



Piss Bar

a short story collection by
Al Sierra

dedicated to people, places, & things.
I have hope for you yet.

Bar and its drinks

I have done a lot of eavesdropping as a bartender. As many as there are venomous, curious, lonely men suckling at my Tequila-stained blouse. There are as many, if not more, patrons who completely ignore me after I serve them their drinks. They have gifted me Potter's cloak of invisibility and I may now read in the restricted section of their lives. More often, it is very boring. Of course, I hear about the occasional affair, or someone who survived a house fire and their restored faith in Allah, or about someone who slept with Chad Michael Murray (real). But most often people are stupid. And their lives are filled with stupid, trivial chatter. This is very reassuring as I'm certain some people would think the same of my Tuesday night musings with a coworker after a shift. It reminds me that nothing is as important as it seems at the time and that no one, no one cares about the script you're working on (sad news for me, as well).

I've heard every bad take on Licorice Pizza and every first date interaction to know that most people are unoriginal and unable to think for themselves — even worse than this, they are unaware of it. Look at me, I know, I'm turning mean. But isn't that why you're here? To be stepped on by the elusive whore behind the bar? Come, let me pour you something special.

Bar at Day

This is a story of Sally and Bar. Two grotesque systems that cannot live without one another. Bar is a walk-up, counter service bar that sells delicious deli eats and conceals a haunted speakeasy in the back. Bar was one of the first buildings on its street. The back burrowed a gay piano bar (a soon-to-be haunted speakeasy), so you know the energy is illustrious. The history rich. The magnetism undeniable. Bar is now a semi-trendy establishment on a street that holds many a far less trendy establishments, including: Pal, a pitch-black room that notoriously sells to minors, and She Bar, a daft, traditional restaurant that dawns happy hours, white-washed tacos, and old fashion misogyny. Bar is now newly renovated with deli accoutrements: hanging sausages, Jewish cookbooks, fat asses, and heartburn. The large open window lets in the California sun and perfectly mints the amber wood finishings. It's all color and crowd and cool.

Sally is perfect and a reliable narrator. Her colors are red, yellow, orange, and black — but in a contemporary, complimentary way, of course, like a coral snake with a tiny tiara. Her clothes are mismatched in thrift fashion and her movements are quick and clumsy. She's stubborn about her viewpoint of the world which makes her heavily fallible and naïve to the general public's ability to cause pain. The only thing Sally really despises about herself is her big chest and the burden these heavy tits bring to her self perception and other people's tendency to stare.

Sally has been working at Bar for six months now and is never late. Sally walks up the long ramp from the parking lot to Bar on a seemingly quiet Tuesday morning. Inside, Josef is mopping.

“Morning.”

“Buen día, chica,” Josef responds warmly. Josef is a Mexican man in his forties and one of the most incredibly talented and generous people Sally has ever meet. Josef moved to Los Angeles in 1991 to send money to his family and be a sacrificial lamb to US-Mexican trade relations. The mop is taller than Josef but in all regards under his command. Josef is like a fervent, agile spider with a perfect mustache. No further comments. The phone rings.

“Bar. This is Sally.”

“Is this The Bar?” the other end asks.

“We rebranded. We're just Bar now,” Sally responds.

“Oh, okay. Do you still offer bottomless mimosas?”

Half of Sally's job at Bar is answering this question. Of course Bar couldn't offer bottomless mimosas anymore. The owner's decision to implement such a thing last year was under the same lack of forethought à la Movie Pass. You pay \$20 and get unlimited mimosas. Unlimited. Do you know how far people will stretch the unspoken limits of unlimited, or the vomit that accompanies such a daring affront to the human body on a Sunday morning??

"No. But you can buy a bottle of champagne and juice for \$30."

"Oh."

A pregnant pause ensues.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" Sally inquires.

Dead line.

Sally proceeds her opening duties: Making lime juice, lemon juice. Wiping down sticky tables. Turning on music. Wiping down sticky menus. Prepping garnishes. Wiping down sticky thoughts.

Bar is set up so that there is a large window to which customers approach, order food and drinks, then bring their food and drinks to the outdoor patio ten yards from the window. This confuses a lot of people because people are notoriously unaware and uninspired. Customers will walk up, look around, check the signage and regard both sides of the window. Usually, by this time, they'll check their phone to see if they're in the right place. During all this, Sally will offer a, "hello." Or a friendly, "hey." To which people completely ignore. Sally then aggressively represses the urge to shout, "I'm a real boy! I'm a real boy!" to these blind patrons that simply cannot imagine bearing the bridge person to person.

Thirty minutes before open, Hollywood and Maximillian approach Bar and ominously understand the infrastructure of Bar immediately. Sally's never seen these guys before. Hollywood sports an extremely shaved beard, and from what she can see, the beard has a fade? Beyond that he wears a nice tracksuit and a Dodgers baseball cap. Maximillian's skin is taugt from frequenting Venice beach. His belly pillows itself on the bar counter. Maximillian has a neck tattoo that darns, "MB SQUAD," right next to which is a large mole with two thick hairs growing out of it.

"Is this The Bar?" Maximillian demands.

"It's just Bar now," Sally replies.

"Choice," he approves.

They peruse the menu. Lots of meats and Bar's infamous pastrami fries. Sally continues to set up station as they look diligently. Bar doesn't technically open for another thirty minutes but Tuesdays are slow and Sally doesn't mind starting the day early. Josef is outdoors setting up tables and fiddling with the shoddy patio speakers.

"Kinda thinking about getting multi-accented for my next watch," Hollywood utters.

"No, dude, are you fucking whack side? All gold or pure silver. No one likes the in-between. Looks tacky," Maximillian counters.

"Benjy said it would look good."

"Benjy's a cocksucker," Maximillian takes out his phone and the FaceTime dial proceeds. Sally thanks the universe for trivial menial work to do as she eavesdrops nearby.

"Yo," a voice answers.

"Tell Hollywood a dual accented watch is for pussies."

"Cuck move for sure."

"Benjy said it would look good with my skin tone."

"Since when has Benjy known shit about shit?"

"Gold's the only way to go is how I see it," Maximillian asserts.

Josef re-enters Bar and gives the two men the side eye. Sally notices. Josef heads to the kitchen.

"Listen, Jeff. We're at a new spot. Called The Bar."

Bar.

"Ernie knows the owner's cousin. Gonna get the hook up. We'll let you know if it's worth swinging by," Maximillian winks at Sally. Showtime.

"Get silver or gold, pussy fucker. There's only one choice!"

"Bye, brother," Maximillian salutes.

Sally puts one foot on the mini-fridge beneath the counter. This stretches her hip flexers and makes her feel masculine, powerful. She arches her back a bit and pushes her tits forward. Sally is a good bartender. Her drinks work on a sliding scale but she's charming as fuck and knows it. Sally graduated with a film degree a year before the global pandemic. She's pretty nonchalant and assured about her place in the world. Sally's twenty-four and pretty and smart as hell. This is a dangerously good combination. She likes to be a "girl" when serving customers because she can get away with mistakes and still get good tips. Sally knows how to flush her cheeks on command and dabs her

eyelids with glitter everyday to appeal to the rich Silverlake fucks who think a younger woman will loosen their inhibitions just enough to get pegged good and well. Sally is good at pegging. Sally likes her job at Bar because she meets weird people and will one day make films about them. Whether anyone will watch these films has yet to be determined.

“What’s good here?”

“We make good Mezcal margs and carry a lot of IPA’s. Our burgers are also great.”

“We’ll take two Bud Lights,” Maximilian decides.

“Ayy!!!” Someone screams from the kitchen. Josef scrambles to the kitchen in Sally’s peripheral.

Sally pours the subpar beers into two chilled pints. Maximilian brings out a fat wad of cash. Obese. And they’re mostly full of fifty’s and hundred’s. An involuntary “whoa” escapes Sally’s mouth. Maximilian gives her another excessive wink. She sets the beers down and they drain the pints in one gulp.

“You guys want any fries or anything?”

“No thanks. Not that hungry,” Hollywood politely suggests.

“Mind if we chill here?”

“People usually chill on the patio, but I guess here is cool,” Sally mostly tells herself. “I’ll need you to close out your tab, though.”

“I want to keep it open.”

“We can’t keep tabs open.”

“You can’t do this for us? We’ll get one more drink. Right here. Then you can close us out.”

Sally was not in the mood to argue for fear of a smaller tip. Besides, telling customers to close out immediately always cemented a stiff vibe, and these guys were giving, *cómo se dice*, mafia vibes? Sally couldn’t help but notice the Rolex dangling off of Maximilian’s wrist.

“Just for you two.”

“Atta girl. What’s your name?”

“Sally.”

“Sally. Beautiful name.”

“I almost named my daughter Sally,” Hollywood chimes.

“Oh yeah?”

“Now she’s Daisy Graceland.”

“Oh.”

“I’m Maximillian and this is Hollywood.”

“Hollywood?”

“I prefer Hollywood.”

Josef darts from the back, hastily knocking over a broom and dustpan. This was completely unlike his calm and collected stealth mode. What was he up to?

“We’ll take two more buds, Sally.”

Sally pours two more and tries, “cool watch.”

“Yeah?” Maximillian raises his eyebrows at Hollywood, as if Sally doesn’t understand nonverbal cues and the impressionable state she’s leveraged herself into. Maximillian takes the fifty grand accessory off of his bloated forearm and into her hands. Sally wants to marvel at it but doesn’t really know what to look for. She could tell no difference between this wealth icon and the Casio her broke, indie garage drummer ex-boyfriend wore.

“That’s a lot of dollar bills in your hand, sweetie.”

Sally raises the corners of her lips. A real “gee whilickers, mister!”

“Hey, it’s almost noon,” Hollywood points out.

“They’re towing at half past?”

Hollywood nods. “What do we owe you, Sally?”

“Thirty five.” Shitty beer is costly in Silverlake.

Maximillian slaps down a hundred. “If I bring some of my guys here later, will you give us the hook up?”

“The hook up?”

“Yeah, will you hook us up?”

“Come back and we’ll see.”

“That’s what I like to hear.” Maximillian spares another wink. *Three winks from a strange man before noon? This is going to be a good day!*

“Thanks, Sally.”

She nods as they shuffle away. What fucking weirdos.

The phone rings.

“Bar. This is Sally.”

“Do you still offer bottomless mimosas?”

“No, but we do a bottle of champagne and juice—”

The line cuts off. Josef apparates by Sally's side, pours himself a glass of water.

"Where have you been?" Sally examines. Josef is usually by her side the entire shift, there to garnish drinks or restock glassware or some other small gesture that makes you feel like you're only working with one arm while he's working with ten.

"Chef cut his finger off," Josef sighs in between gulps. It takes Sally a moment to really hear this.

"His finger?"

"Yeah." Josef mimes chopping then yields a sharp whistle as the pantomime knife reaches his finger.

