

If I Stay Right Here

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Abstract

My novella concerns the dynamics of a relationship between two girls. It shows the heterosexual-like nature of the relationship rather than dwelling on the pressures on lesbians from society as a whole. At its core is the raw emotion and passion of the relationship, which is at the same time toxic, destructive and volatile because of their class differences and other insecurities. The work is influenced by the grit, openness, and innovation of several contemporary writers.

What is sex?

Sex is a humid climate. You can't breathe because the air is so moist but you like how it wets your skin. It makes you feel like an exotic creature on an island holding an open coconut over its head, letting the juice pour over its breasts. Sex is sweat dripping down the back of your neck and in between your thighs. Sex is messy yet so sexy, suffocating yet freeing.

What is desire?

Desire is snow. Snow depends on a lick from the sun to liquidate and start to trickle. Desire is a longing like the long-distance relationship between snow and water. Snow wants nothing more than to get a chance to be with water. It's always so close yet so far. Distance is determined by temperature. When snow finally meets water it realises that water is very much like snow. It gets underwhelmed, waits for temperatures to drop again so it can solidify. The cycle of desire is continuous, inevitably.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a badger trying to figure out why it looks different to an otter. Loneliness is a hamster trying to outshine a guinea pig. Loneliness is a puppy getting left behind while others get picked at the pet store.

What is obsession?

Trying to fix a broken chair without realising that the chair is just bent at the knees and that's how it was born.

What is a dyke?

A dyke is a question mark that comes with an exclamation and a few emoticons like a smile, frown, angry look, indifferent, sick, in love, bored, drunk. A dyke is an intricate, undecipherable encryption.

Against Regulations

My heart beat faster as I drove towards the entrance. I passed the high fence with barbed wire and felt the coldness that came from within, a coldness that somehow summoned me.

At the security booth I was greeted by a boom gate with a stop sign. A man in beige uniform peered out and signalled for me to roll down my window. He was dark, sweating under his cap, but surprisingly cheerful. Perhaps the *maskhande* music coming from his loud radio had something to do with that.

“Eh...hello, who are you coming to see?”

“Mrs Baynard, the senior warder,” I said.

“Name and surname please?”

“Shay T. – I write for a site called FlipTheCover.com.”

“Alright.”

He turned around, whistled, hunched down as he walked back into his booth. His pointy ass bobbed in an improvised Khoi San dance. I watched him turn down the radio, pick up his walky-talky and mumble something quickly, in a formal tone. He nodded then signalled for me to go in. I sighed with relief, anxiety building up in my throat. It had taken us a few weeks to organise and negotiate this visit. We hadn't covered a female prison before.

I was overwhelmed by the vastness of the main building. Tall face-brick walls with multiple barred windows, prisoners' waving disjointed arms, luring me like Sirens. I listened to them shout out I-love-yous and whistle as I got out of the car.

Mrs Baynard was waiting for me at the entrance of the Arrivals Centre. I walked towards her, smiled to show I wasn't freaked out by the atmosphere of the place. She was a chubby but confident woman in her neat beige uniform; a jersey with green shoulder pads, a tight pencil skirt and brown court shoes. I followed her into a building where a couple of women

hung around, waiting to be allocated to cells. She walked fast through long passages with high ceilings, occasionally turning around to speak to me as we passed different sections. At a closed door, she slowed down.

“This large room is where the newcomers get checked for drugs and such.”

I stepped closer to the door. I hoped to hear some kind of protest, some sign of resistance or conflict but it was silent. Nothing could be heard through the metal door.

“So they’re in there right now?” I asked.

“Yes, we have a few in there now.”

“May I see?”

“Why?”

I wasn’t prepared for her reaction or the question.

“I guess I just wanted to get an idea how it’s done.”

“Oh. Well they’re made to strip, open their mouths, spread their arms and squat three times,” she said, without hesitation, like she was giving me a recipe for a Sunday roast.

“Oh,” I said.

She turned away and started to walk down the corridor. I followed her, imagining how ghastly and inhumane the whole process must be. Inhumane or incredibly sexy?

