

Georgie Fehringer *Here*

This is Hello

Again, we never claimed any of this was true

or even that it was the point

or the intended outcome.

We were too busy managing her expectations.

Swimming in our own theoretical form.

The outside had taken interiority to its furthest conclusion.

What else was there to do?

This is called a Splinter

Imagine you are on an airplane. The sky is dark and the cabin quiet. The man in front of you is snoring softly while the stupid little personal screens in front of and all around you play semi-new movies. You are watching Emma Watson in silence. The plane dips below the cloud lines, *ding-ding* you need to buckle your seat belt. A flight attendant runs by, fast. Air moves quickly as heads turn, drawn to the little yellow oxygen masks descending from the ceiling, “secure your own before helping others,” “the plane has entered a free fall,” you lift from the seat your cramped and uncomfortable body occupies. Wave after wave of cold fear run down your arms like electricity. Out the window, clouds are blurred as you continue to drop. You place your head on the cold glass and hold your breath like your life depends on it, your hands go numb and the noises finally escaping your throat are unrecognizable. You make eye contact with the glass you’ve been staring through and tilt your head back and then forward fast, smashing your forehead into the window until the blood blurs your vision, real scarlet fear. You brace for the moment of impact. Are you bracing? But for how long? How long can you assume the position before you entirely just—let go?

This is called Home

I don’t want to be Here. I want to be here six months ago.

Where is here NJ? Do we even know anymore?

According to the Institution, NJ lives on the 500 block, lives in the historic district, lives mere seconds away from what used to be a famous man’s mansion.

She wants to be impressed instead of disillusioned by the Institution's decision that NJ live not Here, but inside this house.

In the way that Here is almost anywhere during a pandemic, in the way that inside the house could be almost anywhere with the total lack of loction exposure, NJ would still be impressed if it wasn't for the isolation.

Look, R and I don't actually live Here.

We live in a 1500 square foot house with high ceilings and a projector TV screen that stretches almost the full length of the wall. Here is: Safeway, is Hyvee, is Aldi, is Trader Joe's, is Piggy-Wiggly is always, always Walmart. Sometimes late at night creeping onto the back deck to smoke the door is just hanging open into the black night.

The door is often open and unattended.

"This is a *low crime neighborhood*."

But what do I know I could barely tell you how to get downtown from here, though it is supposedly walking distance.

Because we don't go outside, because 99-point-something-or-other% of the time it's just those two in the house, or those three if you count the cat. So why don't we just leave?

"I have an obligation to craft."

yeah, there's that.

yeah, there's that.

Besides that shit.

She's lucky enough to have GAD.

(Not like *Egad!*)

Remember: Like a plane falling out of the sky.

(More like *Egad!*)

Bet you wondered why we would ask you to assume the position.

The craft book says explain it in terms we can all understand and at the end just say,

"that is what is like."

In this case a panic attack

Still she is trying so hard.

To get on the plane?

To make meaning out of chaos.

I know, love, I know.

We didn't ask to be Here
on the plane, or not on the plane yet, or sitting in our kitchen, or driving her car.
Which speaking of cars.

She fucking hates snow. Here has so much snow.

It's not like, "I just prefer there not to be snow," it's like, she literally can't
get into my car without

A) Crying

or

B) Hyperventilating.

So it's basically a really expensive brick *until*, when is it, NJ? When the
snow melts?

I don't know. I don't live Here. How could I possibly know?

Sometimes I think about selling the car, it's not like she knows where anything
is anyway.

Dirty snow is disgusting.

yeah but did you hear about those football parents who protested that their
little darlings weren't allowed to throw around a ball and get their yearly
concussions and it literally worked and hella people probably got Covid?
Clean snow's not great either too fucking bright, hurts my eyes.
Fuck this place.

Ok?

I don't want to go home.

What the fuck does that even mean?

I just, I don't know. Here is just an empty gesture and home was just a general
feeling, all the physicality was sucked out of it when we left.