"No?"

Josef shrugs as he refills his water.

"Are you serious?!"

"It's in the fridge if you want to see."

"What the fuck."

"Got to keep it cold if he wants to sew it back on."

"Is he in the hospital?"

"No."

"What?"

"It was just the tip."

Sally abandons her disaffected coworker and storms into the kitchen. The kitchen greets her in deep-set grease, Juan Gabriel vibrato, and intense working hierarchy. Usually an atmosphere of warmth, mess, and experimentally concocted home-inspired treats — it's Bourdain's pirate picture fully alive, but stiff and muted as the commander is wounded.

"Are you okay?!" Sally clamors.

Chef waves her away, his index heavily bandaged. Sally looks to Alfredo, the line cook, for help. He shakes his head in baffled agreement — Chef's machismo will be the death of him. Chef wipes his soaked forehead and Sally returns to Josef in concerned annoyance.

"He needs to leave."

"He doesn't have insurance," Josef averts her gaze like there's nothing else to be said. And I guess, there really isn't.

Sally tries to find something else to pay attention to. The back fridge needs to be restocked. Josef polishes silverware. A solemn draft sets on them both.

Outside, a black Escalade pulls up. Sam emerges from the back. Smoke and Biggie Smalls follow him out of the car. Sam fist bumps the driver then strolls up to the window. He has a large briefcase and a camo bucket hat. His whole outfit is a sleek monotone green. He's a perfectly accessorized action figure, an amateur Cali weed farmer — a suction cup guy you can smack onto your dashboard, and just the size, too!

“What's up, cutie.”

“Chef cut his finger off.”

“Holy shit.”

“Yeah.”

“I have some edibles,” Sam offers. Sally can't believe the people around her. “I got you a present,” he teases.

“Yeah?” Sally obliges, attempting the nonchalance everyone else is feigning.

Sam pulls out a red pill bottle. Full of weed, no doubt. Sally unfurls the cap, sure enough.

“You give me more weed than I can smoke.”

“Where's Jo?” Sam is here everyday. Not only that, he used to work here. Sally wonders how many places he has like this — stopping by, giving people free weed so they like him. That is harsh, obviously. Sally feels comfortable concluding this because she recently hung out with Sam for the first time outside of the odd power dynamic of her serving him and being forced to socially interact with him.

That occasion, unfortunately, was at Bar. Kale, a character to possibly be met later, throws a dj/ thrifting experience at Bar every Friday night called Event. Sally went to film Event in hopes that people would align her more with videography. In hopes.

There, she ran into all her older, lonely regulars. She found herself missing the three foot bar — at least a temporary obstacle in their quest to make physical contact with a woman half their age.

Sally came in non-work clothes which obviously caused quite the stir. *She's even hotter and cooler irl??* Yes'sir. Sam immediately spotted her and said, “That's what I'm talking about!” ... *Okay?*

Though Sam was excited to see Sally, he kept his distance, further feeding the illusion that he didn't desperately need every form of human contact these haunted grounds provided. Sally stumbled into him later in the night after her third or fourth rye whiskey (rye + soda water + bitters + orange slice = her drink. Bonus points if they have

Whistle Pig). He scraped together some meaningless small talk until Sally uttered, “I’m cold. I’m going to go find a sweatshirt.”

“Wait, wait. I got you.” Sam then produced the perfect California hoodie. “Let me get your number so you don’t walk away with my shit.”

They exchanged numbers and Sam popped off many a text that night. Texts that included:

Jacket. Don’t forget.

Ay. I hope you don’t mind me saying you looked mad good tonight.

Hello?? You saved my number, right?

I won’t be mad if you didn’t save my number, I just thought you wouldn’t do me like that.

Ay. It’s Sam. Just let me know when you can give the jacket back.

These texts were all sent within a matter of twenty minutes.

“Do you guys do bottomless mimosas?”

“No, but we—”

The line expires.

Jo comes back because he is a wizard of time, body language, and empathy.

“Got you a present, Jo.”

Sam gifts Josef another red pill bottle of weed.

“Arigato,” Jo thanks. He scurries like a lizard to hide the drugs. Jo doesn’t even smoke; he mixes the weed in water, tequila, and agave, then uses a submerged rag to ice his swollen, overworked knees.

“I gotta dip. Trimming is going to be a bitch today.”

Sally nods. Sam leaves.

The clock turns noon and Bar is officially open. Zzzz. A text from Jack, the bar owner. It’s a picture of Japanese whiskey and the caption, COOL. Jack is high. Not just now, but usually.

Sally texts, Chef cut his finger off.

Three dots.

Jack responds, Addicted to the craft.

This is what working at Bar is like. I hope this introduction to the owner provides a nice overview of the soil in which Bar is planted.

Sally rolls her eyes. Working for someone who strictly speaks in metaphor makes any job difficult, but it is especially so when you have a strict, rule-abiding general manager to confuse the dynamic. GM Bose says, “No drinking on the job!” Jack says, “how do you know your shit stink if you’ve never taken a whiff?”

In this moment of medical emergency, Bose is clearly preferred.

A thirty-something kid and his visiting mother approach Bar.

“Sometimes they have in-flight entertainment and sometimes they don’t. It’s whiplash, Daniel, whiplash. My expectations are totally thrown and I’m never prepared,” the mother provokes.

“You should just bring a book every time,” Daniel points out.

“But if they’re playing the late night shows on the flight, I’m not going to read the book. Then that’s extra weight I’m carrying with me the entire trip. They need to be clear upfront.”

“Hi, welcome to Bar.”

“Is this not The Bar?”

“We re-branded.”

“This is exactly what I’m talking about.”

She has a point.

“Your menu changed,” Daniel notices.

Sally smiles politely to suggest, yes, it has.

“Do you guys still do bottomless?” Daniel asks.

The phone rings.

“No, but we do a bottle of champagne and juice for \$30.”

“That’s a steal!” Jillian exclaims. I know I did not previously point out the mother’s name, but there’s no way I’m allowing a character to be referred to as ‘the mother’ while the son gets a name.

“Bar. This is Sally.”

“Do you guys take reservations?” *New question alert!!*

“No, it’s first come first serve.”

“Bummer.”

Sally hangs up and makes herself available to the affable customers.

“Long menu,” Jillian states.

A helmeted man walks up behind them.

“We’re still looking,” Daniel offers.

“Thanks.” Man takes off his helmet and straddles up to Bar. He’s handsome, clean-cut, and recognizable for being on every network television show but god dammit — what’s his name?

“Can I have the turkey sandwich, a bag of chips, a Mexican coke, and a shot of Jamo?”

“Absolutely.” Sally wrangles this together.

Jillian furrows her brow very hard at this gentleman. Gears turning. Opinions forming.

“I’ll find you when your sandwich is ready.”

“Great.” B-List Actor downs the shot. Everything he does is concise, attractive, and non-offensive. A perfect TV actor for the corporate network fascists. He disappears to the patio.

“Rectified!” Jillian shout-whispers.

“I know,” Daniel reassures, mortified.

“Rectified and Three Days A Week,” Jillian adds, “it’s just plain rude. He knew we wanted to talk to him.”

“How was he supposed to know that?”

“If you’re a star, it comes with the job.”

“He probably didn’t want to be bothered.”

“No wonder he’s my least favorite character on Rectified. I knew there was something up with him.”

Daniel makes eye contact with Sally, an apology in his eyes.

“I wonder if he just got off set. And which set!?”

“He’s probably tired.”

“I’m going to tell your father about this. And DeAnn. We might have to stop watching Rectified.”

“Because he didn’t say hi?”

“He *knew* we *knew* who he was.”

This went on for a few more minutes before they ordered. B-List Actor later got his turkey sandwich and bumped into Jillian on her way to the restroom. “You have beautiful eyes,” he said, then vanished, lifted on a cloud of four-star TV guide reviews. Jillian stood awestruck, her cheeks strawberry red. Situation rectified.

Kale lurks in the corner. Ah yes, Kale. He's the fellow coworker who puts on the art walk/ vintage night every Friday at Bar. This is truly what keeps Bar afloat. Kale is a shit worker but throws Event so he could never be fired. He enters every room with a morose attitude, a vintage tee, and coke eyes.

"Is this your playlist?" Kale asks. Sally nods. Kale nods back in respect. The phone rings.

"Bar. This is Sally."

"Is this The Bar?"

"We're going through a re-brand. We're just Bar now."

"Oh. Okay, do you still do bottomless?"

"No."

"Okay. Thank you!" Nice.

"What's up?" Sally queries Kale.

"Fucking tired. This Event shit is taking up my whole thought space."

"Mm."

"It's fucking tiring being the next best thing. Like why can't I just be normal? Why am I so chained by my limitless, creative mind?! Shit's hard being the one to provide a way for your friends to eat."

It's true Event did allow a lot of unemployed, hungry twenty-something's the ability to sell their art to normies who stumble upon Event and think buying a necklace a tattooed poly depop artist made on acid is inherently cool. Maybe Sally detests Event because it reminds her that her generation only really knows how to brand ourselves. But that's what we were given, right? The job force now is branding. The end, pack it up, go home. Become a social media manager or make tiny niche earrings, but go fuck yourself if you think we need help rebuilding our entire infrastructure to combat the climate emergency, new Gilded Age, and de-valued social programs . . .

We'll figure it out. That's what we always do when given a failing reality: deal with the consequences when they come, be told there was no way to truly anticipate this, totally reorient our way of life, then pretend to forget about it and become permanently traumatized.

"Yeah. Are you able to take time for yourself?"

"No, man. I have zero free time. Zero."

Kale wanders Bar aimlessly. Sally's not really sure what he wants from her. She mixes the rum punch for the week.

“So tired,” Kale reiterates. What does this motherfucker want? Sally estimates eye contact for a start.

“You know I book every vendor?”

“Wow.”

“And cool shit isn’t hard to find.”

“For sure.”

“I’ve finally built something that people can see. When people have been praying on my downfall for *years*.”

“Yeah.”

“Now everybody wants a piece. Motherfucker, I don’t have anything left to give!!”

Sally pours a shot of Mezcal.

“Thank you.” He clears it. Exhale. “I’m just trying to do something here, y’know?”

“And everyone sees that. No one is doubting you.”

“No one but me.”

Kale walks out on that. Sometimes being a bartender is letting people think they’re on a TV show. Especially in LA.

Sally buses a few tables as the afternoon heat beams down. She mozies back to her station to find Bose in sunglasses and a Canadian tuxedo. “Howdy!” Bose spouts.

“Chef cut off his finger.”

“Jo just told me.”

And?

“He’s getting some sewing gear now.”

The phone rings. They have a stand off. Bose reluctantly grabs the receiver. Mumbled entitlement on the other end.

“No, we’re just Bar now, we — hello?” Bose frowns at the dead hum on the phone.

“Bose.”

“Yes.”