I found myself wanting to be part of the dirtiness and roughness, like I was missing out on a pig-sty orgy. “Squat three times,” she had said, and then what?

Realising the increasing space between us, Mrs Baynard turned back towards me.

“Don’t look so worried. We have to do a thorough check so we can make sure that no drugs or weapons enter the building. These girls can be very sneaky. It’s for their own good.”

She set off again, this time a bit slower. I could feel the air getting damper and muskier as we went further in, like we were in the armpit of an obese Cyclops. The mould crawled up every corner and crevice, especially the ones in the high ceiling. The sound of our shoes was too loud. It echoed high and wide at a paralyzing pitch. Mrs Baynard walked on without fear.

“Sippy is 1 of our sweetest. She does what she is told and rarely gets into trouble. She’s also a bit shy so I hope you’ll get the information you need.”

I didn't know much about Sippy except that she was recommended to us by "the people upstairs." It made me nervous to walk into a situation I wasn't well prepared for. We reached a room with a table and two chairs. A guard was standing outside. Mrs Baynard told me to sit down and wait for Sippy's arrival.

"Usually we don't allow anyone to do this, so count yourself lucky. Remember, don't show any fear and relax your face. Good luck!"

With that said she left and closed the door.

The room was cold with grey walls, now only partly grey, the other part scraped off. "Okay Shay, calm down," I whispered as I put my notepad and pen on the table. I wasn't sure what this Sippy would say or do but I figured that my posture would matter. I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be relaxed and slouched or poised and professional. I was told that she's also in her twenties and somehow this made me more nervous. If I acted too old she'd laugh in my face, for sure, but if I acted like I didn't care she would make fun of me for trying too hard to be cool.

The door opened and I heard the shuffling of feet but couldn't bring myself to turn around. The guard sat her down in the seat across the table, uncuffed her hands and left without saying a word. The door was closed once again.

I smiled at her. Her face wasn't scarred, like I had imagined, and she wasn't even big or scary. She was wearing a wife-beater that exposed her skinny arms. One of her forearms was covered in a street tattoo clearly made with hot wire or some dodgy machine. Her navy-blue overalls were tied around her waist and her breasts were squashed and flattened against her chest. I looked at her light-skinned face and was drawn to her small eyes. She had long eyelashes, well-kept cornrows and I noticed her short, neatly clipped nails as she folded her arms on the table. I sat there surprised as I had come convinced that prisoners didn't care about their appearance.

I cleared my throat, sat back in my chair, put my notepad on my lap, hoping to look as unthreatening as possible.

“Hi. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, my name is Shay.”

She looked at me, silently, studying my face.

“I don’t know if they told you but I work for a site called...”

“Do you know that when you talk you hardly open your mouth? She interrupted. Her voice – a husky, deeper tone compared to mine.

“No...no I didn’t know that, and I...”

“They say people who barely open their mouths suck at giving head.”

She chuckled a little and sat back in her chair. Her legs restless and wide apart and her hands resting on top of her head like she had just said, “check mate!”

“This is gonna be fun,” she said with a deep sigh, “What’s Shay short for?”

“Nothing...it’s just Shay.”

“Your teeth are really white, you must come from a good family.”

“If you don’t mind, we don’t have that much time. I just need to ask a few questions. What are you in for?”

I spoke quickly and professionally so she wouldn’t interrupt again.

“I’m in for getting caught fucking girls like you. They complained that the orgasms I gave them were a criminal offence.”

“I...”

I shifted around in my seat before continuing.

“I’m here to get your story out there. I want to know about your past and what led you here. This really has nothing to do with me.”

“My past is my present.”

“Sippy, I just need you to cooperate for...”

“Cooperate, she says...How would a girl like you be able to write about not having anything and having to hustle your whole life? No point in asking for information that you’ll only fluff up and decorate with flowers and butterflies later. This life is no joke. We’re not here to entertain Model C girls so they can go make their school projects colourful.”

“It’s not a school project.”

It was the only thing I could say at that point.

“Do you have a boyfriend? Maybe you like girls, no, you look like you don’t like either. No ring on your finger, thought girls like you married early, I mean what else do you have to worry about?”