Was it the house we used to live in with its claw-foot bathtub and mold
problem?

It was the perfect size when two people lived in its one-bedroom, now I'm the
fourth body, unable to do anything but take up too much space.

The last photo we have of that place is of NJ's legs peeking out of a blue silk
nighty. A body standing shirtless just through a doorway cooks something or
other. He's got on these pink heart-shaped sunglasses and he looks like some

dirty old stepdad
who was just about to come ram me into oblivion.

Is he home?

Pppffh, No.

Is it the studio?

That has quite literally all of our shit? Like my TV stand
my bed frame
my mattress
my fuckings sheets
and comforter
my dishes
and the entirety of the spice collection I've been building my
entire adult life.

I drove 2 hours and
pushed that
thing up a
flight of stairs
to keep it

(She's not allowed back into that one though, so don't bring that up she's quite
salty).

Am I even allowed back in?

No.

It's just so hard not to be in a rage all the time. You know I have a theory that
most major institutions are all made out of brick or stone or concrete
because the way they operate makes people

(*not us*)

want to burn them the fuck down.

Why?

Why are we here?

Physically?

Yes

Money

Yes

Greed

Yes

Incompetence

Oh, certainly.

You worked really hard to get here.

You still are.

I still am.

I still am.

“Let’s not go down the *aren’t we just grateful* path here.”

We are grateful.

Yes, but do we really need to discuss it, NJ?

Explain it to them then. You’ve never been one to miss an opportunity to complain.

Ok, ok back up and set the scene.

Imagine an airplane. The sky dark and quiet. Snoring softly all around you. *wait?* You are watching the plane dip. *ding-ding*. Fast, air moves quickly “secure your own before,” “a free fall” wave after wave like electricity. *Have I?* clouds blurred on the cold glass. breathe like your life depends on it. Your hands numb and unrecognizable, you make eye contact with the glass you’ve been staring through and tilt your head back and then smash, until the blood blurs real scarlet fear, stinging your eyes hot and salty. *Been Here?* Watch as the walls close in on you. Brace for the moment of impact. Are you bracing? But for how long?

Do you understand how trapped in your head and trapped in your house are exactly the same thing?

The feedback is deafening.

I can’t help you.

I can’t even help me.

This is Curtain

NJ wanted nothing more than to actually exist Here. Had been more excited about it than almost anything ever before, at least for the two weeks before the shutdowns. NJ despises being trapped in this house. She feels like a ghost haunting her wildest dream. Things are slipping. NJ is staring at the laptop screen’s closed Google Meet page for god knows how long before her mind registers she is in a body and that body is breathing quite rapidly.

She thinks she’s started having blackouts. We’re nothing too major.

She goes into her room and sees her bed made, she feels her teeth brushed, things folded and tucked and organized, lost somewhere in the giant black hole of her memory.

Every day has become so insignificant that her short-term memory seems

like it's given up trying to do its job completely.

Who fucking cares how many days I've worn this shirt in a row? Literally, no one would notice if I stared up at the ceiling on the kitchen floor for the next two weeks.

R would get tired of stepping over our body to make tea or rice or wash dishes, don't you think though?

"I would rather stare at the ceiling than get in the fucking airplane."

Last night I slept five hours.

This night she's slept zero.

TSA is going to find me sketchy.

It's not the first time TSA has seen a severely sleep-deprived 27-year-old woman. I promise you. Nobody gives a fuck about you.

Well, fuck you too.

You don't even have to do anything. I'm trying to keep control of her muscles but her mouth behind the two tightly fitting face masks hangs open, the muscles around her lips twitch uncontrollably. If I focus I can keep her almost still, barely upright. It's worrying the overhead speakers make her jump. The corners of her eyes betray my efforts at calm. can't feel my *fucking* hands!

It is not our fault that doctors in the early 2000s used to give out benzos to anyone fucking breathing, and now we have an epidemic, so the girl who's sobbing for exactly no reason can't have jack shit to make me able to function. "Take a Benadryl," she said.