Sally eyes: ???

“Does the back need re-stock?”

Sally turns away, unusually defiant for her rookie status.

“I’ll go talk to him.”

The phone rings.

“Do you do bottomless mimosas?”

“Yes.”

Hollywood and Maximillian are easy to spot from across the street, like jellybeans obscuring a sunset, melting in their own gelatin.

“Sally, my girl. What’s good?”

Sally knows this is not going to go well when she’s already been classified as a person other than her own. Luckily, Ralph, one of her favorite regulars, waits on the back burner.

“Nothing much. Wild day.”

“Have you had time to think about the hook up we talked about?”

“Some time, sure.”

“And?”

“Only for you guys.”

“That’s right!”

“That’s our girl.”

“I’m bringing over Marco, Paul and Jeff.”

“What about Benjy?” Sally asks, her version of a wink.

“Smart girl. Benjy’s in Atlantic City right now.”

“Fucked up with his wife real bad.”

Hollywood and Maximillian eventually make their way to the patio and Ralph smacks up to Bar, “hi.” His smile is authentic and sympathetic. Non-threatening. That’s the word I’m looking for: non-threatening. And ultimately, why Ralph is her favorite customer.

“Hey.”

“How’s your day going?”

“Alright,” Sally guesses this is an accurate summation, overall.

“Awesome.”

“Where’d you come from?”

“Molly and I went to the beach.” Molly is Ralph’s fiancée. Sally has met Molly once and thoroughly enjoyed her presence. She’s an impressive woman immediately: a streak of gray hair, fit, fashionable, a writing career. Sally knows they have great sex. Of course Ralph comes to Bar often, and of course Sally and Ralph flirt. But they know

nothing will ever happen because Ralph loves Molly. And, you know, Sally and Ralph both get exactly what they need from the dynamic. So, it's really all, perfect.

"God, that sounds nice."

"Yeah, it was really nice."

"How's work going?" Ralph works in software engineering or some shit like that.

"It's fine. Boss is out of town so I've had a lot of time to..."

"Not do work?"

"Yeah."

"The best."

"Were you guys busy today?"

Sally thinks about this. I guess, not really. "Steady. What'll you be having?"

"Lager. And a shot. Dealer's choice."

Sally pours his drinks and thinks about dating in her thirties. This is what Ralph gives her hope for. Sally wants to show Ralph this story but is nervous about what will happen when he gets to this part. It probably won't matter much anyway. Though Ralph comes to Bar almost everyday, sometimes he'll disappear for weeks going on adult vacations like visiting friends in Chicago or a wedding in San Francisco. Maybe those things are not so adult, but buying plane tickets at the drop of a hat is beyond fathomable to Sally. For now. Maybe she should get a job with insurance. Or a job that doesn't pay her under the table. Or a job with HR.

Sally lives a lot of life in the subjective. In the "this is only one version of the timeline." Truth is Sally is late to work. Often. Even though she iterated she wasn't in the first lines of the story.

Sally's addicted to the messiness of Bar because it feels like an external reflection of her current life. Like it's what she deserves. Sally grew up when we were invading Afghanistan for oil and buckshot patriotism, and last week America told her it was for women's rights. She doesn't know anything. Sally's twenty-four and graduated with a film degree a year before a global pandemic. She thinks writing this story is selfish because who even gives a fuck.

Sally wants to tie this story together with the mafia guys and Josef and B-List Actor and the loose, chopped finger. But maybe that's because all those things happened in real life and there was no callback, no through line. So, Sally's going to say this is the end of Bar at day and maybe something different — better? — will happen in Bar at night.

two chapters in quick succession:

My dad's memory is going so he keeps a Word document on his computer chronicling major events in our family's history:

2008

- Allison quit gymnastics.
- We adopted Amber.
- Mom finished her first marathon.
- Twins in kindergarten.

2012

- Allison got a black eye.
- I got my first heart attack.
- Twins abandoned bunk beds for separate rooms.
- I entered men's over forty soccer league.
- We went on a cruise that summer.
- Granddad moved out.

I can't place why but this makes me deeply sad.

Me and my man. Or not man.

My man has a huge cock. I have mammoth breasts. Neither of us feel particularly like a 'boy' or 'girl', respectively.

I think it's funny we've been gifted these traditionally covetous features for our gender when neither of us really care for them that much.

I like fucking him in his pussy and He likes taking my big cock.

Bar at night

Los Angeles is a baseball town, I guess. Sally likes the Lakers because baseball is boring and basketball is cool. The end?

At Bar one night, the Brooklyn Nets were playing the Milwaukee Bucks and it was important, apparently. Bar was packed because this was a good game and Los Angeles is a town of everyone from everywhere. Sam was there, rooting for his hometown team of the Brooklyn Nets. It was good to see him so invested in something. Even Mike was there. Mike watches sports at Bar. He tips well and doesn't say much about himself, just watches basketball and drinks Shiners. Solid guy.

Everyone was crowded on the patio. A majority of people were rooting for the Nets, but no bad tension from, or for, those who were there for the Bucks.

Sally was busted from serving everyone for two hours straight by herself. She heard the cheers, jeers, and snides just thirty yards away but couldn't see the TV. Finally, they were in the last period with three minutes left. Brooklyn was down by two. No one was getting up to get a drink. Sally left her station and wandered over to the other side, *the real world*. Sally was elated. She had been working five, six day weeks and had no time for a life. This felt like it.

Soon enough, the game was over. Milwaukee scored a three. Brooklyn lost. Everyone felt it and consequently went home.

The taste of commotion melted on Sally's tongue like cotton candy. Unfortunately, the aftertaste was being alone with her least favorite coworker, Van. Van is the owner, Jack's nephew. Sally first met Van the third day she worked at Bar. Van hit on her and asked for her number. Sally gave it to him because it was her third day and he is the owner's nephew. She never texted him back, of course, but five months later Van started working at Bar twice a week to give him a little extra money for his up and coming start-up. Sally doesn't know what Van's start-up is because she doesn't like Van and doesn't ask him questions about his life.

When Van started working at Bar, Sally and him pretended not to know each other so reintroduced themselves once more. However, history always reminds you of what once was. History, in this case, was an iPhone thread that goes:

Van. Nice meeting you today. When drinks? Have u been to Sidebar?

—six months later—

Running a little late. Be there in 10

Today, Van saddled up to Sally after his late entrance with his chest on the back of Sally's shoulder. "Sorry bout that, you good?"

"You're in my personal space," Sally responded. Sally is doing a lot of work on setting boundaries with customers and coworkers. Sally was a little thrown after the last short story and is working on a life she wants: a life of balance, respect, freedom, and growth. She likes Bar, she thinks, and understands that to work in service as a woman, you have to be a bitch. Her two femme coworkers, Amazing and Grace, taught her this. They're absolute cunts and now Sally is a cunt, too. A lot of people don't like Amazing or Grace when they first meet them because they are so rude at first. But listen, you have to be rude! Of course, over time you develop the ability to learn who will be soft, kind people from the start and can be immediately friendly to them. Nevertheless, you usually have to be a ruthless bitch. That way, when a group of young white male producers who have built their career off of family money and entitlement come to Bar, they don't hang around too long and think they can say anything to you because you smile when you serve them their drinks (literally your job).

Van acts startled and backs up because he has been called out on his inappropriate behavior. "Rough day, love?"

"Don't call me that."

"Sorry, just my Southern hospitality coming out."

Van is from New Jersey... the fuck?

Sally goes to the back to sneak some pad kee mao and avoid Van. She thinks about her little mushroom, M. M is Sally's current flame and coworker. Sally hasn't brought up M before because to write about M would make this a love story. And that's not what this is. All she'll say is M has confirmed that Van is a shit person. Van once asked M in front of two other coworkers, including Bose, if women ever pulled on his braids during sex. Van's tendency to completely disarm people with tasteless verbal scenarios under the guise of "being casual and fun" is very not fun. Why hasn't he been fired yet?

Jack, Bar owner and Van's uncle, walks through the front door.

Jack is high again and going to hang out in the upstairs bar (the gay speakeasy in days of old) where Sally eats her dinner. The upstairs bar has double tinted windows so you can see everything that happens in the downstairs bar but not vice versa. Sally prepares herself to converse with Jack. Jack is great — he is, really — but Sally is also

acutely aware that Jack has no idea who Sally is. Jack isn't around very often and sees the world in rose colored glasses. He thinks Bar is great (it's alright) and that Sally is, well, Sally doesn't know what he thinks of her. But since they have thirty second interactions every time they see each other, yet have known each other for eight months, Sally feels any real information about her could shatter whatever positive image he currently holds of her.

“Hey Jack.”

“Hey Sally. Another day in paradise.”

— “Another day in paradise” is something the person Jack is based off of says frequently in real life. The person Sally is based off of feels she has to mention this because it feels like a betrayal to boundaries —

“You said it,” Sally feigns.

Sally ditches her boss and goes back to her station. The light pollution in LA makes every night sky feel like it's 3am. Sally loves this. Sally dwindles and pretends to do work under the 3am sky. She guesses where cars go when they drive by, and tries to speak telepathically to the plane passengers that soar above her. All she's ever gotten is that flying makes a woman named Samantha very anxious.

The night passes in sparse customer interactions and avoided eye contact between Sally and Van. It's an hour before close when Silver and two guys roll up. Silver is an investor at Bar. He's bald and buff and likes to own things. Sally is sorry for whatever he must lack in his life.

Silver, like many of the investors, loves to believe he and Sally are friends. They can say and do whatever they want, get a discount, then leave Sally a 200% tip to ensure her complacency. Next to Silver is a white guy with ferret energy, nothing else to add here. The other guy has gelled hair, a cross necklace, one too many buttons unbuttoned, and a hunch — or is he just drunk?

“Sally. What's up?”

“Hi, Silver.”

“These are my friends [Can't remember] and [Who cares].”

“Nice to meet y'all.”

“You have some Don Julio in the house?”

“Always.”

Sally pours three shots with a Tajin rim and limes on the side. The boys down the round then request another. Silver talks about his day and how he's been thinking about

acquiring a minor league baseball team. Sally nods and pretends she knows what it means to own anything or entity. The whole time Who cares is staring at her. Staring.

The three men finish talking at Sally and head to the upstairs bar.

Van asks, “I didn’t know you were so close with Silver.”

“I’m not,” Sally responds. Sally decides she will answer all of Van’s questions in two words for the rest of the night. This game is called: New Iterations of “Fuck Off.” Which, interestingly enough, “fuck off” would pass.

“Yeah, I agree. Totally. Unless, like, you’re saying it’s more complicated?”

These echoed, baseless words linger up to Bar. These are the words of Fred. Fred is a bartender at Mean Goat, about five miles from Bar. It’s a fun Greek joint with cheap drinks, tacky decor, and good people. Fred is also from Sally’s hometown. Sally and him found this out when they first met at Bar.

