

**Did you make
this up?**

to be in love,
is it so uncool?

A zine by Sophie Frances
Kemp

September 2023

Summer — if I were to tell it in retrospect, this is how it went. It started at Boat Bar, at Sunny's, at the bar down the street from my apartment. On Smith and President. In Chinatown (I was wearing a \$5 dress. I had consumed an \$18 martini. The cab cost \$25). Summer — if I were to tell it in retrospect, this is how it went. *I was 27 years old.* The buzz was all mine. A blinking yellow light. Avenue B, West Fourth, the Hudson Line, The Q Train, A Beech Forest, The Garden of Gethsemane, A Portal To Hell, Holding a Dagger of Which to Slice Open the Oyster, A Burning Hill. It was all so normal it was scary. I was so normal it was scary. I swear it. *Even though I couldn't stop asking: Why am I so itinerant, and what is this country.* Summer — if I were to tell it in retrospect, this is how it went. A green field and a gray sky and a dirt road. Jacob's porcelain ladder pointed at the sky. I played the part the best I had in years.

The Saint Lawrence River, May

A high necked blouse. A farmhouse. I was walking through it like this: alone, quietly. There was a part about a beer. There was a part about walking to a creek. There was a part about passing a horse and buggy on foot. A set of train tracks. A college bar ten, fifteen, twenty miles from the Canadian border. If you go ten, fifteen, twenty miles south it is called the Tug Hill Plateau and in my understanding this is a bleak place, flat, cold, prisons, rye crop and a tv sitting on a plastic table, livestock where they have flies swarming around them. A rusted out Pontiac inside of a superfund site. It is so packed in the bar. It was very embarrassing to be in this situation. Dressed overly formal. Drinking vodka and soda. In the distance I think I heard a train rush past. In the distance I think they were playing the hits. The light in the room was very bad. Talking to my brother's girlfriend about what they did here. "The sorority across the street," she says to me, pointing, "They all sleep in one big room and the windows must be left open all year otherwise, in the eyes of the law, it becomes a brothel." I think about what it would be like to sleep in a room with several other girls where the windows are always open. In my opinion it sounds like an orphanage.

Avenue B, June

This part is embarrassing. I spill a martini on a woman who edits a magazine. For context she is two years older than me. For context he does not see me spill the martini. I like this about him. He is a year older than me and tells me facts about myself that I already know. I like this about him. It is nice to be reminded of facts about yourself. Another thing I like about him is that he is covered in tattoos and has one earring and medium length brown hair. This is similar to another person I know from a different time. You will be required to do the math here. Here is what he does: he goes outside to snort the drug cocaine. Here is what I do: I go outside and follow him. Like a little lamb I follow him so sweetly. It is all over his face. The Drug Cocaine. He offers me some while it is still all over his face. I am reformed and do not do this drug anymore and I tell him this. He thinks I am being funny. I tell him I think he is attractive. Then we do kissing for a while. I do not hear from him again. He does not tell me any more facts about myself.

Liverpool Street, July

This part is a very beautiful occurrence. I am in London alone. There is a lunch involved where I am told the grilled cheese is the thing to order but they call it the British version. I am here to see my friend who lives in Hackney. The sky is gray and the weather is bad. A cyst inside of one of my ovaries begins to burst and I slump over a cracked leather chair in a karaoke booth somewhere in Finsbury Park. The pain is very bad and I beg my friend to come home with me. She says: you do not have to beg like that, obviously I will come home with you when you are in this kind of pain. She and her boyfriend help me onto the bus. I hear them fooling around later when we get home and my main thought is that I am happy my beautiful friend has found beautiful love. When I wake up the cyst inside of one my ovaries continues to burst.

Another thing that happens: a new friend buys me a glass of champagne in Soho. We are told it tastes like an apple. She is glamorous and Irish and has a personality that I would say is warm. Another thing that happens: a friend from New York is here at the same time as me. One day we go to a pub at 2pm and watch cricket and then spend the rest of the afternoon walking walking walking walking. For hours. Then there was the beautiful occurrence. One of the most beautiful of my summer. It was at the Liverpool Street tube stop. I was trying to get on the Elizabeth Line so I could board my plane back to the United States of America (USA). There was a glass elevator and it went very far underground. I was listening to indie rock when I saw this happening and it became a very spiritual experience. The elevator glows a yellow light. There are people inside of it and they look like they are collapsing falling crashing into the earth, the very far underground. They look like they are in a snow globe. I do not get into it. I stay the course. I am very brave on the stairs. It reminds me of events in my past but I cannot remember about what, exactly. You are not supposed to tell people true facts in this context.