I mean you can't have a panic attack while you're sleeping but you can't fucking do literally anything else either like, I don't know, get on a plane.

Well it's a good thing *you're* not getting on the plane isn't it? You leave everything to me anyway

Fuck, I just mean my

Our

Our white mother has a slight fear of airplanes and her doctor goes,

"Oh yeah here, take this," and off she goes with her little Xanny script

but us over here becoming more agoraphobic by the day can't get anything stronger than an antihistamine. Nah, I'm good don't worry about it.

I know, I know, *Let's not make this about race*
But *come on*.

Actually NJ,
I mean,

I just wanna be any fucking basic ass white woman named Tessa in some indistinguishable suburban town with its own special mix of Target, gas station, Panera, Starbucks, Starbucks, Walmart who just really likes crystals and her man. Like actually likes him and her life, none of that Instagram fake shit.

And?

I would pay too much money to just say, "Oh, I don't know. I don't really follow politics," to a group of vaguely nodding housewives after our paint-and-sip girls night and wake up happy with myself and the state of the world the next morning.

Wait, I thought you wanted to wake up as North West?
If you can't see how North West and Generic Tessa are exactly the same person I can't help you. But no, you're right. Every night I say my little prayer that the next morning I'll wake up as that tiny little millionaire, just in case.

Feel better?

No. Every morning I wake up not millions of dollars richer.
No, I wake up and face the decision of whether it even matters if I change out of this outfit this week or not. The only thing that makes me happy anymore is stupid fucking Instagram meme's and even then I know the Zuck let's them watch us out our front facing cameras. Never forget you are the product and you are disposable.

Fuck me, girl you gotta get it together!
You're the one that's supposed to have it together. I'm over here in my little blacked-out hole
and you're doing what? Folding laundry, brushing our teeth, making phone calls, going to
doctor's appointments, taking your little meds, working out?

We can't both spend our time lost in your little white-white-picket fence

heteronormative snuff film fantasy. Gag me. You wanna erase us completely?

I mean the world seems pretty intent on it already. Fuck it's just like sometimes slitting my own throat sounds like more fun than being there for all that shit.

Fun for who? You know that kind of sounds like why the doctor was like "if it gets worse go to the hospital" & "they're only here to help"

YoU KnOw ThaT KiND oF SoUNds LIkE WhY THE DoCtEr WaS LIkE...

Talking to me in an outdated and arguably ableist meme format doesn't help your case, NJ

You really get off on being that person, don't you?

Pffffh, ok.

Listen bitch, I don't wanna hear it, just because you've read an Instagram infographic doesn't mean you're more in control. You waste your emotional energy contemplating turning self-harm into something theoretical and poetic. I get to, occasionally, be overdramatic, ok?

Ok.

Ok—

Remember that thing about Meme's being Neo-dada or something like that? Yes, lol—

You know what would be even worse than Here?

What?

Can you imagine living under this fucking flight path in Minnesota?

No, that we can agree upon.

This is a compromise

So B in one of those little therapy appointments you hate so much asks me,

"If there's not anything to like here what do you think about your house?"

"Is a big house something you would like?"

Well yeah, we like living with this much space but if the question is really would I live here *in order to* have a big house?

Do the houses make it worth it? The answer is absolutely not. Absolutely not.

I would live in a shoebox not to ever be landlocked again. I'm not gunning for applause for being a good brown Here queer. I want to walk down the street in a nighty with ripped tights, a big fur coat, and holographic platform Tevas, in the dead of winter and have no one bat an eye.

Ok, well no one is doing that right now so you can pretend it's just you but
There are other things that make it worth it.

“The city is for the gays. I'm sorry that's just a fact.”

Do you think we could *attempt* to temper our explosive coastal elitism?
Lmao no.
Here hasn't given her a single damn thing to latch onto.

Besides the people
and the time for art
and the classes
and the money—
you know what, *anyway*.

B she goes, “Well if you could have a house this size in a major city if money wasn't a problem would you want that?”