~sometime ago~

Fred approached Bar with a tie dye t-shirt that read ‘Decent Spokes.’

“Are you from Austin?” Sally asked with a smile.

“Oh, yeah. How did you—?”

“Decent Spokes. The bike shop on Guad.” Sally pointed to his shirt.

“Oh yeah, totally.” Fred was a classic Texan now that Sally could see it: he had a permanent sunburn, an over-friendly demeanor, a loud tenor, and the unconscious entitlement to take up space anywhere you went. A bumbling man who liked to call attention to himself. He was classic cutie to Sally / what she grew up with.

“I worked at Odd Duckling.”

“No way! I was a part of the opening staff at Maude’s.” Odd Duckling and Maude were two bougie bars on the West side of Sixth. Sally and Fred immediately understood each other. Comrades in the plight of serving tech bros and nescient social media gurus.

Suddenly, a woman with bangs and a statement shirt (said out of respect not belittlement) joined Fred. They exchanged awkward hello’s, an unsure side hug, and looked at the menu. Meanwhile, Sally and Fred partook in, “Do you know —?” And, “Did you ever go to —?”, “Remember when —?” It was nice. Home-y.

Finally, Fred and his chic date ordered some fries and drinks and made their way to the patio. Fred insisted, “If you ever come to Mean Goat, I got you.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely.”

It was clear that Fred was on a first date that wasn't clicking. Especially when they parted after twenty minutes.

Sally decided to go to Mean Goat the next day. The move was eager as fuck but she was still new to Los Angeles and, well, horny. Fred served her free drinks all night but was definitely shocked to see her. Sally left her number and he never called. C'est la vie.

~~

Now, here is Fred stumbling up to Bar two weeks later. Drunk.

"Hey y'all," Sally greets, provoking their Texan tie.

"Hi," replies Miranda, Fred's very hot new date. Fred's face contorts tomato red as he realizes what he's done. Sally instantly makes it her mission to be as nice as possible to Miranda.

"Where'd you get your top??" Sally initiates. Fred looks off into the drunken distance. Every now and then he tries to find a word, but only a syllable can make it through his swollen, embarrassed lips. Sally charges them full price and Fred leaves with a smile, and a small pepper flake stuck between his two front teeth. Dickhead.

Sally speeds upstairs to relay the story to Jack. On her frenzied run, she feels a source of kinship — why does she want to tell this story to Jack? Are Jack and her closer than she initially thought? Her elated state reminds her of the time Jack gave her a hundred bucks when her car got towed. That was nice... That was nice.

Sally swings the doors open to find Jack playing Mike in Texas Hold 'Em. Mike looks distressed. Wondering when the cards in front of him turned into Chinese characters.

Before Sally can even reach Jack, Who cares stops her.

"You're cute." *He speaks!* "My name's [Who cares]. I own Isabella and Nightline downtown. We could use a few cuties like you."

"No thanks."

"Sally. You make good drinks."

"Thanks."

"And you're mad cute."

Sally nods, averting his belligerent stare. Her original goal dissolves before her eyes, hijacked by gluttonous men and their ever-demanding needs.

"Come by sometime. I can get you and your girlfriends in for free."

"Cool."

“Let me give you my number.”

“Nah, you’re with Silver. I’ll see you around.”

“Come on.”

Sally smiles at him. A smile that says,

1. You smell like hot dog water and expired Head & Shoulders.
2. I would rather jerk off a mannequin to completion than spend time with you.
3. You remind me of a toddler who hasn’t learned to take his hands out of his pants and I regret having had to waste any of my time being around you.

Who cares probably didn’t receive this message since his response is, “Alright, sweetie.”

Sally flees back to her station and sighs pure relief. It’s fourteen minutes until close. She proceeds her closing duties and no one else approaches Bar.

Sally reacquaints herself with the 3am night sky as she takes out the trash. She contemplates why all garbage smells the same as her mind and body gift her the feeling of pride for performing labor. After hoisting the dump into the dumpster, Sally is stopped by a memory. Her first night here, taking out the trash.

~Sometime ago, ago~

A woman in tears stops Sally. Her shirt is halfway off and a fake eyelash sticks to the sweat on her eyelid.

“Excuse me?” she manages. “Do you have a phone? I lost my purse and phone and don’t know how to get home.” Small, broken sobs interrupt her breath. Sally ushers her to a chair.

“Are you here with other people?”

“They left.”

“They left?”

“Mhm.”

“Where did you last see your phone?”

“My brother had it, but- but. I don’t know where he is now.”

“Do you know their number? I can call them for you.”

“No. I just want to go home.”

“Okay.”

Sally opens Uber on her phone. “What’s your address?”

“Brianna!! Stop acting like a little bitch.” Her brother appears by Sally’s side in an instant.

“Go away!” Brianna screams.

“I’m so sorry,” Brother says to me.

Then Tiffany was there. “Brianna, we have to go. The Uber is here.”

“I’m not going nowhere with y’all. You left me.”

“We came back, stupid. C’mon.”

Brianna starts to run.

“Oh my God,” Brother groans.

Brianna face plants into the cement.

~

Sally blinks away the memory.

how many ghosts could this place produce? And when did I start to become one?

IN THE FOYER: A PLAY

casting:

Michael Cera as Kevin
Some Guy as Cyan Bow
Alanna Ubach as Michelle

location:

Rome, or some shit like that.

ACT ONE

Bells rings. Not church bells, but church bells adjacent. Or if it helps to imagine, church bells.

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

INT. PARLOR — MIDDAY

The sun streams through heavy velvet curtains. At the center of this ornately dressed room (think holy water, stacks of old books, a blue chaise) is KEVIN (39). Kevin wears a nice-ish suit — clearly not religious but business affiliated. He needs a haircut, a proper shave (though, his five-o-clock shadow is leaning on the ‘this took me all summer to grow’ roller rink operator look), and an ironed shirt. Nothing can help his baggy eyes and woe-is-me apathy. He’s the type who chooses misery.

CYAN BOW (99) looks out the window. Cyan dawns expensive, orthodox garb. He looks present because he has practiced presence his whole life, but under his ethereal nature he is mentally gone. He’s an ancient relic, though, more along the lines of a Madame Tussaud’s figure. If he was real, (as in a person and not a fictional character inside a play inside a hilarious, charming, and completely original short story collection) he would be a gay icon. Drag queens would dress like him and slay-boots-the-house-down by sitting there in silence, feigning friendly absence for a whole song, probably Céline. Cyan is kind.

Kevin hunches next to Cyan, follows his eye-line out the window. All he can spot is the vast, infinite sky. A couple specks of dust lit by a sun streak seem more alive than Cyan.

Kevin’s phone rings.

KEVIN
Hello.

THE STAGE OPENS TO REVEAL:

INT. HOME OFFICE TURNED MEGA GIRL BOSS CORP. FEAT ASSISTANTS,
COFFEE, AND A TODDLER

MICHELLE (42), hot suited woman, talks into her phone being airlifted to her ear
by AN INTERN.

The scene commences Split Screen.

MICHELLE
I swear to fucking god if you do not put Elmo in his play basket—

KEVIN
Michelle?

MICHELLE
Hi. Sorry. How's Cyan?

KEVIN
He's Cyan. Doing his, his Cyan thing.

MICHELLE
Where's his morning Tweet?

KEVIN
He's, um, coming up with it. Doing prolonged window duty.

MICHELLE
Kevin I swear to fuck if he does not Tweet within the next hour Sysco is pulling
sponsorship. And you know how that will fair in Guatemala.

KEVIN
Right, right. The—

KEVIN
Thing at the UN.

MICHELLE
UN conference.

KEVIN
Um.

MICHELLE

Hold on, I'm getting another call.

Kevin regards Cyan. Cyan stares dead-eyed out the window. Kevin tries to recall the last time he saw Cyan blink, then checks his eye line, again: Nothing.

Kevin politely squeezes his shoulder.

KEVIN

Nothing like another, er, y'know what's another—?

Kevin notices Cyan's catheter is filling up.

KEVIN

. . . yeah.

MICHELLE

Kevin?

KEVIN

Here. Yes.

MICHELLE

A blank Tweet is not going to cut it again. We need words this time. Words. Y'know the Penguin contract is per character, right?

KEVIN

Yes, um.

(Kevin treads lightly)

Did Dr., uh, did Dr. Yanis talk to you?

MICHELLE

Yanis?

KEVIN

Uh-huh.

MICHELLE

Is that the urethra one or-

KEVIN

Main one. Just like, main doctor guy.

MICHELLE
No. What's the issue?

KEVIN
Yanis, the doctor, thinks, uh, that, uh, Cyan might have had another.. stroke.

MICHELLE
Another?

KEVIN
Stroke.

A silence ensues.

KEVIN
I'm not so sure about...

MICHELLE
What?

KEVIN
Well..

MICHELLE
Kevin, finish your sentences.

KEVIN
Anything? Not so sure about anything? Any of it... ?

Michelle doesn't respond.

KEVIN
... Is this the?

MICHELLE
Not answering stupid questions?

KEVIN
Yeah.

MICHELLE
You still have the flashcards, right?

Kevin eyes the pack of shiny, ridiculously large pre-school vocabulary flashcards on the desk.

KEVIN
Sure.

MICHELLE
Then why are we still talking?

Michelle hangs up.

KEVIN
(a long whine)
Neeeeuhhuhehuheeeee.eeehee...

Cyan coughs.

KEVIN
Okay, Cyan.

Kevin reluctantly brings the flashcards over.

KEVIN
Going to knock these out real quick.

Kevin drops the pack, cards splay all over the floor.

KEVIN
Fuck.
(catches himself)
I mean—

Kevin surveys Cyan. Cyan farts.

KEVIN
Right.

Kevin holds up the first card: A SUN.

KEVIN
Now this one is really popular. People love the sun. So. Could me happiness,
hope, love, or...

Nothing in Cyan's appearance changes. Zero reaction.

KEVIN
Alright.

Kevin pulls another: A PIG.

Nothing remotely alive registers in Cyan.

KEVIN
That's a no.

Kevin pulls: A WATERFALL.

Cyan farts.

KEVIN
Gonna count that.

Kevin sets the waterfall aside. He pulls: A CHICKEN.

KEVIN
People love chicken. America- America loves chicken. Do you know a layer of Earth, in the future, will be made up almost entirely of chicken bones? Isn't that SO...

Kevin stops himself. Cyan's look into the distance does not falter.

Kevin sets the chicken down.

He pulls: A GOAT.
Cyan farts.

KEVIN
Counting that again.

Cyan farts once more.

KEVIN
Agh.

Kevin includes A TURTLE into the deck.

A farting spree commences. Kevin doles the cards as quickly as possible into the pile. Trying to keep up with each sequential fart. Another, another, and another.

KEVIN
You gotta- agh..

The flatulence is seemingly unending. Cyan remains unaffected.