An Interference Fit

This is a metaphor for intercourse. If you see a machine do this it is essentially two parts of a machine mashing into each other. This has always been spiritually significant for me because of a punk rock album that I love the most. It came out when I was eighteen. In the summer I revisit this concept, as well as a few others. A Boltzmann Brain in a little white room where a little tea cup sits on a tile floor, five dimensional optical storage (difficult to explain), Tranquility Base, Base Reality, Quantum mechanics, Particle Physics, the Memory Of Mankind, The Far Future, The Supercontinent, The Cambrian Explosion, The KT Event, The Angle of Incidence (the angle between a ray incident on a surface and the line perpendicular at 90 degree angle), Cassandra Wailing At The Walls Of Troy, What exactly is goldenrod?, The American Locomotive Company, Straddling the Great Divide in a miniskirt, The pope in his tiny house, Research stations in the north where they keep finding weapons in the snow (a blessed occurrence, I'd assume, to find an arrowhead just like that), a plane, a warplane, a device of destruction flying across the clear blue sky.

Red Hook, Noho, Flatbush, May

I consume an unlimited amount of pink wine and make decisions that I tell people I really regret! But in my mind's eye they are very magical. I had never done it in the bathroom before and I think this a cool fact and I have no shame about it. When I wake up in the morning we do an interference fit (do you see what I did there, ha ha ha) and then I become worried I have been impregnated by a dark force. I ask him about this and he thinks this is funny and also not true. I take photos of myself on my cell phone after he falls back asleep. My friends we go shopping and I see celebrities and my old boss. I am reminded that I am 27 today which is why today is different from all of the other days (sorry to the Jewish people לשנה (הבאה בירושלים). I take the train to Smith and Ninth and my brain decides to have anxiety. My friends we sit in a lab with a three dimensional printer and drink sparkling water. For dinner I do not invite him because we are not in a relationship anymore but I do invite my friends who I met at Oberlin College in Ohio in Lorain County (there was one time in a field called George Jones I was wearing a denim jacket I had taken a 15mg edible on an empty stomach, another time in the brutalist library in the snow). We eat pasta the food and I am wearing a white linen suit and manage not to spill. There I had a lot of thoughts about the nature of being and by that I mean: what business did I have being alive. It is cool to do this. A lot of the time I wish I was sitting on a hill in a religious setting while the sun sets.

Govenor's Island, May

Another thought I have about being alive happened while I was on Govenor's Island. It is just that when you lie there in the grass and the weather is perfect you are thinking about the nature of being. It is just that you think it is interesting that you are alive now instead of in the time of ancient Sumer. I think it would have been hard to be alive during the Fertile Crescent. I think it is interesting to have been born at the edge of the second Clinton term. To have the whole of the 20th century be a distant star that you only know about from facts you read in a book or on a web site. All my friends are playing cards and I do not think they are having this thought. All my friends are playing cards and it is the first day of summer.

Text Message, August

This kind of hurt my feelings

But not too much!

But more than the one where it turns out I am the bed bugs

Anyways mostly I wanted to say major congrats on the major book deal and I hope you're thriving

And thank [sic] for introducing me to [that song](#) I still listen to it often

Also I hope in addition to thriving you're rich now

Book Deal

The Work shall be approximately 54,500 words in length and is described as a novel about the Gen Z yearning for true love and authenticity; a hilarious, daring, surreal, and devastating journey into the mind of Reality Kahn, a 23-year-old determined to land a boyfriend.

Provincetown Ferry, September

This is the best moment of the whole of my summer. I am alone on a boat. It is not even technically summer. I am drinking a beer. I wrote some really good notes about all of this but they are unfortunately totally gone. They are lost in the depths of the machine. But it really was the best moment of the whole of my summer. I am in a denim jacket. It is windy. There are kayakers in the water. At a certain point you cannot even make out Boston anymore. It becomes a speck of light. At a certain point I am listening to music and again having a spiritual experience because of this. I am listening to music that makes me feel like I am a woman who lives in a cave off the side of a mountain. It is making me have delusions of having my life be awesome all of the time instead of only some of the time. I have a thought that is like: *to be in love, is it so uncool*. Even though I am not in love with anyone during that time and also currently while I am writing this. I grapple with my reality often. It is not an easy époque to be living through where you don't even have romance but also people who are geniuses say this is how you earn your stripes and also you can do an interference fit with anyone you would like if they want to do it too. It is true that I do that but I am not sure it is very enjoyable. In fact I know that it is not. When I have done this the past few months it is all in retrospect — watching myself doing it. But I love being in the open sea. I love the open sea. You do not do it all in retrospect on the Provincetown ferry.

