



NYC SUMMER

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& 5 FLIP FLOPS, BLOOD-LETTING, CRYING, SPITTING,
AND EXCESSIVE SWEATING

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The heat of a New York summer is nearly unbearable. Between the excessive amount of blacktop collecting heat throughout the day and the overabundance of hot, shit-smelling steam rising up from the sewers, manholes, and subway grates, one feels filthy the second they step out of the house. Once an individual has adapted to this type of filth, a level of acceptance is reached. “I am dirty, I will be dirty for the remainder of the day, I smell of rank sweat and am noticeably dehydrated.” Everyone is this dirty, except for those who aren’t. And how *do* those people stay so clean—the fresh-smelling ones, whose air one catches when the subway approaches its Queens Plaza stop “at the platform edge”? It makes one wonder what other people smell when they’re downwind of them. Onions and nervous sweat. This thought persists throughout the day as one’s arms are lifted to move a stray hair from the forehead or reach up to pay for that \$2 coffee at the falafel truck that only accepts cash, as one passes by a handsome man or woman, smiling coyly when suddenly a gust of wind runs through the negative spaces between torso and arms, and one is once again reminded of their horrible stench.

After this, the sweating becomes worse and this cyclical pattern continues throughout the day until the smell is so unbearable that the rest of the night is spent doing drawings topless with the sweat-soaked shirt in the corner of the studio while the custodian repeatedly enters and exits because his utility closet happens to share a wall with the studio and the only bathroom on the first floor. It’s not his fault—he’s just trying to do his job.

There is no privacy here. There is also very little time to rest. “The city that never sleeps” really is a fitting nickname, but it seems most people could use a little break. Each morning greets one with a stuffy nose and eye boogers from the dirt collected the day before, and when getting out of bed, every attempt is made to ensure that not one toe

touches the floor for fear of Staph infection, or Measles, or God knows what else. So, shitty, Old Navy, \$5 sale flipflops are worn at all times and become a most prized possession.

Sharing a living space with twenty people means shared showers and hair in the drains. Someone in the house is a professional at removing the hair. He has a special technique and will explain the right way to effectively remove the hair from the drain using a piece of toilet paper that's placed between one's thumb and forefinger. If asked how to do this, he will gladly describe the perfected practice, using his fingers to re-enact the swift motion one needs to use. This is free of charge (even in New York)!

A designated bedroom has been assigned and unavoidably is in the center of the labyrinth-like building. To get there from the shower, one brings a change of clothes and puts the clean clothes on in the bathroom after the shower, but if one is lazy, or doesn't have a clean bag to put the clothes in, or forgets, one walks through the house in a towel. This poses a problem.

There is a 90% chance that one will have at least six encounters between the bathroom and one's living quarters. These encounters can include a friendly smile, a wink, a look of distaste, a nervous glance as if embarrassed at having seen the toweled person, a longing gaze, a conversation about how the day has been, a quick "hello, how are you?", an awkward knee-knocked walk up the stairs (for the towel-wearer, especially if someone is sitting on the floor by those three small steps), or if one is lucky, it's possible to move through the room unnoticed. In each of these encounters, it's easy to feel like one needs to perform.

Most times it becomes the performance of recoiling so as not to draw too much attention to the self. With this recoiling can sometimes come an overexaggerated shyness which turns into the opposite of the desired outcome. For a woman it seems “cutesy” or reads as if she is trying to appear innocent. Then there’s the option of acting as if one is wearing clothes, carrying on conversations normally, without any inhibitions, so as not to make anything awkward. One worries that this option may trigger irritation in those who wish the towel-wearer was clothed, those who have partners in the house, or those who could possibly be turned on by the presence of water droplets on a bare collarbone and shoulder cap. Why? Because this has been learned. In the past, the towel-wearer has been irritated with someone who isn’t clothed who wants attention, the towel-wearer has been jealous of the presence of nude bodies when their partner is around, and the towel-wearer has been turned on by a another coming out of the bathroom in a towel.

The solution to this problem is to just bring some fucking clothes to the bathroom, but sometimes it just doesn’t happen that way.

Showers don’t help the stench that was mentioned earlier, and neither do the amount of vegetables that are being consumed by the individual. Eating a mostly plant-based diet also has its pitfalls. No time to do laundry, so re-wearing socks is in order, and the option between bathing suit bottoms and going commando also presents itself. One could choose to wear the aforementioned glorified flipflops around the city, but taking the chance of stepping in a putrid puddle or dog shit or a pile of leftover, rotten mystery food is quickly rejected and wearing dirty socks turns out to be a pleasant alternative.

Coffee and delicious local eggs are always in the kitchen upstairs. How lucky is that? The stove faces a large window that looks out onto the

roof and some newly built high-rise apartments for the elitist. At night, all the blinds remain open and it's easy to see into each living space: lovers on the couch watching TV, a cocktail party, someone petting their dog or reading mail—haven't seen any sex, but then again, one tries not to stare too much. The witty girl with the contagious laugh says, "who needs TV when you have *Rear Window*?" and the newbie misses the joke. Damn it.

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