It finally slows into one, long, bloooooooowowowoowwwwwwwwww.

Kevin holds up: A CROWN.

KEVIN
Fitting.

Kevin lies before him: a waterfall, a goat, a turtle, a flower, a rock, a pumpkin, a young girl, a book, a man talking on the phone, a farm, a playground, a banana, a tree, an old woman, a dress, and a crown.

KEVIN
Okay... I can work with this.

Cyan blinks.

KEVIN
I can work with this.

CURTAINS.

Bar and its people

I want to be clear — and yes, I’m dropping the ‘Sally’ of it all and cutting straight to ‘I’ because I’m talking about people here. Real people. *Yes*, I have mostly been talking about real people but let’s face it: I’m a harsh bitch.

I don’t like beginners, especially beginning bartenders, *especially* beginning bartenders that admit they’re beginning bartenders. I confess, ah, I was a beginning bartender when I began at Bar. I lied straight to Bose’s face like any sensible American looking for work. But I’ll be damned if I didn’t go on a forty-eight hour YouTube bartending bender before my first shift. So, if you show up not knowing what’s in a fucking Moscow Mule . . . Jesus Christ I’m allowed to roll my eyes and let you drown in the sea of pretentious Silverlake saps who want their French 75’s and martinis *shaken* not *stirred* goddammit don’t you know it changes the flavor’s *profile*.

But, please, let me be retrospectively clear: I love Bar and I love Bar’s patrons. For the most part. If you’ve ever slipped your tip in my back pocket, couldn’t raise your gaze above my clavicle, or returned a drink or food order: earnestly fuck you. You’re a perverted disgrace to women and working people, and you need to find a reason to live besides bottom-feeding on the vulnerable and less powerful. A merry fuck off to hell to you and Mr. Bezos.

Nevertheless, I understand that humans are humans with bad days and they are overwhelmingly lonely. Very lonely. This is not a slight. I think it is a natural product of the isolated, individualistic society we’ve created. And beyond that, we all talk about stupid shit. I’m full of stupid shit. So, if you take offense to any portrayal in this section or feel you strongly identify with a certain asshole, know that I am the asshole of assholes and I’m working on it.

Here are some Great Regulars at Bar, a cheers to you!

Mary and Joseph.

A childless, late thirties couple. You guys are great. You always tip and ask us how we are and never uncomfortably overshare. You are middle class classics who like a drink at your regular establishment after work. You barely fight and sometimes Joseph needs a drink alone next to a friendly stranger, but you are a healthy couple. You succeed in normalcy and distance yourself just enough from toxic family relationships. I love

meeting your friends from college and forgetting their names right after you tell me. I'm rooting for you. I love you. I'll see you tomorrow.

Walker.

Oh, Walker. You border on the creep but I see that your marriage is dying and that you know less and less how to relate to your daughter. You take forever to order because you don't know what you want. In everything. You amble and frustrate the people present in your life because you're scared shitless to make a move. Scared shitless of life. When Grace and I discovered your "office" above Bar was actually your apartment, we sought pity on you. Of course we could not come in after we ended our Saturday night shift at four am, you do not have the relationship with us that you think we do. Sure, you've earned the right to be privy to some office gossip, but Manuel, the underpaid manager of Bar, is getting weary of you. We all are.

Zel.

Sweet Zel! How you miss your home of Italy. I first thought your Italian accent was fake. You moved here when you were three, after all. But now I see, now matter how forced, Italia is your true home. I couldn't stop smiling when M showed me your viral TikTok of "The Secret History of Italian Mafia in Los Angeles." You're a true star. And the chocolate magic mushrooms you tip us with — coated in love! You're a weird ole' storybook fuck and I adore you.

Rick.

A movie producer who once declared after hearing a pitch for this book, "no one wants to hear about your sadness." True! Rick, you enter every room belly first, arms last — you envelop yourself in everything. You like good food, good conversation, and running into fellow Macedonians. Once, a pair of young men were bothering me when you heard them speaking Macedonian to one another. You quickly adopted the two boys like sons and bought them shot after shot. Rick, you are a man who overstays his welcome and over-estimates your closeness in every relationship. You do, then ask permission. You're a walking case of emotional and physical claustrophobia, and you lack any humble capacity to take a hint. We could all learn a thing from you.

Marcel.

My girlboss queen. My double Rittenhouse Manhattan is ready to go when you walk through the door. You wear a pink headset that always has a business crust yapping on the other line and you still manage to mouth me the funniest jokes. You say, "It's five o'clock somewhere," at one pm and, for you, I believe it. Sell those stocks! Shatter that

ceiling! I believe in capitalism if your platinum blonde, French nails, impeccable boob job'd self is at the helm.

There are more that have been mentioned and more that will go unmentioned. Either or I'll say this: it's fun to walk into Bar and see you. You make me feel at home. You make me feel popular. You would not be in my life without Bar and intersecting in one another's lives is a trip and a blessing.

Now, two others that need to be noted.

One woman show.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry the virtual reading of your new one woman show was not a hit. It's the medium, it really is. Your show does have a time and a place, but by God, it is not now. It is not April of 2021. What's going on, girl? What does your day consist of? You are not part of something right now and you feel it. But talking to that one straight actor you met at twenty during a modern day rendition of Macbeth where the cast was like family and you ultimately rejected him but so appreciated and admittedly indulged in the sex for the adoration during this shining, world-is-your-oyster peak of your career... Is not the answer. He doesn't want to hear about it. He's glad you called him up. The pandemic seemed like it was ending and you said you were thinking about him? Qué romántico. But alas, when he got to Bar and all you could talk about was the hope and failure of reviving your one woman show for 2021, he was reminded of the selfish bitch you truly are.

Lastly,

Zachariah. Zachariah is a successful commercial director who appears to be enamored with Sally. He says he can truly see Sally and she believes him. Sally first met Zachariah when a tipsy woman tried to hit on him at the bar. The drunken courting was a true miss, and instantly bondable when shared by two witnesses. Nevertheless, Sally could not forget the problematic leverage this interaction put her into. Zachariah rejecting a woman his own age to laugh about it with a younger woman. Sally took it for happenstance at the time.

Zachariah liked the way Sally poured his Pinot Noir and came back the following Sunday. An empty bar provided Sally and Zachariah the illusion of romance where they could talk about the art they liked and the people they didn't. Sally made Zachariah laugh

and Zachariah waited when Sally was trying to put together a thought. Zachariah liked Sally's perspective on the world and Sally liked how Zachariah talked low and slow, never speaking on Sally's body or anything other than what was on her mind. Zachariah never interrupted her.

Sometimes Zachariah would say, "I did that," as a commercial for a Master Class with Sean Penn played on the TV behind the bar. He would share stories of egomaniac actors and location scouting in the Scottish isles. He once showed Sally a painting George W. Bush made for him and how the lowly warmonger was sad and distant. When Zachariah asked if he could take her to the Yoshitomo Mara exhibit at the LACMA, it was an easy yes.

Sally had had a sugar momma before. She would take Sally on her boat and open decades old wine for Sally while she complained about her ex. All Sally had to do was sit there and look pretty. A job she already knew by heart.

Sally wasn't sure that's what Zachariah wanted from her but she was interested, and maybe even open, to seeing what he did. Zachariah was out of town for the next month shooting a movie. He sent her pictures of the Chilean coast and asked for movie recommendations. It was all quite nice. Soon, he called her on Christmas and New Year's. He was hesitant to speak about family and a bit more needy in conversation with Sally. Not much later he spoke of wanting to give Sally a massage, asking her about boyfriends and commenting on old Instagram photos. He quickly soured for Sally in an all too familiar way. He was her dream man in her forties and fifties: a respected director with distinguished taste and a knack on good conversation. Sally ignored the red flag of his age difference as a mark of respect; she was a "smart girl for her age", after all. But soon, Zachariah was like all the rest.

Sally remembers one doomed, magical night when her very favorite film director of all time, ***** , happened to be standing on the other side of the bar. Sally froze. When you see someone only in pictures and they materialize in 3D before your very eyes, it seems like a joke. This can't be? This nominal visionary before me? Oscar winner and dialogue genius?

"Hello?" he politely uttered, hoping Sally would eventually approach him. Sally became mad, starting pacing back and forth. "Did I do something to offend you?" he asked playfully.

Sally shook her head. Made her lips tight. Nodded, "ready for your order."

"Two shots. Case Azule."

“Of course.”

And of course the bottle ran out midway through. Sally sprinted to the back. Announcing “***** ***** is here. ***** ***** is here,” to her unaffected, uncultured coworkers. Sally came back with a new bottle to find ***** with a woman half his age on his arm. Wasn’t he married? The woman whispered in his ear and tucked his arm in between her breasts.

Sally rang them up and the young woman paid.

However suspicious Sally was by now, she had to make known how important one of his films was to her.

“*** is one of my favorite movies of all time.”

“Really?!” he asked surprised. “You and ten other people. Nobody watched that film.”

Sally smiled at her deep-cut. It was true, no matter how apparently film-basement-nerd suck-up it appeared.

“I appreciate it,” he said. The woman toted him away and Sally later served the rest of his crew via QR codes. Him and twenty other women. Most younger than her. Most underage. He avoided eye contact with Sally for the rest of the night and drank like a king. Accepting lap dances and belated birthday cheer.

Him and Zachariah were the same to Sally now. I guess all men were. What no longer surprised Sally became a haunted truth.

I “lost my virginity” with a one night stand. The next morning, he was making me French Toast when a nine year old girl walked into the kitchen — don’t worry, I’m not going to say she was some younger version of myself or some shit like that.

I freaked the fuck out (period!).

Turns out, he lived with a single mom. So, I lost my virginity to a stranger I met at a stand up comedy open mic (I know) while a single mother and her nine year old daughter slept in the room next door.

Anyway, I was telling my roommate this story today when he dm’d me an hour later asking if I sold dick pic ratings. Hell yeah, I did. He Venmo’d me \$25 and sent me a picture I had actually already received from him three years prior (the background was very specific). I sent him my rating (10/10) and that was that.

~

A stranger at the grocery store once asked me if it was hard being so beautiful. “Yes,” I responded, “yes, it is.”

/////

(unaffiliated)

I want to have sex with everyone I meet because I know I can and I like to know people in that way.

Sometimes this is bad because it ruins a friendship and it’s like no I still want to be friends with you, don’t be mad that I sat on your face and made you feel whole. Just be chill about it, it’s really not a big deal.

stupid rant.

every guy now is like, “I love eating pussy. No seriously, I love it.” As if they are the only guy to have ever said this.

this is frustrating.

Fortunately, I was not sexually active during the time of “going down on women is uncool.” Which is so obviously uncool. Uncool to the point where ‘uncool’ is the first word to describe it as opposed to ‘sexist’.