“That’s none of your...none of that is relevant.”

I had lost control of the interview. I put my notepad and pen on the table, put my elbows on it and leaned forward. I had seen this in TV-series and movies with an interrogation room scene.

“Cut the crap and tell me what you’re in for!”

“Oooh, tough girl! Hahaha. No but seriously, why don’t you have a boyfriend man?...What’s wrong with you?...Are you cold in bed, dry maybe? Is that it? Or is it mmmaybe because you’re all serious and you dress like you’re 50?”

I kept quiet. I was starting to get angry. I sensed she wasn’t attracted to me...but why did that matter? I got up and walked towards the door, too embarrassed to look at her.

“And then what will you tell your bosses huh?” she said, “Sit down, sit your ass down!”

I could’ve left but I didn’t. I found myself turning, walking back to my chair.

“You think I’m the 1 with problems just because I call this place home? You come here with a notepad like you’re monitoring the progress of a monkey in a lab. I could very well be you and you me. None of us give a fuck anymore! This is what we have so we just deal.”

She seemed angry. Maybe if I pushed further, harder, she would say more.

“Trust me, I could never be you,” I said.

“Oh, yes you could. Why do you think they picked you to come and interview me?”

“Because I’m a journalist and you’re a prisoner.”

“But there are other journalists, I’m sure, and there are many of us in here.”

“I live closest to this prison...and the warder said you’re the best behaved.”

“Oh, is that what they told you? Do you know which cell block I stay in?”

“No.”

"I thought so. Have you ever been with a girl Shay?"

"No," I said without thinking. I wasn't sure why I had answered that or where it came from.

She sat forward in her chair, bit her lower lip, and scanned my chest with her eyes. She reached across the table and touched my hand. I let her. Her hand was surprisingly warm, soft. I shivered a little and felt my fingers twitch with shock under her palm. She looked at me with a smirk on her face, fingers lightly tracing the veins in my hands. My pussy clenched and released sporadically. I shifted in my seat hoping to crush the sensation. It didn't work. I felt excited and repulsed at the same time. I needed to get a grip. I snatched my hand back, stood up, and opened the door. There were 2 guards waiting, 1 of them walked with me and the other went into the room. Suddenly the passages were hot and narrower than what I remembered. My legs seemed to hesitate with each step as though I had gotten up too quickly, left too quickly.

Mrs Baynard was still at the Arrivals Centre talking to another warder when I came around the corner.

"Done already?" she asked.

"Yes, yes I think I got everything."

"I hope she wasn't too difficult, she comes out in a few weeks you know. Anyway, have a good day."

"Thanks, you too. Thank you for everything," I said as I walked towards the exit.

I was glad to feel the sun on my skin again. I walked towards my car and realised I had come out empty handed. My notepad was still in the room.

Something Short

We kept in contact – letters, calls for a month. Well, letters to her, she preferred to call. She kept my notepad and I told myself that the only reason I kept in touch was because she still had it. I believed that. Who writes their number in a notepad anyway? The tendencies of a new SIM-card owner. It was probably the 100th time I had lost my phone and had to buy a new 1. I wanted to “lose” this phone too so that she wouldn’t be able to reach me but my parents had threatened that this was the last time they were buying me a phone. Besides, the problem wasn’t the actual phone, it was the number. Who knew how much trouble 10 digits could get you in? But it was trouble I wanted to be in.

There I was, waiting for her to come out. I fixed my hair 3 times in the rear-view mirror. It was tied up in a small bun, a style I figured would make me look exotic as it pulled my eyes outward, with the help of black eyeliner. I wanted to appear as a cheeky wild cat. The light wind kept freeing my hair strands from this bondage and yet I needed all my troops to pull off the look. I had to be perfect for Sip.

I stood next to the driver’s seat, at first, with the door opened. I then closed the door and stood straight like I was back in high school at assembly or line-up. I put my elbow on top of the car, kind of leaning, but it still wasn’t quite right.