West Fourth, Sidney's Five, Prospect Park, Redacted Street, August

This is the part where my heart got really broken by someone I barely knew. A bar on first avenue that is always empty which is why I always go there. He tells me that there was a mishap, that he spilled coffee all over his nice outfit which is why he wearing his not nice outfit (what was the nice outfit, I wonder). We are set up by a friend. It is effortless and I immediately have a feeling that I do not particularly enjoy, which is realizing that someone whom I have just met is going to really break my heart which I guess is what people call a crush. Or maybe they do not. But anyways: we walk around lower manhattan all evening and he apologizes for smoking but this is what it is like to be European ha ha ha and he tells me about how in the Hudson Valley they all live in a house by a famous bridge named after a man who was famous for napping and how there are chickens a vineyard a wood burning stove a flock of sheep a pair of knit socks everyone runs in the snow maman et papa and a wine cave in la vallée de la loire. For the first time we do kissing in front of the subway at West Fourth and it is like: oh god, jesus christ. On the second date we do kissing in Prospect Park and it is like: oh god, jesus christ. It is like oh god, jesus christ, let's listen to the KLF while driving a manual transmission volkswagen thru a field. He gives me compliments (nice ass, nice eyes, nice smile, nice feet, nice understanding of UFOs, nice way of gesturing w/ hands, nice pronunciation of French words, nice way of doing kissing) and we do an interference fit in my bed on redacted street and this time I do not do it in retrospect. And yet: I do not hear from him again and this is very devastating to me for some reason. I actually know exactly why but it is too private to share. I am not devastated by it anymore because a fact about me is my resilience. It is hard not to be corny about these things.

Wellfleet, September

In the big beach house what we do is sit around all day in wet bathing suits listening to Otis Redding, Al Green, The Replacements, Pavement, Kanye but only the album 808s and Heartbreak, Stevie Wonder, Skrillex, Whatever Was Playing at House Parties in 2015. What we do is go swimming in the pond. What we do is go to the beach where it is all naked gay guys. What we do is watch the sunset and eat beans. What we do is wade through a marsh and there are minnows and sand dunes and I am again thinking about the ancient era of Mesopotamia and how if I was alive in that era it would be the River Euphrates for me. It would be washing my son in the River Euphrates for me. But it is not, so instead it is one mile of salt marsh in an area just east of Provincetown. There's a house party and everyone rips cigs on the back porch and in the sky I think it's Cassiopeia and I think of a lyric from a song that is like *go to sleep comma you stunning sky*. We walk past the power lines and into the sand. I wake early and walk over a bridge onto a small island. And it reminds me of a time where I walked around Chelsea and it was six in the morning and there was a diner called Malibu and the colors were muted and I was acting obliterative. It reminds me of a time I was riding my bike very late and the only noise: the clicking of my bike while gear shifting my way up a hill. Wellfleet—it all looks like the edge of the universe. You can hear cicadas at night some waves from the sea, the ocean. It is a soft breeze.

Songs

Fourth of July by Galaxie 500 because I was listening to this song on the Hudson Line because of a man who drove a cheese van and I thought there was going to be a future where he drove me around in the cheese van in the Hudson Valley. None of this happened and now when I listen to this song I mostly just think about the lyric “I decided to have a bed-in but I forgot to invite anybody.”

Dallas by Silver Jews because it reminds me of my friend who is from Texas and makes me have thoughts that are like “Goddamn” and “I know about College Station” Also the line “The CPR Was So Erotic”

Kick the Tragedy by Drop Nineteens because of the spoken word interlude specifically the line “i am only nineteen how serious could it be”

An Ear to the Chest by Lewsberg because of the guitar break in the middle because I love a guitar break in the middle.

A Good Thief Steals Clean by Caroline Says because it makes me feel cold and small, like I am some kind of girl who stands there in a field while waiting for the lightning to come instead of the kind of girl I actually am who does none of those things.

Hard Boiled Babe by Lizzy Mercier Descloux because I first heard this song a few months ago when I walked into this bar up these stairs with diffuse lightning and candle burning that smelled like wet concrete and the cocktail waitress had on a g string and my cocktail didn’t have a name it just had a number and no one made eye contact with me the whole time.