However, this time of every guy thinking that they’re the only guy who eats pussy and how they lloovovlovooveoeooooooooooooooooooooo eating pussy and no seriously I love it like isn’t it weird how much I like it I don’t even care that you’re on your period do you want me to repeat that I don’t even care that you’re on your period I’ll still eat your pussy isn’t that so. Brave. Isn’t that so *brave* and *hot* and *equal rights* of me . I love eating pussy.

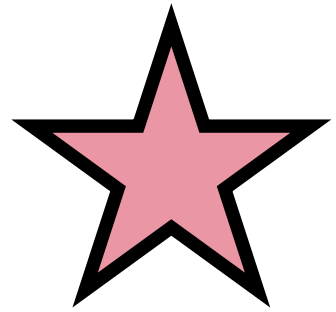
are you okay to get a little sad?



when i was little,
and my mom and i wouldbe at a stop
light,

she would ask me if i had any green
lights in my pocket .

sometimes i Did and it still didn't work



Bar at Saturday brunch

The worst day of the week: Saturday brunch. Not Sunday, Saturday. But also, everything Sally looked forward to: working with M and Randy.

M. Sweet, sweet M. M is her boo thing as previously mentioned. He is tall and has many walks. His most used walk is a tired one. He drags his feet a little and the effect is that of a swinging pendulum. Like each foot is a heavy ball only propelled forward by gravity and the audience's promise. Like if you looked away the balls may fall loose of the strings — but they don't because they're so eager to please. Like, "Hey! Look at me. I know you didn't think I'd come around again. But I did. For you! Isn't that great?!" Or, "I know you expected me to come around again, so I did. Then why are you so mad at me??" Sally knows this walk is done on purpose. At least, subconsciously. Because the walk conveys swagger and fatigue. Like, "yeah I'm tired as hell but I'll look cool doing it." Sally knows M is actually very, very tired. He has a kid at home and works overtime at Bar and is still an artist above it all. Not only that, he is nice. He is nice all the time. Sally doesn't know how he does it. Probably because he has a very genuine soul. Probably because he doesn't have to put on cunt armor. M is a naturally curious, naturally kind person. That is why he is perpetually screwed over.

Randy also has kids. Two. Randy is an elementary teacher (el·e·men·ta·ry teach·er /,elə'ment(ə)rē 'tēCHər/ *noun* - a person who should be paid more than Bill Gates) and recent divorcée. Randy has bright orange hair that matches the flame and general disorganization of her life. She's the best. The best of the best. Before teaching, she was a waitress for a long time. Now, after her divorce, she has started serving at Bar on weekends to help support herself and her kids. Yes, she works seven days a week. Yes, this is the land of the free. Randy is a terrible waitress. When working with Sally and M during brunch she actually makes things more difficult. She forgets to write down people's allergies, loses money, and spills drinks. But never ever would Sally or M say this to Bose. Randy is a great person who deserves the measly \$250 a week and who cares if a twenty year old micro-influencer gets a mimosa sans champagne — Randy has bills to pay!!!!

Randy is one of two coworkers that knows M and Sally are together. This is also why Sally looks forward to Saturdays. Instead of intense eye contact and brushing one another's hands during shifts, M and Sally can openly love one another.

“If you ask, does my heart go aflutter every time I see you,” M recites beside Sally. Sally did not ask this question. M is just a cheesy motherfucker. That is something Sally has never had before and something she didn’t know she would enjoy so much.

Before Sally can make fun of M, Randy enters toting a Jack Russel and two kids like a proper Mother Duck. Her oldest is Lilly. Lilly chooses all her own outfits. Today she sports a t-shirt with a raccoon in sunglasses, a striped red tie, sleeves from a winter shirt she cut up (Randy is only slightly perturbed at this but more so encouraging), a long floral skirt, knee high socks, and tennis shoes. Lilly is also currently writing a novel about a lone wolf who travels the Pacific Northwest — she visited Washington with her dad recently and left ever so inspired. Lastly, Lily, a six year old, is a skateboarding prodigy who can perfectly drop into a half pipe. Behind Lilly is Dex. Dex is quiet because Lilly is loud. He’s shy, cute, and has sticky fingers — no, not jelly on his hands sticky but five finger discount sticky. He’s five with messy hair, t-rex’ophilia, and a recent habit of drawing on his face since introduced to Bowie grandeur.

Randy mouths, “sorry,” before M or Sally can even acknowledge her parade of chaos. Randy escorts Lilly and Dex to the upstairs bar, and Sally follows behind to offer her support. Dex immediately runs for the darts and Lilly is halfway through breaking the second act of her novel to her mom, “. . . and then Sierra dives into the water to save Apex. But then she realizes Apex is her enemy! He has the scar behind his ear from before! He swipes at her and Sierra’s snout starts to bleed!!!!!”

“Okay, Lilly. Mommy can’t hear the rest right now but—”

“And Sierra yelps in pain but also does a double yell as a code to the rest of the tribe—”

Randy hands Lilly a handful of napkins and a pen from her apron. “Write it down so you don’t forget.” Lilly snatches the material and whisks off to a booth before the juicy details can ooze from her child brain.

“Hi Lilly. Hi Dex,” Sally tries. Neither respond.

“Their dad can’t pick them up until one,” Randy groans. That’s two hours into her shift. Two hours of the kids left unattended in the upstairs bar. Sally can’t help but laugh. “Is Bose coming in today?” Randy asks. Translation: I’m really not in the mood for him to see my life like this.

“I don’t know,” Sally apologizes.

“Okay, guys. Mommy is going into work. We’re only going to bother Mommy if... ?”

Lilly responds in a practiced tone, “If we’re bleeding.”

“Dex?”

“Blood,” Dex retorts.

“Good.”

“Blood,” Dex says again.

“Yes, if we’re—” Randy notices Dex has a nosebleed. “Shit.”

Sally leaves them to it and fills M in on the situation. He’s already pouring a couple their first round of peach flavored bottomless mimosas — yes, bottomless is back: business is slow and Sally wishes to say nothing more on this. M laughs at Randy and her life. Sally laughs because M laughs. Randy appears quickly by their side tying her apron haphazardly around her waist.

“So sorry about all this. Derek was supposed to— Ugh,” she apologizes for no reason. M starts laughing again, a light. Then Randy laughs. Then I laugh. It’s pure relief. I love Saturdays.

“Excuse me?” the head honcho of a birthday group announces her presence. “On your website the bottomless are listed as \$19 each. But on your menu here they’re \$20. Who can I speak to about this?” I hate Saturdays.

Two hours later brunch is in full swing and Derek has yet to show. Lilly has drawn on the back of a laminated menu in Sharpie (no one knows how the Sharpie entered the scene), the drawing is of her main character, Sierra. M says it’s the best wolf drawing he’s ever seen. Sally audibly doubts that. Aren’t you supposed to be realistic with kids? Or overly encouraging? Sally can’t remember.

Sam, amateur Cali weed dealer Burger King prize, arrives with his dog, Alex, just as Lilly is showing off her drawing... It’s clear he does not know how to be around kids.

“That’s cool, little man.”

“I’m a girl.”

“I know.”

“Why did you call me man?”

“I didn’t mean it that way. Stop stressing, dude.”

“I’M NOT DUDE.”

Alex barks at the excitement.

“Is your dog a wolf descendant?”

“I guess all dogs are.”

“In my book Sierra befriends a husky who wants to get back to his roots as a wolf dog.”

“Hm. Maybe I should ask Alex if he misses his ancestral descent.”

“Ancestral descent?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you know Shakespeare used to make up words?”

“Yeah.”

“Gooogat.”

“For sure.”

Lilly skips outside as her mom immediately redirects her back inside. Alex barks at Silverlake joggers passing by.

“I didn’t know you had a dog,” Sally asks.

“Seven months old. Got her three months ago,” Sam replies.

“Wow.”

“Hey guys,” Ralph, Sally’s favorite regular, greets.

“Hi,” Molly, Ralph’s effortless fiancée, gleams, perfectly grounded and warm.

“I was just about to peace.”

“Oh word,” Ralph mourns.

Sam gives Ralph a half-handshake, half-hug. “Good seeing you man. See you later, Sal.” Sam gives Sally a playful wink*.

“Hey y’all,” Sally greets.

“How’s brunch?”

Sally feels the sweat in between her butt-crack, thighs, armpits, bra, and soaking in her boots. She feels the general lack of regard for her as a human being by those who are offended they don’t have poached eggs or that their restaurant is still under-staffed. What are they not getting at home that they take out on us here?

“It’s brunch,” Sally replies. She pours them each a pilsner. They thank her and grab a table. Interactions between Sally and Ralph have been sparse and substance-less lately. This is probably because Ralph’s perceived life of stability feels further and further out of reach from Sally. Especially now when she writes this, as M and her are no longer together.

* Not all winks are preemptive declarations of assault or territorial trespasses, but most are.

Look, life is changing all the fucking time... in a way Sally cannot keep up with in written word. Sorry.

Yes, M and Sally are still together for this particular telling of the story, but if you really must know:

Sally and M operate on two different planes. M wants a lot of things from Sally that she cannot provide. Like sex on a dime. Or to be a girl. Or total submission. Meanwhile, M cannot give her a stable emotion. Or an un-changing memory of an experience. Or sobriety. All of which does not seem like a big deal to the offender but like an impassable dynamic to the offended. Moreover, M's expressed feelings on these matters depend solely on Sally's. If Sally thinks they can't work through their issues, M gives no fucks because things never work out. However, if Sally wants to work through them, M pretends he doesn't have underlying issues with their relationship because he wants it to work so, *so* bad. M never wants to be perceived as weak, so he always lets Sally take the lead and never reveals how he truly feels; thereby rejecting the label as the rejected, but harboring all the pain and loneliness nonetheless. They could never speak honestly with one another and that is why it had to end.

sidenote: M can be an artist because his mother and his mother's child primarily take care of his kid. This feel essential in writing in retrospect.

Sally delivers a Tequila sunrise and Paloma to table 87. As Bar temporary inflates on the weekends, QR codes have been implemented at certain tables so customers can skip the line at the window. This is fine but often leads to resentment from the staff. Let me just wait on you hand and foot all the while you never speak an actual word to me. Sally's experience with table 87 accentuated this. After Sally delivered their drinks, she returned to her station to find another ticket request: two waters, plz :).

Sally thought this odd but maybe they were shy. She brought the waters to a silent table once again; at least silent to her, though thoroughly invested in their own conversation. Sally barely eclipsed her legs back to the bar when there was another ticket: Can you turn the music down on the patio?

Just talk to me!!!!!!

Bose came right as the brunch shift was ending. Randy was closing out her tables and finishing with roll-ups. Her kids sat nearby, exhausted from thinking up ways to get

her attention. Their silence and lack of energy, I assume, made them look as if they had just arrived, ready for their mother to get them out of this strange adult place.

