

Sonically, there are a few things we got right in the '90s: stompy, rage-fueled queer bands; hazy, uber-pedaled guitar; poeticism to be yelled full-chested towards the windshields of our 2nd (or 3rd, or 4th) hand vehicles. More generally, there was also a lot we got wrong: conversations on mental health, non-conventional identities, issues of accessibility and opportunity, etc. Sarah Shook's new solo project, *Mightmare*, finds a way to roll those sounds we couldn't live without into a response about the issues we couldn't live with, confronting personal habits and rules in the process. Loved for their work in Sarah Shook and the Disarmers, Shook's *Cruel Liars* brings their crispy clean, country-twanged vocals to the table alongside a furiously urgent need to express themselves independently.

*Cruel Liars* is a brick taped to the gas pedal in an "I am here unbridled, with clear eyes" sort of rebirth; taking all the pieces of themselves they needed and lighting the rest on fire. From "Saturn Turns" ('...*speed into the curve cos I'm lookin for / any old road I ain't been down before*') to "Sure Thing's" ('...*I'm packin' all my records up and turnin' out the light / ain't gonna be no memories gonna haunt me down tonight*'), *Cruel Liars* takes us through a process of self-made catharsis written over the course of pandemic lockdown. As their first formal rodeo with full engineering and producing credit, Shook's intrinsic fidelity in finding what turns a song into a *song* is clear in every layer and transition. Turns out you can self-produce incredible lemonade out of isolation lemons.

*Cruel Liars* marks their process of finding meaning in recovery—facilitated in no small part by how much open space they discovered outside of gender or drinking or protocol. Shook cites affordable therapy (found through [OpenPathCollective.org](https://www.openpathcollective.org)) as a piece of their process, something that many queer and low-income people struggle to gain access to even in the best of times. Although the gravity of healing can be overwhelmingly heavy, it can also slingshot a record towards something both conceptually remarkable and a simply exhilarating, embodied knockout.