

Weeded from Home

MARCH 16, 2020: PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

I'm pouring Fernet into plastic cups like it isn't the second to last bottle that I'll have until god knows when.

And also, like I know damn well that it is, because we're cleaning out Kate's walk-in and packing salad mix and ricotta and burrata and bacon and hot salami and Everything You Need For A Perfect Pantry Pasta into milk crates to be taken home tonight, or sent home with her staff tomorrow.

Little sense-making comes from looking at a calendar. This is during the third week of March because the liquor stores closed the seventeenth and Pittsburgh starts to feel like a ghost town after that.

At this point, We (the collective We, the service workers We, the restaurant people We) are scrolling through Instagram, wondering what every other business is doing, wondering what our friends are doing, with the pace and focus of a severely mis-scheduled host running mimosas at brunch. Fast, motivated, perhaps existentially aimless. Sloppy.

And then there's a lot of mania. A lot of yelling on the front porch about how the food system is broken, and has been, and how *well who the hell do we talk about it with* and *what the hell do we do*. A lot of wine.

By late April, I haven't been to my job at the Kosher bagel shop in the historically Jewish neighborhood in nearly forty days. I haven't seen most of my coworkers, who are my closest friends, in the same amount of time. (Some of them have brought me flour; I have brought some of

them ramps.) We have all been doing a lot of puzzles, and panicking.

I have cried in Kate's lap about my mom being sick in New York, about wanting to be with my parents at the 24-hour, 365-even-during-Hurricane-Sandy-even-after-9/11-deli run by Jehovah's Witnesses in the river town I grew up in (the one with the maximum security prison).

It's April 22nd, and I just want to make a lox sandwich for an acquaintance I saw at the bar the night before, but had to leave early to make it to work at 6:15 a.m., and I'm thrilled to see them walk in and rub the sleep out of their eyes at 1 p.m. before staff meal at 4.

There is disdain for the government that both has to be, and can't be, situated or contained within the context of Ruth's Chris Steak House getting bailed out over your friends who have worked their whole lives for this. There is love that unemployment can't buy. There are pockets full of folded-up singles that can't be communicated through a virtual tip jar.

And We're staying home but not the home We used to clock into every day. The home with a smaller fridge, with places to sit that aren't milk crates next to a dumpster. The home that's a lot quieter, where you don't need to announce that you're walking behind someone, or rounding a corner into a different room, or holding something sharp, or coming down the stairs. (Maybe now, you do this anyway. It might provide some kind of comfort.)

On this, I can only speak for myself: I almost miss the mop closet. ☹