“Hey guys,” Bose greeted. Sally overheard Bose speaking recently to a friend that he was ready to find a wife, have kids, picket fence and everything. Sally didn’t know if everyone could see this deep need for him to ‘pass the test’ with these random kids, but to her it was glaring.

Dex sticks his finger up his nose.

“Dex. This is what encourages your nosebleeds,” Randy reminds him.

Dex wipes his finger on his shirt and Bose laughs as an alternative to finding a response. Just then, Derek pulls up in an ’87 Lexus.

“This motherfucker,” Randy utters under her breath.

It’s one moth later and Sally hasn’t worked a brunch in weeks. Is God rewarding her? She’s wiping down bottles from the top shelf with her manager, Manuel. Manuel doesn’t know anything which is a good reason to talk to him. That’s what Sally likes most in people: an absorptive soundboard. Sally is learning that she is selfish and turns all the people in her life into characters.

She tells Manuel M and her broke up last night. She misses him in her life— what he makes work feel like, what he makes life feel like, what he makes brushing hands feel like. His magnetic, good quality. This is hard because Sally knows they are not meant for a romantic relationship with one another. Why does life do that?

Sally realizes her relief from brunch shifts is not from God but from Manuel. Her friend and superior she is talking to right now. She dials back to Earth as Manuel scrapes off a dead fly from emulsified whiskey and sugar.

He mutters, “I’m too pretty for this.”

“Yeah.”

not quite there

Or,

I'm twenty-four years old. Why the fuck should I be making any smart decisions about my life??

Last summer I had a brief romance. We matched on a dating app and met at Santa Monica beach. It was far too cold for my manic apparel and he offered to walk to his apartment, a mere block away, so that I could wear his pants or jacket or whatever I like.

I didn't think we were an exact match but my initial read pointed me towards pursuit — every tall, skinny, gender queer man I'd dated were a quick catch. I had an encyclopedic knowledge on how to bait and trap one of these Oneohtrix Point Never, Don DeLillo fanatics. And they usually always have a massive, unsuspecting cock. Not to mention fire finger game. Sorry.

After cozing into his comfortable leisure wear, we headed to the beach. They were easy to talk to, easy to agree with, and escalated my hatred towards the state (it was always nice to be around someone who got it). We had a somewhat botched first kiss on the beach, and I took a massive shit spew in the sand because I just started eating meat again after two years of a vegetarian diet and all the public restrooms were closed. The date was weird enough to keep me entirely engaged. We saw M. Night Shyamalan's *Old*, by far the worst movie I'd ever seen, then headed back to my place. We didn't have sex as I was still recovering from my recent assault. He cried when I told him about my assault. It felt nice not to have sex on the first date. His face, still a stranger to mine, felt so far away as I lied down next to him. I recognized that feeling and how often I let people enter me when I felt a million miles away from them. Maybe we could journey to find each other in the valley between our two pillows (sorry).

By now, it was over for me. Our first date had completely veered from my normal pattern that my Aquarian infatuation was set on this near stranger. A couple days later we decided to have dinner at his place. His birthday was the next day but that seemed of no importance to him. Still, I bought him a present — “French for Cats”, a small, delightful coffee book.

He loved it. He said his mom would love it. This was after he cooked us dinner. I felt on vacation in his beach backyard apartment. We were only some miles from Los Angeles but I felt in a new realm altogether in his barefoot home. The Pacific in our

nostrils and curiosity for one another under our skin. After dinner by candlelight, we took a walk on the beach. He tried to find an owl he had seen the night before.

“I think he was trying to communicate with me.”

“He most definitely was.”

We are the same type of delusional.

We sat on the beach as the roaring ocean dared to punch us again and again, and never did. She was so powerful, but moreso, the most beautiful thing you ever saw. I began to take off my clothes.

He did, too.

We ran into the ocean and kissed and kissed and kissed under moonlight. We sealed together, suctioned by our salty, sea mist bodies, and he told me I was so, so beautiful.

By then it was midnight and it was his birthday.

“Happy birthday.”

We went back to his home and took a shower in the dark. We had sex, some versions of it, and he had the most massive cock. I’m sorry.

When it was daylight, he told me the best birthday present was waking up next to me.

We didn’t see each other for five days but he sent me pictures of family dinners and FaceTime’d me in awestruck silence. We were stupid.

That Sunday, after a botched plan to hangout, he asked to call.

“Can we talk?”

He had been seeing someone else, casually. And they now wanted to be official. This is what he wanted all along and now that they offered the relationship he so coveted, it was time for ours to end.

I didn’t really have much say in it.

After meeting, then two days later swimming naked in the ocean on his birthday, I felt a bit — *you were there, too, right?*

I was in shock. Inconsolable for weeks.

Now, months later, I find myself fighting with M at five am.

It’s after Event and we’re yelling at each other in the street. He loves to pick fights about how I don’t understand him. He loves the anger and excitement and make-up and break-up and showing that you care, you so stupidly, desperately care when you shouldn’t.

And the truth is, I love it, too. I love every minute of it.

I never thought I would be a part of a couple fighting in the street. I never thought I would be ghosted by a skinny white dude white who cried at the hearing of my assault. And I know I am in love with the experience of it — the surprise, the intensity, the fierce actualization of life.

God help the unlucky fool who interests me.

I have been in love before. And it is far too humiliating to actually write about.

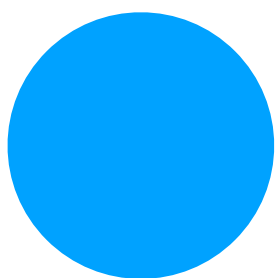
Bar & ghosts

When I first interviewed to work at Bar it was in the upstairs bar with Jack. Jack asked if I was using this job to get vaccinated. This was during the time when, well, whatever.

I was immediately overwhelmed by all the goodness I felt in my stomach, head, and heart upon entering Bar. Jack told me this was one of the first buildings on the street, that the back bar used to be a gay speakeasy. I felt every single good time in that moment. I knew I had to work here.

I see ghosts at Bar often. They pass by in quick bursts, eager to get to the back. No ghost is malicious. If they even register me it's in a curious manner, "What are you doing here, small gay boy?" Always they are longing, desirous of a time Bar gave them. They don't know that most guests are already ghosts walking. In many ways, the actual ghosts are more alive than Bar's current demographic.

Bar is a magnet to the wanting. To the lonely, tired, and aspirational.



my granddad would take me out to
doughnuts after he picked me up from dance
class

Bar & ghosts_reprise

It's October and Bar is vomited head-to-toe in Halloween. It's beautiful. Beautiful because it's camp and grotesque.

The ghosts are much more prominent in these Halloween decorations. I think it's because the context of fake ghosts allow you to receive supernatural apparitions more easily. Maybe your brain is already interpreting these contexts as safe, normal.

Regardless, ghosts are everywhere. It's like a crowded train. They knock you over as you head to the walk-in. Ready for the piano bar and gay sex. So. Many. Ghosts.

It's almost annoying.

...

I told Jack there were more ghosts than usual. He asked me if I knew how most of them died. Je ne sais pas. Getting hit by a car after drunkenly leaving Bar.

"But how do you Know That?" Sally asked.

"You're not the only one who sees ghosts."

Bar when it's slow

Manuel plays darts in the upstairs bar. Manuel is Bar's manager and #1 unappreciated pretty boy troll. Basically, the man stuck with all the shit Bose and Jack don't want to do. Sally feels for Manuel. He's a good guy and at the young age of forty he has already become too old for this world. Probably because he's at work all the time, promised stability and eventual ownership from the two guys who call on him to work a fifteenth day in a row.

Manuel has a frayed relationship with his wife because he's at work all the time. Manuel's at work all the time because he has a frayed relationship with his wife. His racist mother-in-law now lives with his family as Manuel works all day everyday to provide for their newborn. It's tough, it really is. Manuel and his wife, Cindy, met when they were servers at Bar. Cindy became pregnant and left her job after giving birth to raise a literal human being. Of course, without maternity leave provided by the restaurant or @America, this meant Manuel had to work. A lot. What once was a labor of love became a labor of resentment. Cindy needed Manuel at home to help her with the baby. Manuel needed Manuel at Bar to help her with the baby. He couldn't win.

But now, Manuel plays darts and laughs. The bags under his eyes seem to sink less far and he becomes a person, not a cop, for just a moment. It's the third wave of the pandemic and Bar is deserted. Even on a Saturday night.

Kale dj's on Saturdays and right now the room is empty. It's just Amazing and Sally dancing to his mixes. Sally pops her pussy and thanks the Universe that sometimes this is her job. That she gets to exist in an environment so loving and new, and that right now she's dancing to Rihanna. Since the eight months that Sally has started writing this book she has gotten to know Kale immensely more. She is now one of the hungry mouths Kale has fed. Kale is a large part of why Sally keeps writing this damn cursed diary, and why Sally believes this will be a bestseller. Because Sally and Kale feel cosmically inspired in the pursuit of their art and what's possible. And more so, Kale is Big Papa. A Big Papa who shows you new music and makes you realize your potential and always has an open door and picks you up at 2am when you have a flat tire and can perfectly tell when a guy is bothering you and someone whose laugh fucks — puts Spongebob's to shame. Kale and his partner, Anna, are your LA mom and dad. They've housed every dj in East Los Angeles and only ask that you text them when you got home safe. Sally will

always be indebted to their belief in her. In a town of no's they gave her unwavering yes's. They gave her community and challenge and hunger and ineffability.

Sally rides her high to the kitchen where Josef chops it up with Alfredo and Santiago. They insult each other in jest as the ticket machine lies comatose.

“Hola mami,” they greet as Sally cheeses in. Sally loves this. You would think a possible classification like this would ruffle Sally's misandry feathers, but she knows the kitchen gang would never lie a finger on her. She sneaks them Tequila shots on Friday nights and they return her with huevos rancheros and indulgence in her faltering Spanish. Sally puts her arms around Josef. They are comrades in war at this point. All too familiar with demeaning clientele, ten hour shifts, and vodka-soaked shoelaces. That bitch of a lifestyle makes you brothers, partners in a way. Okay to throw the occasional fit at dropping a dish rack or mislabeling a table, but they still have resolute admiration for one another. Not a lot can do this kind of work. They both stupidly care about this failing restaurant and proper drink presentation. They care about doing things well and the healing qualities of a well-executed service experience. They see this disease in each other and feel less alone, like maybe what we all really need is a good meal together, and what a treat to be the person that provides that!

Sally and Josef dance in the kitchen and Sally knows that to be any place but here would be a complete waste.

Bar at four am

Amazing and Sally count their drawers as Jack fends off Walker, Mike, and Rick. Walker, Mike, and Rick think because they spend a fifth of their income on our drinks and company that they are “part of the family.” But until they’ve washed lime juice from their hair and taken a slap on the ass from an executive at Hulu, they can retire to their own homes. It’s closing time.

