

“Working Girl”

By Ife Olujobi

I don't have any black friends. I'm black. But I don't have any black friends.

I heard that instead of one black friend, you have to have two now not to be a racist. I don't really...well, I have me. But I wouldn't really consider me a friend. I wouldn't consider me a racist. I don't like myself very much.

The delivery guy from the Cuban restaurant a few blocks over...he's black and he tries to chat me up sometimes. I think, maybe I should be nicer to him. I'm nice to him, you know, I just mean, like, you know, smile back. My boss tells me to smile. Everyone at my office is white.

The Cuban food isn't for me. It's for Ryan. The delivery guy – I should learn his name, yes – he leaves it on my desk and I knock on Ryan's door and he flashes his hazel eyes at me and maybe our hands touch when I give him the bag. I mention his eyes are hazel because they are, not because I have some, like, thing for him. I don't. He's gay. Which makes me feel like we could relate, in some way. His boyfriend, or lover, or the man who he's fucking or whatever came to visit him at the office one day and they were waiting by the elevator and Ryan kissed him so I could see. It was kind of a little show but it was sweet. I'd like to think we shared a moment of minoritarian solidarity. But then he goes down and a few minutes later he comes back up in the middle of a phone call and he goes back to his office and closes the door and he is still a rich white man and I am still the girl who brings him his food. He only looks at me to be polite.

I saw Alton Sterling on the cover of the New York Posts I distribute every morning but no one ever talks about it so neither do I. Sometimes I feel like crying but I try to stay busy. Busy-looking, at least. The insurrectionist in me is bolstered by bad coffee. Maybe I'll buy a pin and wear it for everyone to see. I'll get big hoop earrings. Grow out my hair. I get an email about tracking a USPS package. It's undeliverable, so I have to call into the help line and recite the pre-selected phrases and then keep pressing zero until I hear signs of human life.

I work mostly because I have to, partly because it looks good. In my downtime I negotiate the difference between shyness and self-sabotage. I don't get a lunch break, so I sustain myself with occasional mouthfuls of salt and pepper chips when their backs are turned because I don't want them to see me eating. It would make me too real. I'd prefer if they thought of me as a cordial appliance. This is a place of business, after all.

I spend nine hours a day at work. I go home to an empty apartment. My roommate is white but she's literally never home. Probably too busy hanging out with all her boyfriend's black friends. I suppose I have black friends by proxy. Black friends in

theory. I am a black friend to other people. Does that count? Thinking of my life as a part of someone else's is dizzying but it makes me feel like it adds up to something more than subway rides between white walls.