Emily Yourman

**An objective look at a five-story walk-up**

The story is straightforward, and as follows: the neighbors upstairs didn’t want to knock and tell the neighbors downstairs that they could hear them singing rather loudly and off-key because they knew last night Anita had burnt a souffle and the neighbors had said nothing then— even when the odor of burnt orange loomed in the air for hours and burrowed into the upholstery—so if they said something now the downstairs neighbors would surely feel some level of disdain and certainly come knocking the next time Anita inevitably forgot to set a timer for one of her concoctions or let the bath water run over onto the tile and print circular patterns into the neighbors ceiling (Derek had insisted they rent a place with a claw-foot tub, and Anita found this non-negotiable endearing in the ‘I know my taste and what I want’ kind of way that Derek lived and breathed, but he hadn’t used it once in the year that they had lived together and it now it menaced over the bathroom with a sickeningly sterile white porcelain sheen) and, anyway, the neighbors both liked the established relationship of don’t-ask-me-for-a-cup-of-sugar and please dear god do-not-talk-to-me-about-the-weather as we climb up the five flights of this walk-up but yes, let’s listen to our boots squelch and pretend not to hear each other’s heavy breathing and yes, maybe it was true that Anita noticed how the lady downstairs had light purple rain boots that were just short enough so she could see orange and yellow striped socks peeking out, but that only made her think about her own ankles that were littered with scars from borrowing boots that were not her own because she refused to buy the chunky-heavy-black-buckled platform Demonias that seemed to be the uniform for the so-called dinner parties that Derek would take her to, but upon arrival always consisted of adults nursing glasses of wine in the brick lined backyards of their brownstones and maybe watching a good friend paint or fiddle away on the guitar, but whatever it was, it left a rancid taste of ostentatiousness or (maybe narcissism) so sometimes Anita would leave early to go home but when she would reach her door, decide not to go inside and instead travel to her dear friend Bea’s house that was precisely twenty-four minutes away on the F train, who’s rattling sounded awfully similar to the so-called music that Derek’s friends played, and she would sit on the shiny slick blue seats and listen to the sterile pre-recordings announcing which stop it was and softly exhale as the train climbed above ground and yes, the brutalist architecture of the factories may not be the prettiest view but at least the lights around them twinkled and she would soon reach the stop where Bea lived and sink into her plush couch for the night—a couch that had a ridiculous array of blankets because Bea could not seem to stop weaving them or buying them or receiving them as gifts, but Anita supposed it was fine because none of them were itchy—and escape the austerity of living with herself and Derek, who most certainly would never notice their downstairs neighbors’ striped socks and purple boots, in fact, Anita was almost certain her boyfriend was colorblind but never felt the need to stray from the mediums of poetry and charcoal and his beloved tri-x 400—that he insisted could not go through the x-ray machines at the airport so Anita would stand with her shoes off in the security line waiting for a TSA agent with striking frown lines to hand check his precious film—and so Derek lived on, undiagnosed, content with the beatnik black print of his Kerouac and the grey glow of his Word documents and an aesthetic taste that was based on the appreciation of form, an appreciation that attracted him to Anita in the first place, when they met in line at that god-awful camera shop that had nothing wrong with it besides the high-nosed and smudged eyeliner crowd it attracted (Anita was there only because she wanted to get the film developed from the little disposable cameras she set out at her brother’s wedding) but she ended up being plucked out of the crowd by Derek—she did have an effervescent look about her that shone even though he probably had no way of knowing the scarf that adorned her neck was vibrantly multicolored—but his fascination with form now inspired his dark eyes to graze on one woman too many during the punk shows that he would drag her to, shows that Anita begrudgingly wore outfits to that were more appropriate for a funeral than anything else, but that was almost fitting, so part of her didn’t really mind, but for the most part she hated peeling off her rainbow striped stockings and outfitting herself with a different skin in a reptilian-like fashion because the charade was simply that—a charade—and as she lived and loved with Derek for longer and longer she became less convinced he truly felt like himself in his leather pants and more convinced he encased himself in a shell so he would appear shinier to others, and it was honestly insulting that she had to cancel her baking class to go see his favorite band that was ‘so important’ Anita went to because he wanted her to ‘understand his scene’ but she had been to so many at this point and did not, in fact, ‘understand his scene’ and would much rather be volunteering at the library or even sitting and watching grass grow because at least then she could be at peace, and there was absolutely no peace at the venues they went to or the backyards they sat in, so was it really so bad when Anita knocked on the door of her neighbor with a key-lime tart she had just baked to ask where on earth she had managed to find such exquisite purple boots, and was it really a crime when she didn’t break eye contact and noticed how her neighbor smelled like mint?