She said she wanted to see me in something short so I wore a black short skirt with a sheer, loose short-sleeved blouse that showed my black bra underneath. The blouse kept bulging in the midriff – the wind trying to mess up my look again. I kept flattening it with my hand, my newly painted choral nails glistening in the sun. I chose to wear my gold earrings. A friend had forgotten them in my bag after a night out so they were mine now. They hung so low they were touching my shoulders – club earrings – the types that elongate your neck.

I walked around to the front of the car and considered sitting on the bonnet. Women in adverts and music videos do that all the time. Maybe Sip’s first day out, after 3 months, should be filled with a music video dream. I didn’t quite know what that meant or why I cared so much but I was starting to learn that standing in a sexy way was a difficult thing.

My lips were pink – naturally – and glossy. My toes also painted coral and strapped in black Sissy Boy sandals. It was odd to wear so much black in the middle of the day but surely this unspoken rule didn't apply on a Friday.

I changed my mind a 1000 times and wanted to start the car, drive off and pretend I was never there. But we had spoken on the phone too many times for me not to come, or to come and then leave. I walked back into the car and sat waiting, sweating – the kind of sweat that wets your hands and makes you tremor. I hadn't been that nervous since my driver's licence test. We had spoken about so much garbage on the phone that we forgot to tell each other not to be nervous – the important stuff. We tried phone sex once, like it would've ever worked in her situation.

It went like:

"What you wearing?"

"Are you being for real?"

"What you wearing?"

"This is silly, it won't work."

"Come on, babe."

She had started calling me "babe." It had been a while since someone called me that. She said it so naturally, like I was hers no matter what I said or thought. Once, I slipped up and called her "baby." I couldn't take it back after that. "Babe" and "baby" go well together.

"A lacy G-string," I said, finally.

"You're lying."

"I'm not, I promise."

"Ok, then take it off."

"Don't they record your calls?"

"Take it off."

"Sip, we don't have time for this."

"Is it off?"

"Ok, it's off."

It wasn't.

"I want you to touch your pussy."

"Touch what?"

"Your pussy."

"Now?"

"Yes. And put the phone against it so I can hear you play with it."

"Sip."

"Shay."

"No."

"Please."

....

"Did you hear?"

"...Fuck!"

"What?"

"Nothing...I just...when I see you I'm gonna...damn. I'm gonna fuck you so hard!"

"I'm not gonna let you."

"I'm gonna make you."

The phone cut.

Here I was waiting for someone I had only seen once. So much can change in 2 months. I wondered if she had undone her cornrows or if she would come out in a dress. Maybe the butch look was just a facade, something to help her look less like a pussy inside. I started thinking that I wouldn't be attracted to her then but why was that?...a question that hung mid-air and evaporated.

I started thinking that maybe she had changed, maybe they had roughed her face up or she had lost more weight, but how? She was already skinny. Or the opposite, what if she was bigger, darker, stranger?...stranger? She was a stranger already. I didn't want to take a strange stranger back to the flat but she had nowhere else to go. Her father knew she was in prison but her mother thought she was still at Technikon, at least that's what she told me. She hated her father and had told him she'd kill him if he told her mother. Of course she

didn't mean it. There was love in her voice when she spoke about him during our calls. There can be so much love in hate.

I played the radio and tuned it to 5fm. I upped the volume so we wouldn't have to speak. "Drunk in love" played right on cue. A song by a sexy artist surely made me look sexy too. I hadn't considered music when I got dressed up at home. My friends always played these big Beyoncé songs when they got ready for a club, which seemed to make them feel as though they were just as hot and famous or that they too "run the world" and are "flawless". But I didn't feel hot and famous in that moment. I was worried about what Sip would think. I wanted to be better than what she imagined.

It was too damn hot in the car. The kind of heat that makes your thighs and butt crack wet. I got out and just as I was closing the door, I saw a figure walking out of the building towards the security gate. I froze...I think I did. My temples beat hard against my skull. I didn't know whether to wave and be excited or to act as though I hadn't seen her and stare at something far out in the distance. I opened the door, leaned in and quickly upped the volume again, then stood next to the door and looked at her getting closer and closer. She was wearing black skinnies, red sneaker boots and a white t-shirt with a Bob Marley face imprinted in black. The gate opened and there she was. Her hair - a resilient afro despite the wind.

