

No New Normal

By Teagan Kessler

Meet Esther,
who hated her grad program so much
(because using Zoom post-pandemic is so out of touch)
that she rage-quit on the last day of her last semester.

For weeks, the talking heads on the news had said,
It's finally safe to go out! Burn all your homemade masks!
Kiss grandma on the mouth! Sleep with any stranger who asks!
But weeks later, Esther still lay in her twin-XL bed.

Was it lingering fear? Inertia? What she'd learned the French call *ennui*?
that kept her from going out and partying till she pukes?
or fucking all the Tinder Tims and Tadds and Lukes?
What kept her in bed, getting up only for DoorDash and to pee?

Then one day, her student loan funds ran dry,
and she was forced to think her life decisions through,
because soon those soul-sucking payments would be coming due.
She got up, put on actual pants, and decided she had to try.

She finished getting dressed, putting her newfound energy to the test.
Hell, when was the last time she'd actually worn shoes?
Did they just say "pandemic" again on the news?
Geez, thought she, *when will they give COVID-19 a rest?*

"Fuck it," said she, "it's finally time to have some fun."
And so she spent her week at raucous bars and in subway cars,
and moshing at packed punk-rock concerts under the stars—
and promptly came down with COVID-21.