snow, and I try to shield my wrinkled, scalded hand from the dirty precipitation. I call a Lyft. After a few minutes it careens to a stop in front of me and honks the horn, a Toyota Camry with the strong scent of Black Ice and wet leather. I get in and hold my hand parallel to the window. My husband FaceTimes me. “Are you okay? What can I do?” I ask him to open the door to our building so I don’t have to turn the knob and deadbolt when I get there in a few minutes. The skin on my hand has blistered now, forms a perfectly straight line where my shirtsleeve was. It is going to scar.

I start to cry again. I am so sick of working this job, this stupid thankless job that hurts my body and my heart over and over, that gives me scars and backaches and tension headaches and FOMO and leaves me all alone in a fluorescent-lit room and that my sister-in-law will use to puncture my balloon of self-identity and that now, because of my own

eagerness to be good at it, leaves me unable to clasp the hands of my father-in-law, who I love, who sold hand-squeezed Florida orange juice to restaurants like mine for sixty years, whose hands have seen more burns and births and wedding rings and sabbaths and pages of books than I can ever hope to see.

I use the leftover gauze pads from my dog’s first aid kit to wrap the burn and secure it with athletic tape. I’m not crying anymore but it feels like one hundred sunburns in five square inches of flesh. Careful not to place my weight on my hand, as a side sleeper, I fall into the fitful sleep of the people everywhere who cannot afford to go to the hospital, who work with burns and cuts and bloody noses and chronic pain and no fanfare and the acknowledgement that their pain doesn’t matter, not really, not to their bosses or their clientele or their families or the police or OSHA or the dozens of people on Yelp or OpenTable or at the Department of Health. I love them. I am thankful for them. Blessed are we, when we all get to heaven/ what a day of rejoicing that will be, et cetera. We are the people who keep on working because what choice is there? Someone has to lock the door.

Sincerely,

Rachel

Counter Service.

Counter Service.