I stepped away from the door and closed it. She was in front of me and my bare legs had forgotten how to stand. She was smiling but avoiding eye contact, her tongue licking her lips, her fingers rubbing her chin.

"You're late," I giggled.

"Yeah...and fashionably so," she winked.

She reached for my waist to hug me. I put my arms around her neck. She held me like we had known each other forever, I think I heard the knots in my back crack. "I'm glad you're finally out," I said in my softest voice. She gave a long sigh of relief and kissed me, holding it like our lips were glued together. She then let go slowly and stood back to look at me.

"You look fucken amazing!"

“Oh these old things? I just put them together. In fact I woke up like this!”

We laughed as we got into the car. The security guard stared at us as we drove away.

Random FlipTheCover Stuff

Tuesdays were the worst. The number of lectures and tuts was obscene. I opened the front door and noticed that Sip wasn't in the lounge, neither was she on the balcony where I usually found her. A few empty Black Label bottles were lined up on the ledge next to a chair in a corner of the balcony. She had left the sliding door wide open. The sheer curtains were flapping wildly - warning me to turn and walk back out. I should've listened.

I closed the door and walked across the lounge to get the bottles and close the sliding door. I grabbed all 3 quarts by the neck, pushed the curtains aside and slid the door shut, assuming that Sip had just forgotten it. I walked towards the kitchen but she wasn't there either, instead I was greeted by dirty pots and dishes piled in the sink just as we had left them the previous night. I threw the bottles in the bin and stared at the mess. I hated cooking but I did most of it. Occasionally she would wash the dishes so that I could cook on a clean surface when I got back from class, but not that day.

Our flat was small with 3 old-fashioned light-green sofas in the lounge. The walls were white with 2 large abstract paintings, of what looked like women carrying umbrellas, hanging in the middle. The best thing about the place was the wooden floors. I liked the sound they made when I walked. Also, some parts were bouncier than others so it was thrilling to think that 1 day the floor might collapse. The kitchen opened to the lounge or the lounge opened to the kitchen, either way it was an open plan. The kitchen was well equipped with a washing machine, microwave, kettle etc. just as the advert had promised.

The neighbourhood was surrounded by private schools so it was quiet during the day. Even when the children got back from school, they were the well-trained/well-raised type who could play without making much noise. Our small block of flats was 1 of only 2 in the area. We had found this fully furnished 1-bedroom flat on Gumtree, or rather I found it and my parents agreed to pay. They had no idea I was sharing it with Sip and neither did the landlord, she was never around to notice anyway.

I went to the bedroom to put my bag down and to change into my joggers and tank top. Sip always told me my ass looked sexy in those. As I walked in I found her sitting there, focused on the computer screen, her hand on the mouse. I had asked my landlord for a golden brown worktable, well just a worktable. It went well with the wardrobe of the same shade, the white linen, and the beige curtains. I had put some artificial plants on top of the bedside cupboards, right behind the bedside lamps. They too complimented the colours of the room. Every time I walked into our room I felt at peace, like all the bullshit of the world had no way of entering such a freeing space. It was different this time though, it felt different.

Sip didn't take her eyes off the screen to even acknowledge my presence. She never sat at the desk because she said my books depressed her, unless, of course, she was creating a playlist or surfing the net. Either way, there would be music blasting, be it Lil' Wayne, Drake, Nicki Minaj or all 3 on the same track. Occasionally I would get home and hear some old-school R&B, that's when she was in a romantic or good mood. This time there was silence, just the sound of rustling leaves outside our window and the clicking of the mouse. Her other hand was covering her mouth, her index finger rubbing an invisible moustache. She had a frown on her face and was hardly blinking.

I looked at the screen and she had opened a folder I had named Random FlipTheCover Stuff. I had put the "random" strategically to deflect any kind of interest from it or the files within it. Clearly it hadn't worked this time. As I walked slowly towards the wardrobe on the far end of the room, my heart started beating harder, uncontrollably. She turned around and looked up at me with the expression she always had when she was disgusted/appalled, a mixed expression of who-are-you and how-could-you. I stood there, waiting. She glazed over my deflated frame and then turned back around to look at the screen. I hoped that my face had a confused expression on it even though I knew what was to come.

