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GABI

Okay, confession time: I didn't step foot in a Maccies for three years. That's right, gurlies, THREE 🍷
WHOLE 🍷 YEARS 🍷

Why?? Shame, I guess. Growing up against the cheerily classist backdrop of Jamie's School Dinners, McDonald's was public enemy number one - remember news reports about mums pushing burgers through fences to kids on their dinner break? This was a time before the well-to-do would enjoy the odd 'cheeky' Big Mac in order to demonstrate their down to earth credentials to one another - before all the clever marketing that posited the Golden Arches as the great social leveller of the culinary world. Maccies was poor food for poor people. Another stick to beat us with and demonstrate how our moral failure was the root cause of our poverty and how we really deserved it.

So, I'm in my late teens - I'm trans and I know it, and, without the language to express it, so deeply closeted I can see Narnia. I'm yet to achieve class-consciousness, in a state of pure self-denial and on a mission to jettison anything that might mark me out as 'less-than'. The propaganda I spent my formative years exposed to - as anti-trans as it was anti-poor - has sunk in deep, the various sources of shame are all entangled, and I'll do anything to evade any kind of visibility - I don't wanna go all trauma porn here by going into details so long story short, it's bye-bye Maccies.

Fast forward to the present day: After a long, dark period of aspiring normativity - peppered with erratic behaviour that culminated in me 'running away' to Mexico for a drawn out nervous breakdown - I got the fuck over myself, gave up on the (admittedly ridiculous) plan of waiting for all my loved ones to die, and finally came out. Now I'm out there living my truth™ I'm a million times more visible and not even the tiniest bit less terrified, but - having shed my shame-shell - at least I'll go to McDonald's now.

So... This next bit goes on a bit of a tangent but stay with me here: My Nonno (that's grandad to all you non Italian speakers) used to say that as a young man, if someone sat in front of him on the bus he'd stare at the base of their neck - creepy, I know - and they'd always end up feeling/ scratching/ batting at it like a fly had landed there or something. Like some sort of bloody medieval alchemist, he genuinely believed that people could feel eyes on them. TBH I kinda vibe with that; It's a mood. Now that my visibility is assured (at least in my mind) by my presentation, I feel eyes on me non-stop whenever I'm out the house. Are there actually eyes on me? I have no fucking clue - best I could say is probably. Either way I feel like it's safest if I go with the presumption that there is.

Result? The couple hundred yards between me and my nearest McDonald's is a heady brew of dysphoria and anxiety prefaced with a solid half hour in front of the mirror, closely examining my face and body for traces of masculinity in an attempt to preempt any critique/gauge just how feminine I can present without drawing attention. Eventually I'll get out the house - probably wearing at least one layer of clothes too many, and one layer of makeup less than I'd actually like - and head down, face covered with hair, speed walk the 0.1 mile to the restaurant.

Once I'm in, it's over to the nearest self-serve machine and punch my order in like it's going out of fashion, and then wait... After the obligatory eternity my order is up and I grab it, and just when I allow the thought that I might actually make the journey unscathed and unclogged, I hear it, or something like it, just on the threshold of audibility, from the group in the booth by the door who've spent this whole time muttering amongst themselves: "Is that a man?". And just like that, my day is ruined.

ASH

Anyone that says they're a morning person is lying.

There's only one thing I feel I reap the *full* benefits of from getting up early in the morning. And no, it's not having the whole day to myself. I don't want the whole day to myself, why would I want the whole day to myself?

I'll tell you in bad puns, so you can laugh instead of pitying me. I make no promise that upon reflection you *will* pity me again when you realise I'm trapped, many of us are trapped, in an inescapable poverty cycle. More on that later, but probably not more on that later because I'll probably start crying. It's not 'romantic' or 'bohemian' or 'fun' to be counting pennies outside a Sainsburys so you can buy a loaf of bread whilst having to tell Sarah and her 5 year old brat on a micro-scooter to stop staring. This isn't a museum of poverty, this is real life- so stop being so nosey.

So, on the off chance that I do wake up early, and find myself with "the whole day to myself", I need to start with an immediate form of escapism- and this sounds a lot more glamorous than it is. No, it could be glamorous: I could wake and wash, do a cut crease eye look and get dressed. More likely wake and bake, pick the crust out my eyes and stay in pyjamas. Check the time, once twice three times in a minute. Pick my nails, pick my face, pick which friend to talk to about the incessant picking. Pick how to *make myself feel better* - I'll only have energy for one thing. Actual help, such as calling my GP, sitting on hold till I'm eventually connected to Sandra at the front desk who will somehow hang up on me by accident just as I was being connected. I'll then lay in bed dreaming of what might have happened had I eventually gotten through and made the call. I imagine it goes along the lines of : be immediately referred for all the specialist psychological help I need and be "cured" within the day. Simple. Probably not that simple, but one step closer to it being that simple. Alternatively, there's void filling distraction help, such as 5 hash browns and a large coke. Let's not pretend it's a hard choice. Maccies breakfast.