Soft Pyramids by Q and not U this song makes me feel like I am 27 in 2002 instead of 2023 and that I have a walkman and headphones that plug in and I take the bus while wearing a skort. This is how the whole of the summer has made me feel, for what it is worth. I told this to someone recently, that I felt like the operating mood was being 27 in 2002 and he said: “What??”

Reiki by Peel Dream Magazine because I listen to this song basically on loop when I write fiction or at least I have been since the springtime because I had a breakthrough one time while writing this song in a very private way.

Self Portrait at 27, September

I stole this from David Berman. There is a poem he wrote that I love that is called: Self Portrait at 28. I know it is a bad title but this is what I have been thinking about a lot lately. Is how do you describe yourself at each new age you get to be! For me it is like a burning hill. A desire to sit on top of a burning hill in a religious setting. The transit of Pisces. A collection of stupid shit that I have done. Mostly on purpose because a thing about me is I like to do stupid shit on purpose because I cannot shake the feeling that it is maybe interesting and that I can use it later. I am always right. But I think this is also a feeling that is specific to being in your twenties. That you are just always being Cassandra wailing at the walls of Troy because you did something stupid on purpose and now you have to suffer in some kind of acute and cosmic way. It is like in this short story I wrote about the aftermath of a breakup that everyone in my workshop at Columbia really hated:

All of it will be fine. She will finally figure out her life. The narrator is going to become a political lesbian. Luce Irigaray could never!!! The narrator is going to be messy about it (being a political lesbian). The narrator will wake up each morning at an early hour. The narrator is going to get on the train. The narrator is going to stop crying to the song "Range Life," and thinking about the Croatian Experience. Were the Stone Temple Pilots actually elegant bachelors??? The narrator is going to investigate her relationship with sex. The narrator will start to think she is falling in love with someone else but it is all artifice, man. It is all artifice.

But I think I was onto something here. That this is the era of big artifice. Big thinking you are a grown up because you were "wild" and "self destructive" and "feral" at 23 and at 27 you have things like a book deal and pet cat and wear beautiful dresses and most of the time you know when to cut yourself off when it comes to booze and in some ways sex minus your birthday party and your friend's party for her magazine in a mall and a party for a different magazine in Chelsea and a evening out in Ridgewood where you wake up the next morning so depressed you start drafting a text to all of your current sexual partners to tell them you are becoming celibate.

27 is about thinking you are mature when in reality you, as a female, can't stop wailing at the walls of Troy because last year you bravely decided to break up with your awesome boyfriend because you could feel the curvature of the universe shouting to you in your ear *one day you could be happier*. So you kind of have to live with that and it makes you feel like you are speeding past the moons of Saturn, like some kind of siren of titan, hurdling so deep into space that one morning you wake up and throw up and realize you kind of have to do it, you have to bravely be alone. So you do this and you're just like always on your bike listening to the Dear Nora album *We'll Have a Time* and Here's Where the Story Ends by the Sundays and again wrongly convince yourself that it is all about being 27 but in 2002.

I think what I am saying is that there is an intensity that you are kind of trapped by. That you kind of have to lay there and take it and wander around the great plains of Flatbush Avenue and then you want to refer to everything in the second person. A hypothetical. A set of instructions. *You must do this and then you do another thing*. And so you do. You do this and then you do another thing. You must stare at the Henry Moore. You must walk across the Gowanus Canal. You must shotgun oat milk. You must become the

witch of redacted street. You must become Lord Sophie Of Artifice. You must read a Mary Gaitskill book in a camp chair. You must bathe in a pond. You must brave the TSA line alone. You must be nice to all of God's Creatures. Kindness has to be pro forma. And it does not ever get easier but sometimes, when the light is right and the weather is warm, you think to yourself: I am happy to be brutalized by the good word, one's metaphysical era. You think, again: to be in love (even if it is with no one, even if it is just with the concept of being alive!) is it *so uncool*.

Later, *Made Up*

A woman, age 27, lording over a table in a black dress. This is a setting where the light is diffuse. This is a setting where you are out of sight and out of mind. She is walking around gesturing but you cannot see to whom you can just make out a hand, a hand of a man. He says *would you like another glass of wine, babe*. And then she blinks and when her eyes open, as if she has just walked through the event horizon of a black hole: a field, the croaking of one frog, a sweat lodge at the edge of a forest, glowing coals, the tail of a meteorite, like a bone thrown from a void. And this time, the reemergence of the hand, this time formless, a shade of blue hovering above a small white cloud, belonging to no one. It says: *AND THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID; AND DARKNESS [WAS] UPON THE FACE OF THE DEEP*.

Just think about it. This will be something later.

about the author:

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**Do you ever
look back?**