After a few seconds, I unstiffened my neck and arms, took my heavy sling-bag off my shoulder and walked towards her, stealthily creeping behind her like a panther. I put my arms around her and rested my head on her shoulder. I gave her a squeeze and kissed her cheek hoping that this wouldn't set her off into a wild rage. "I missed you today," I said, as I watched her scroll up and down the screen. She didn't respond. "How was your day?" I

asked, a kiss on the cheek again. She tightened her jaw and still didn't say a word. The veins in my temples started pulsating louder and faster. Shit-fuck-shit-fuck-fuck-shit-fuck-shit-shit-fuck, I thought, with every downbeat and offbeat. Eventually, she shrugged and raised her elbow so that my arms rolled off her and collapsed at my sides.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Who's this?"

"Where?...In the folder?...Oh, that's just Brent, agh, I mean Brett...sorry. He's one of the guys I interviewed last week. Remember the one I told you about?...He has that problem with..."

"Are you fucking him?"

"No, what?...Why would I...why would you think that?"

"I don't know, maybe because you've saved all the emails between you two and..."

"Oh come on, babe, it's for the site, it's research."

"I'm not a fucken fool Shay, don't piss me off, I just read le shit le!"

27th of Feb:

Him: I want to rape your brain hard.

You: Tell me how.

Him: I will shove my cock deep in your throat until it reaches your brain. I want your brain to leak out! Make you a mindless whore! Do you want that?

You: YES I DO!

28th of Feb:

Him: The next time you come here you won't leave. I'll gag you and make you my slave. You want that?

You: YES I DO!

3rd of March:

Him: I want to..."

"Sip please stop, I know what's there."

"What is this shit Shay? Do you want all this?...Should I fucken get a strap-on now?"

"No."

"So every time you leave the flat with your equipment this is what you go and do?"

"I never did any of it I swear. I only entertain him because he's sick, he doesn't mean any of it, he...it's for research I swear, I don't want him, you know I don't."

"Just shut up!"

"Babe, you're..."

"Shut-the-fuck-up!"

I watched her scroll down the screen as she took the last gulp of her beer. She looked at the empty bottle with frustration and banged it on the table. It tipped over the edge and fell on the floor. I hesitantly walked towards it, picked it up and went to the kitchen without looking at her. I threw it in the bin and stood there wondering if I should bring her another 1. She should stop drinking, I thought, but saying that would only make things worse. I wondered if I should start drinking in preparation for what was to come but no. Maybe that would imply that I thought all was fine, she'd definitely want to prove me wrong.

I opened the fridge and grabbed a Black Label. I didn't know I was shaking until I almost dropped it on the kitchen tiles. I looked for the opener in the drawer and in the sink, eventually guessing she had left it out on the balcony. I fetched it and opened her drink, trying to do it as quickly as possible in case she decided to come looking for me. I preferred her sitting down - not standing - in these situations. When I went back in she was looking at pictures of him, also in the same file. I put the beer next to the keyboard and walked back to my spot near the wardrobe. I tried to keep my movements minimal and silent, as though any sudden sounds/noises would trigger something and result in an attack. It felt much like what people did on the reality show, *My Cat from Hell*. She was clicking around, enlarging the pictures and quickly closing them like she wanted to see and not see them at the same time. I slowly took off my pumps...and then my jeans...and then my top...and then my....

"Are you fucking this guy?" she asked again. Her voice now lower, quieter.

"No, babe, I swear."

"Do you want to?"

"No, of course not, please don't be like this, I'm sorry you had to see that, it's nothing though...promise. I have to make them feel comfortable so they can tell me everything, that's all it is. I do it with all of them so they can trust me."

She turned around and shot me a look, then turned and faced the screen again.

“You’re not going anywhere anymore unless you’re with me, you hear me!?”

I didn’t have the energy to challenge her so I kept quiet.

The silence in the room grew louder. I didn’t know what more to say to calm her down.