Socks? Mismatched. Pyjamas? Stained. Birkenstock's? Lost. North Face slides it is, they're comfier anyway. Pink puffer jacket because I'm not me without it, hair in a messy bun and out the d- back in the door because I forgot the keys. Back out the door and oh it's bright. And oh, there's people. Eyes to the left and it's my GPs office. Can't walk on that side of the road, what if Sandra sees me. She definitely knows I'm not taking my antibiotics, and definitely does not care, but I do anyway. Eyes to the right and it's the estate agents. Rents late, so I'm pretending I don't exist. It's pretty easy, you just put your phone on airplane mode then cry every night questioning why you were denied

financial security and if you'll ever be written off being written off work. You might need to read that last bit again for it to make sense.

I go back inside. Succumbing to the higher power. The higher power being the £3 delivery charge, so I can bow down to agoraphobia and stay inside. I'll sit on the doorstep and wait. Are they here? They're here. No that's not them, here they are. They're here.

I get a large coke because it's three portions of small cokes. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. It can sit and sweat on the bedside table all day, and comfort my predictable fluctuating mood. By all day, I mean two days, sometimes three.

Phobias pandered to, mouth greasy, belly full.

ELLIE

THE NUMBER ONE RULE IS ONLY, ONLY USE THE SELF SERVICE MACHINE.

The self service machine brings me peace, no communication needed, just me taking my time and able to order what I actually want because I'm not mortified to say the words out loud or take my headphones off to talk.

Big headphones on, playlist with all the songs I've been listening on repeat to all day obsessively flowing through my frazzled, socially inept brain. It has taken four hours to convince myself I can leave the house, but the pyjamas I wear with a jumper (not pyjamas if you wear a jumper- then it's technically an outfit choice) allow me to take some comfort with me for the ride.

I hope that the place is empty, I can't bear to be seen around food or buying food or thinking about food or... you get it, I'm ashamed of being alive and needing basic things. I think about how little money I have and how I definitely shouldn't spend it on diet coke and fries (but like, let a girl live?) I spend half an hour convincing myself it's ok to buy things sometimes.

As I walk towards the golden arches I pray to the gods that the machines are working, the ridiculous amount of shame I carry with food forbids me from saying my order aloud, and asking the cashier for the very specific random items I want is somehow embarrassing to me.

My mind is like a rolodex, flicking through my order over and over, strategising and making sure I remember, like I don't order the same exact items every time I go.

Googling the calorific damage I'll be doing to myself and then thinking of my mum berating me and the four days of avoiding food that'll follow this trip of self-indulgence. I hate that word, 'indulgence', it's like when making the word (because people make words, like, someone sat there and made them), they just wanted you to feel guilty for even saying it.

I'm the only person in the world walking on this street, time has frozen and nothing exists, what I'm seeing before me isn't real and I really miss my cat. It hurts my heart and I change my order again to "I'll just get a Diet Coke please".

Poundland is good for the soul but Maccies counts as hot food and therefore self care and maybe that's ok sometimes. I can't carry cash because one, I can't count it and two, it reminds me that money exists and I'm too sick to work but I desperately *want* to. More sad.

Eyes down as I feel stares all over my skin and the world tears it's way through me, everything's loud, everything's bright, everyone's mean. I quicken my pace and my broken fake birkenstocks can hardly keep up with me (I have been meaning to stick the sole back together with the bathroom sealant I have in the cupboard for like a year now). I trip (twice) and my body sweats with stress and embarrassment (ask me to do anything but regulate my body temperature, please god), I'm almost there, so close I can almost taste the perfectly watered down diet coke.

Finally, four hours after the thought was planted, I finally made it through the doors and scuttled in. Oh for fucks sake, the self service machines are broken.

Gabriella Davies - I'm a 28 year old artist who has run away from being poor and marginalised in Stoke to live the artists dream of being poor and marginalised in London. Previously described as 'a reasonable balance of swearing & insight' and 'chic & tacky all at the same time', I'm a working-class trans woman from the midlands with an answer for everything. Known as the queen of one-liners, with a knack for killer titles, I play to my strengths; taking class and gender and turning them on the world as my lens.

Ellie Harman-Taylor - I am a 22 year old artist living in London, freshly graduated with a BA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins and some nice big debt to make me even poorer than I already was. I make work thinking about my community- the sick, the poor, the menatly ill, the disabled. I like to explore how we have to move through the world and the mundanity of it all; the doctors appointments multiple times a week, going to the job centre and telling the scary man that never smiles that you piss blood sometimes and want to die multiple times a day.

Ashleigh Williams - I'm Ashleigh Williams and I'm average at best, aggressively mediocre- whatever you wanna call it. My work aims to highlight the importance of lived experience, and in return maybe have some content beyond your classic art jargon. Something my family can access. When you're an underrepresented part of the 'art scene', presence and existence become socially engaging and political. Moral of the story? More people like us need representation