

Weird Club
a novel

Seth Sawyers

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The night I saw, finally, that my little plum tree in my little back yard was for sure dying, I sent Violet a note, trying not to sound as desperate and empty as I felt in my guts. I could feel it, another summer of too many beers at bars that didn't care about me, whole runs of TV shows I'd already seen, dates at the symphony or the baseball stadium that would be fine but never anything else. A whole summer of fretting over dark clumps slowly eating my plum tree. But Violet didn't ghost me. She wrote: *Where have you been, jerk*. And I was, all over again, filled with that feeling, with Violet, of being pulled quickly, deliciously out to sea.

Turns out she goes back to Cumberland often, to visit her mother, who had a stroke that put her in a nursing home up on Haystack Mountain. Her stepfather died years before. Violet and I made plans. It felt too easy.

First night, at this downtown bar neither of us had been to, she was already there. As soon as I got to the booth, jacket still on, she said: So what's all this about? You lonely or something? That first one was weird, neither of us comfortable, but she's in town often enough, and she needs the distraction, I think, so we keep doing it.

A weekend a month, I drive west from Baltimore, and she comes down from Pittsburgh. We meet on Fridays at the same place, in what used to be blue Allegany territory, close to