I mean obviously.

I couldn't figure out the point of the question. She said,
“maybe you feel better in Asia because it's not majority white,”
and I'm like,

Duh.

Duh.

You know some days you could make an appearance. I think you'd like to run
the conversation in circles.
No thanks, the way you just agree makes me sick. I can't even begin to explain how happy I am we won't have to do another of those sessions the whole time we're here.

I wouldn't have to do it if it wasn't for you.
I'm not in charge. I'm not in charge
of everything.
"I'm so happy to be off that plane"

You and me both. You and me both.

Did you call mom?
Shhhhh!
She says she's fifteen minutes.
Fifteen minutes?
"I'm sitting right inside the door wearing a yellow sweatshirt."
She says the bridge is up.
Of course, the fucking bridge is up why wouldn't it be.

"Is it going up or down?
Ok, I will be right here."

This is called Big Voice

Light from the east rises up and through car window, shining onto steering wheel and hands held still, holding for concrete to lower before eyes, ground grey and dark black spots of wet, feet in socks in shoes resting on carpet on metal on plastic. Windows are raised and not darkened, between yellow lines on street road paintings, the airport exit is not far and when you take it the limit goes to 25 but the wheels all go 40 until blue car with silent lights on top to the right sits as you wrap around the curve and all the wheels slow and look at numbers, poles under black square signs that say: American, Delta, Spirit. NJ is there standing under number 4, zone 4, on big sign wrapped around concrete pole, face and body under yellow cotton fabric hood and sleeves.

This is called cognitive dissonance

The goal is not to make you like me.

Her goal isn't to make you not like her either. Or like me instead. Really she's lying here NJ even wants me to like her and how do I respond to us? I just think it's like people don't appreciate unlikeable women.

Especially unlikeable fat women is what she means.

Unless you look like Cheryl Blossom.

(She's not even real?)

Especially unlikeable fat Black women is what she means.

People don't appreciate unlikeableness in women unless they're gorgeous and successful and even then it has to be a specific type of cutesy/sexy/bitchy. I just wanna not care what people think about expressing the parts of us that are not socially praised and have that be ok?

I'm telling you she's lying.

Being likable is probably the only thing she consistently cares about.

"Why can't I just be an unlikeable avantgarde weirdo
and have that be the reason people like me?"

Pretentious much?

Pretentious much?

Kathy Acker wrote a story about a child in a sexual relationship with her own father.

But people think she's fucking crazy.

Ok, Chuck Palahniuk writes stories with the N-word, or about people literally choosing to cannibalize each other and gets cool points for being on the banned book list.

He's a white man doing things the way white men have always been able to
do them?

Wait, did you just self-censure?

I'm never going to succeed if I don't keep a white audience in mind.

So white ass Chuck Palahniuk can say whatever he wants but you have to
self-censure?

He's a white man doing things the way white men have always been able to
do them.

People think he's a genius.

(She's talking about herself here.)

(you know I can hear you, right?)

Who, teenage boys and people who watch Rick and Morty?

(she watches Rick and Morty)

(I can still hear you.)

A four-sided conversation with ourselves is a little much even for us, don't
you think?

Are we making collective decisions again?

Only if you quote her.

“Look, I’m not a bad person just because sometimes I see groups of white people and I’m like—no. Or because I refuse to see places that are overwhelmingly, *painfully* white as “quaint” and not dangerous.

Or because Queer safe spaces don’t translate to BIPOC safe spaces or fat safe spaces.

Which is infuriating.

“If that makes me unlikeable then so be it.

Who am I trying to impress anyway?”

So many of us end up dropping out of PWI

(Primarily White Institutions)

(Which is an acronym white people don’t even know.)

they end up creating a special task force charged with trying to raise the retention of students of color headed by the one Black woman in admin.

Really playing up that double-Du Bois-consciousness now aren’t we?

“What does that say about me?”

Mom said don’t be a statistic.

Yeah, ok that pissed me off too.