When she wouldn’t let me explain I had so much to say but now that she was giving me time and expecting a response, I froze and lost all sense. I carried on taking my clothes off until I was naked. The joggers and my tank top were right there on the shelf but I decided not to reach for them. Instead, I found myself saying, “You’re so sexy when you’re jealous,”– a risky statement. I walked towards her, put my hands on her shoulders and slid them down towards her breasts. I started kissing her neck and felt her muscles relax a little. She said, “Not now,” and moved her head away while still looking at the screen.

I watched her close the folder and start to look for music videos on YouTube. She sat back on the chair in the usual slouched position, put the hood of her sweater on and took a sip of the beer I had brought her. Slightly relieved, I walked back to the wardrobe and got dressed.

How Shay gets her Stories

- Some are sent by the website owners if there's something for her to cover. They either call her or send an email. How she acquires the information is her prerogative, her bosses are only concerned about the final product.
- The general public send her stuff either about themselves or someone they know via email or social media (i.e. Facebook messages). She sometimes posts statuses asking for people to contact her with an obsession or fixation story. She then has to sift through the bullshit and hope she lands on something legit.
- Her own observations in the streets or elsewhere.
- Responses to her existing articles.

Is the camera rolling?

- Transcribed by Shay T.

In his office:

Guy: First of all, my apologies for making you come here at this time, it's just that I have a busy schedule during the day, I'm swamped, I mean I'm talking meeting after meeting, magazines wanting me in the centrefold and other photo shoots because, as you know, I also do a lot of modelling stuff, I mean between my secretary, personal assistant, and manager, none of them are actually ma-na-ging. I'm telling you it's insane! But anyway, I don't want to bore you with all that. My point is this is the only time you're going to get.

Me: Oh, that's ok, I don't think we'll need more than one session. Thank you for...

Guy: Is the camera rolling? And where is this going to be published? I understand it's going to be online but where? Wouldn't want to tarnish the Steinfeld brand. My face is just everywhere lately. I can't take the risk.

Me: I understand. It's just a site about successful, attractive eligible bachelors, such as yourself, making it in the business world. I won't even use your real name.

Guy: Oh, but you must. No one would read that article otherwise, plus I don't give my time unless I'm given full credit for the outcome. It's how I keep my place at the top.

Me: Yes, your brother said you'd...

Guy: (he laughs) That guy! He's always been so jealous of me. I'm surprised he organised an interview with someone as attractive as you because that's very risky for him. He wishes he could get all the attention, I mean all the women and money...Sorry I digress, you were saying?

Me: Just that he spoke highly of you. By the way, I haven't been able to look away from that painting on your wall. The colours are striking...almost as though the purple and orange are fighting for space. Sorry, I'm just crazy about abstract art, all the shapes and angles. It's all mathematical really, that's the only way an artist pulls it off. Every shape serves a purpose and fills a space...although very restricted.

Guy: Yes, no definitely. I'm glad you noticed it. I was in Milan just the other day and my friend, Giorgio Armani, took me to this exclusive art gallery where there was only one of each piece of art. I thought it was ridiculous at first because the walls were so

empty but he informed me that only the elite were invited because, you know, we can afford such things.

Me: Oh, wow. How did you and Mr Armani meet?

Guy: He made this suit. In fact he makes all my suits. Didn't Dwayne tell you anything? He saw me online and emailed me wanting to use me for a Vogue photo shoot. I was busy at the time but I visited him at a later stage. He called my manager for all the legal stuff and I've been wearing him since then. Of course I don't pay anything, I'm doing him a solid by wearing this.

Me: So you endorse as well then...like celebrities.

Guy: I am a celebrity except I'm not the type to go around saying that. Listen, if this interview is to continue let's establish one thing, respect. I'm not here to tell you how famous I am so watch your questions!

Me: I apologise. It was a silly thing to say.

Guy: Anyway, I was saying. I hardly pay for any item of clothing. Designers line up to have me wear their clothes because I have a large following in both business and social media. But of course you know this otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here.

Me: When I Google your name, articles about you dating Karla Homolka flood my screen. Is that true?...I mean as you know, Homolka is a notorious Canadian serial killer.

