

Christopher Shortsleeve
from *Brick City*

What can I say about my life in New York? It's a brain-sick city. Fantastically defeated. The aura of defeat and exhaustion is everywhere. It's a city where the s*** smell reaches fifth story walk-ups. Where the spending of unnecessary money is a highly philosophical act. Where the Ima-be-somebodies hurl and clack themselves around desperately like the whole place is on its last legs.

In New York, I eat a lot of cereal. Lucky Charms and Captain Crunch, and people wear purple everywhere you go – purple Yankees hats, purple hip-hop sneakers, purple T-shirts that say stupid things like, I Only Like New York as a Friend. I have a studio apartment near City College, in Sugar Hill. The apartment's OK. OK because the space is decent and the locks all work. OK because my brother pays for it, paid for it, that is, before he got shot in the neck and chest area three days ago on September 5th. OK because even though the floors are slanted, even though the water pressure is sub par, from the roof you can see Dirty Jersey, glowing and comfortable in its mediocre grossness, that place where real life begins.

In New York, nothing has really happened to me so far. I go to parties and look at my phone the whole time. I go to movies and either feel mildly let down, feel mildly entertained, or I look at my phone. I think a lot of people live their lives like this. Like they're in a train station and their brains have been ripped out and they're just zombie-limping it into the first car at random. I would like to be part of something but I don't know what. All I know is I want it to be really huge.

In New York, my super's name is Manny. His pretty-in-an-ancient-way wife is named Claribel. They're real nice people and it's weird to say, but whenever I see them, I hope they

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never die. There's a quiet class war raging in our neighborhood. They follow it real closely, it makes them so anxious, divided loyalties. The war is played out asymmetrically in sushi restaurants and poodle s***. In amateur graffiti and elevator piss. In the coded speeches of terrifyingly androgynous Neighborhood Association representatives. In loud-as-f***, crack-your-sternum-open, Saturday morning Reggaeton. Our building is the Antietam.

In New York, I treat the library like an open Pringles can. I give people who are dressed better than me the intentionally wrong directions. I always walk real slow and gangster, everywhere I go. Like Fallujah took my calf muscles. Like I'm the one who's shot. This is the New York that I live in. The New York I barreled out of, on a 27 mile-an-hour PATH train, for a family funeral back home. What more could I possibly say that's interesting about this? What else does New York have in it that you cannot find in a splattered, runny egg?