As if she knows shit about retention rates.

But she means well—I mean she couldn’t have known.

How could she?

The lady in the book was like if places make themselves welcoming to brown students then there would be more. A lack of people of color is almost always institutional.

A lack of people of color is almost always personal.

What she really means is, what the fuck is wrong with us?

Didion said you’re always selling someone out.

“Is it possible not to sell out yourself?”

For access

for education

for prestige

for ego

for recognition

for joy.

This is me acknowledging we are all sick of talking about pandemics, sorry

Schools are closed for six weeks through email during middle of workday break, all look at screens and discuss what is: 6 weeks is 6 months, is a year or 6 years when time starts to slip, when the outside is both haven and danger. Do: sit by open window, do not go inside, or maybe sit six feet apart outside or don't go out at all, except to shovel the snow so that feet do walk by unheeded, except to make purchases to buoy the economy, inside is danger but not inside is capital danger, artisan dog food masked as essential, big-box shop inside 6-inch screen delivers thumbtacks through snowstorm. Cat eats tuna-food stuck in shipping and below freezing temperature, someone living the high life. Big house becomes small house becomes whole world. One school is all schools in the way that one place is all place in the way that this country, America, is made up of repeating islands that go: highway, housing development, Walmart, Starbucks, Panera, target, housing development, casino, gas station, highway, occasionally punctuated by a million people in close quarters earnestly wondering "what even happens out there?" Graffiti across middle section says meth is an epidemic and demic on top of demic, by virtue of all becoming different all, wash-rinse-Clorox-repeat.

(This is called pandering.)

(Listen, NJ is grateful for every opportunity she gets but the girl has had herself wrapped in knots for as long as she can remember and the pandemic isolation is causing unforeseen outcomes. Think of her like a nonlinear presence trapped in a linear storyline constantly knowing that she is the element that causes the chaos.

She doesn't really understand how she got Here. She is worried that because she moved during the middle of it all Here will always be tainted with the pain of the whole situation and she'll never be able to find something to like about the place. And she'll be labeled just another Black person who should be grateful instead of
so loud.

She already stirred up enough shit that she can't handle any more death threats or lawsuits. She can't even walk into a Walmart without feeling like she's going to hyperventilate for fear of being arrested for existing. If she isn't good enough

and grateful enough and worthy enough no one will ever hire her and everything
will be for nothing.

Sometimes I think the only thing that keeps her going is this pretense that she
doesn't care if she's unlikeable.)

(Jesus, Fuck off! you know I can hear you!
This is the most unoriginal, whiny venting.)

Are you done?

No,

“I'm just so tired all the time”

Why are you being mean to me?

What? No, I'm not being mean to you.

Yes, you are! You're being mean to me. You don't think I have any control
over anything

Do you?

No, but isn't treating me like a predetermined situation causing it to be one
just as much as my circular thinking?

...

And isn't coddling me just going to make everything worse?

Look if you would stop with the tears I could focus on this conversation but
I'm just trying to keep everything together right now can you just, Mom will
be here in 15 minutes I really don't want to do this in public.

All you do is act like you are so overwhelmed all the time which is really
incredible because you spend all your time lecturing me about how I'm too
overwhelmed all the time and how I'm a hypochondriac and every time I
have a headache I'm convinced its brain cancer

But you are!

yeah but every time you complain about how overwhelmed you are handling
all of our shit I don't just sit here and go “bleh bleh blehh shut up.” I'm like
yeah we are overwhelmed let's like just be overwhelmed!

We can't just be overwhelmed all the time!

Why not?

You know why not

control slipped through our fingers	control slipped through our fingers
long before we existed	long before we existed
I don't know if they get it	I don't know if they get it
This isn't about terror	This isn't about terror
Or being ungrounded	Or being ungrounded
Or home	Or home
This is about being anything	This is about being anything
but a body	but a body
when your body is anything but safe	when your body is anything but safe

“Hi Mom. It's good to be home.
I am just so tired”