Amazing and Sally recount all the times Walker and Rick have crossed a line with them. Sally feels cool bonding with Amazing, an undeniable hot girl. Amazing models outside of Bar and has bi-weekly Snapchat stories with a famous rapper smoking weed in the background. Sally feels close to Amazing especially after Amazing drunkenly hit on her after one shift. Sally should not have indulged this but weren’t they always flirting with each other?

After one of Amazing’s daytime shifts, she stayed around during Sally’s night shift drinking and arguing with Jack. Later in the night, Amazing cornered Sally against the bar.

“I wish you would touch me more.”

“Touch you more?”

Amazing put Sally’s hands around her waist, then drifted them further down.

“Will you give me a kiss?” Amazing beckoned.

“Sure.” Sally kissed her on the cheek.

“This time on the lips,” Amazing chimed. They kissed. It was warm. “Mmm.” Amazing smiled, “that felt better than it should have.”

The next day Sally dm’ed Amazing, “you were bad last night.” Sally was still feeling the heat from their encounter and the dm, brave for Sally, felt right. Amazing later responded, “I’ve had hangover anxiety all day *hand on forehead emoji*.” This was not the response Sally was anticipating.

That same day at work during their day to night shift switch, Amazing apologized for her behavior and asked what all happened the prior night, she couldn’t remember.

Sally did a memory trip of her own. To the work Christmas party. They compared boobs in the bathroom and Amazing kissed her nipple. Hadn’t Amazing been drinking then, too?

Sally felt disgusting. In those moments, was she any different than those gross men that hit on them?

After Sally and Amazing lock up their cash drawers for the night, Amazing heads behind the bar to help Manuel batch cocktails for Jack. They take old liquor and near-expired juices and bottle them for a catering company — one of Jack’s many enterprises. Amazing smiles at Sally, and Manuel groans at his aching knees. Jack tries to show Sally an old music video he directed for Ice Cube.

“This is an exhausting business,” Jack notes of the video. “Lots of lines get blurred here.”

Bar & ghosts_final reprise

Sally went to Colorado for a weekend to visit her sister. When she came back, Bar was overrun by energies so vile, so brash, so inflated and unconcerned with others . . .

Bar was becoming a true ghost and what Sally feared most: A sports bar.

Bar at Sunday brunch

Sally loves working with her hands. As much as she could endlessly shit on her job and standing all day and whole body cramps and the fucked sleep schedule, Sally loves her job. It's the best one she's had so far. Sally had two stints in an office where she got mandatory lunch breaks and a snack room with a Nespresso. It was nice. Everyone was... nice. It was also the backdrop for some of the most depressing days of her life. She did nothing. Absolutely nothing. All day. And upon further recon with peers, apparently that's the thing! Most entry jobs in office settings don't... do... anything?! Really? That's just something everyone is comfortably knowing and doing?

Anyway. Sally sometimes feels insecure when telling friends or family what she does, and that's with bartending as one of the higher placements of the "service hierarchy." But working at Bar is the most useful job she has ever had. It's a service you perform and can immediately see the fruits of your labor.

Restaurants are important. They are places of community. Places where you can sit with a friend and ask how one another are doing. You can try something new. Meet a stranger. Almost any activity that would boost a Sim's well-being. And the Sim creators are right: be out, let life surprise you, surround yourself with company.

It's hard to remember this during this particular Sunday brunch. Randy no longer works at Bar and it's just M and Sally. M is coked up and him and Sally broke up for the twenty-fifth time the night before. There's around two hundred people being served by two people.

Bar is severely short-staffed and it now seems every shift is a chaos tunnel. Everyone's out now and tweeting about the tragedy of staff shortages but putting a gun to your fucking head if they don't get their French Toast in less than fifteen minutes. I don't know. Maybe it's just the part of town Bar is in, but people don't seem worth it sometimes.

A week ago, Bar was hosting a memorial service and it was packed. Overflowing. The deceased was a very loved, party-going man. Everyone was trendy and wearing clothes from 2050 and even a Kardashian was there! But Christ, they hated us. Not even the mourning had a twilight of empathy.

Sally hustled passed negligent tipsies to the kitchen where Mark, Bar's eighteen year old dishwasher turned chef (did I mention we're short staffed?) was expediting food. Two other poor souls are also serving two hundred people but privately, and usually

thanklessly, in the kitchen. The stoves and fryers are emanating a claustrophobic smoke in the already heat drenched pressure cooker that is the kitchen. Spills and piles of dishes puncture the landscape as Mark and Alfredo are far gone in the weeds. Their faces read familiar annoyance and anger; although, Alfredo can still manage a genuine smile. He's probably saved by God or some shit like that, that's why he can remain somewhat amicable in this hellhole.

Sally is carrying a sent-back breakfast sandwich and knows she must get information across as quickly as possible when approaching Mark — carrying a plate back to the kitchen is already tree bark in the ass so she might as well lube the orifice quickly.

“They want their bacon well done and their eggs less runny and didn't know it came on a Kaiser roll and would now prefer Rye but grilled Rye and less spread than the original and cut in half but not through the yoke so the eggs stay intact and if you have any parsley they would like that on the side.”

“Fuck you.”

“I'll be sure to tell them.” Sally drops the plate and quickly u-turns back to her own ill-sealed fate. Waiting back at the counter is a young man from a group of eight women. He's their head queer and clearly exhausted from providing their sole entertainment. So, every time he returns to the bar to refill his mimosas he's spiteful and *has! no! time for it!*

Sally refills his pitcher and he inquires, “I think you may have used decaf in my friend's espresso martini.”

“Oh,” Sally resigns. Sally knows they don't even have decaf but that is not what this is about.

“Can we get a refund for that?”

“Sure.” Just agree. Sally has learned to just swallow it and agree. Sally refunds the four dollars and looks behind her to see if M has heard all that. He's cleaning up a spilled Bloody Mary and dares not make eye contact with Sally. This is a brutal shift.

Let's pause to touch on some things:

The first two hours of a shift is always a delight. You're the captain of a mad ship and expert at tide changes and knot ties. That quickly dissipates and becomes an exhaustion of mind, body, and soul after not being treated like a person for six hours.

The service industry is a breeding ground for anger. Everyone's angry. And tired. So what do you do but drugs?

There are a lot of drugs in the service industry but especially cocaine. Bar is latent with cocaine. Sally thinks that's why M is never the same version of M. Bar can be a flurry operating at 500 mph and cocaine may help that, but afterwards the world is slow moving and seems a little harder to bear when all your sadness is suspended right before you.

You're probably waiting for a vomit story. That seems to be on the horizon of a brunch retelling, right? I can tell you a million but the through line is people never seem to make it to the toilet. On this particular shift, the chunks landed on top of the trash can lid. Nice.

There are other bodily ejections that happen in Bar bathroom.

Do fights happen at Bar? Sometimes.

At New Year's Eve, Kale had to kick out one of his friends because he kept taking off his shirt at random and trying to fight strangers. Including Jay, the owner Silver's son. A couple would be laughing and he would stomp up to them, "you talkin' bout me?? You talkin' bout me?!"

When Jay became the randomized target, Silver could not stand for this. Neither could his wife who he brings once in a blue moon and pretends not to know us or that he frequently sexually harasses us. Jay was firmly protected by mommy and daddy and later wanted me to nurse his invisible wounds. Like father like son.

This wasn't the only disappointing holiday Sally spent at Bar expensed by others' Saturday night release. Sally turned twenty-five on the back stairwell on her fifteen minute break. Bose found her three minutes 'til midnight and supplied two Tequila shots. They both stared silently until Bose's phone read 12:00. "Happy birthday," Bose mustered. Sally downed the shot and rejoined the rowdy crowd, a quarter of a century after her birth into the world.

After this shift, Sally, Jack, Amazing, Kale, and Manuel drank until sunlight and filled Sally with compliments and love. They bemoaned of rude patrons and sat with each other under the light of mutual understanding. What a complicated place Bar is.

All these recent tidings fester under Sally's brow as the man recently refunded for his decaf Espresso Martini is now asking for the manager's email. After being served seventeen rounds of bottomless, but missing last call because Sally didn't make it to their table, he summarizes that this treatment is "unfair."

Sally says, "yes, that is unfair," to no one but herself. She hands him a slip of paper with Manuel's email and disassociates to the point of oblivion. He pays for his \$300 tab and leaves behind \$4 worth of quarters.

Maybe it's time to quit.

Bar and its epilogue told from the perspective of one of its ghosts

We have watched Sally plenty. The saddest of all her qualities is her desire to be seen. Her most romantic moments go unnoticed by everyone but herself, and she foolishly thinks that is tragic.

Sally has been gone camera operating a TikTok gig. Sally was delighted to receive this job. *Hoorah! A job in my field!* However, when she showed up on the first day and was handed an iPhone, she knew the river upstream may be just as shit-stained.

Over at bar, eight policemen and women pulled up. They wore bulletproof vests and packed a lot of heat (Scary). They silently walked in on a Friday at 8pm during peak business hours and dispersed themselves throughout the premises taking pictures of the place. They spoke to no one for a full ten minutes then pulled Manuel aside for about half an hour. All the bartenders and patrons were freaked, having no clue to what purpose the police were here. When they finished speaking with Manuel, Manuel and Amazing disappeared to the upstairs office with Bose and Jack. After almost two hours, Amazing sent a text to Sally:

Pigs at Bar tonight

??? Sally inquired seconds later.

Three police cars pulled up to Bar. They said we've violated multiple codes but could fail to name which ones. Maybe more noise complaints from neighbors.

Kale called Bison, who's worked at almost every bar in LA. Bison said the pigs visit was a good thing. It meant we were "popping". Their inability to list any wrong-doings meant they hadn't actually caught us doing any illegal activity.

But make no mistake: they were threatening us.

Sally's heart dropped. Where was she?

~

Maximillian, the maybe or maybe not mafia guy, eventually became a regular at Bar. One night, Sally put on Mr. Bean on one of the bar's tv's. Maximillian laughed endlessly. Immediately transformed from whatever costume his life made him wear. Sally saw him.

Sally has had a few one night stands with patrons. They are always disappointing.

Us ghosts can confirm, from a non-bias perspective, that if you say, "Can I be annoying?" before ordering, that you better just stop right then and there.

Sally has taken up skate boarding recently. She likes to move her body, for movement is life. After one late night shift, Sally and M were doing ollies in the parking lot. M filmed her as she tried to ollie higher and higher. He was perfectly encouraging. Sally could never land the trick because she was too distracted by M's smiles as he watched her through the lens.

Sally is scared to turn into one of us. She sees that Bar is a cemetery of sorts. When she worked the TikTok gig she realized the whole world is a cemetery, a mourning of lost desires and past selves. Bar is just where we like to get drinks and an occasional blowjob.

It's never the individual and almost always the system.

My life is crass and outlandish, but retrospectively predictable. The universe cradles me.