Guy: Yes, yes I've read about her but goodness no I don't know her like that. Unfortunately when your face is everywhere, people take advantage of your fame. The media, you guys, lie sometimes to sell some paper or magazine. I have no affiliations with that woman.

(He gets up) Where are my manners, do you take scotch? I'm getting a double and a cigar.

Me: No, thank you, I'm intending on having an early night.

Guy: Suit yourself...and no I didn't use the word, "suit," deliberately. (He laughs). That's the problem with you journalists, you work way too hard and for how much? Minimum wage. I didn't get here by working hard, I work smart. Are you sure you're ok? Comfortable? Alright? Ok.

Me: If you don't mind me asking, what does your job actually entail?

Guy: Well, that's a dumb question, I'm the CEO therefore I do a CEO's job. It's quite self-explanatory especially if you've done your homework and I'm assuming that you have.

Me: Yes I know, I was just wondering what you do from day to day and...

Guy: You would have to ask my secretary about that one. I don't know half the things I do, all I know is that everything I touch turns to gold. I mean if I'm not here I'm busy modelling or getting laid by a high-profile escort (he laughs out loud and takes a sip), free of charge might I add.

Me: Alright. So I understand you've had some work done on your face?

Guy: (taking a drag from the cigar and fixing his tie) Yes, a little tweaking of the nose and lifting of cheek bones. I also got hair implants. If I hadn't told you I'd done that you wouldn't have known but it was quite bad. A receding hairline is just not part of the plan. I mean I'm only 30.

Me: Interesting. I saw several videos of you on YouTube. You're flexing and talking about how to get a good physique. I also went to images and noticed you've changed your looks a number of times and put different pictures on different sites.

Guy: Absolutely. As I've said before, one needs to stay active online so I pay a number of content writers and SEO specialists to keep my twitter and all sites updated. Also, I believe one should take care of their body, I go to gym for at least 2 hours a day, I cleanse and tone my face every day and I scrub weekly, go to the tanning salon three times a week and so on. I had my teeth straightened, levelled and whitened as well.

Me: That's a lot to fit into a week. So are you satisfied with yourself now when you look in the mirror?

Guy: There's still plenty work to be done, my ears need adjusting, for example. One is slightly higher than the other and they stick out more than they need to. I mean I don't need to hear that well (he laughs). I don't need to listen I get listened to.

Me: I don't see anything wrong with your ears.

Guy: Yes well you don't seem like the type to notice such things.

Me: I guess I'm not. So I understand you're also in the Adult entertainment industry?

Guy: What? What are you talking about?

Me: The gay porn videos that I've seen you in...

Guy: That's ludicrous! It must be a lookalike, I am a respectable business man!

Me: So you've never been an escort either?

Guy: Absolutely not. Sex work is for desperate people who do not possess the smarts, looks, determination, power, influence, presence, physique, strength, and infectious

aura that I have. And did I mention looks? No porn star looks this good and healthy. How could they, they're all disease ridden.

Me: And you're definitely healthy.

Guy: No doubt about it! (He takes a gulp of his drink).

Me: I see you have pictures of Dwayne everywhere and are these your children and wife?

Guy: That guy occasionally comes here and makes a mess of the place, putting pictures of himself everywhere.

Me: And the kids?

Guy: They're mine.

Me: I thought you were an eligible bachelor?

Guy: Well yes, I divorced her a while ago and when I say the kids are mine I mean that they're my brother's. I pay their school fees and all that while Dwayne gets shit-faced somewhere.

Me: But the wife is yours...Interesting. I didn't come across any of that information. I guess I...

Guy: No, you wouldn't, I keep my life very private.

Me: Private. I'd call your life anything but private Mr...

Guy: Are we done here? I think we are.

Me: One more question Mr Steinfeld. I also saw pictures of your travels online. You seem to travel quite a lot....sometimes you're in two different places in one day. How is it that you find time to do all you do and travel so much?

Guy: When you run a company as big as this, the whole world wants a piece of you and after saying no a couple of times you end up agreeing to meetings no matter how pressed for time you may be and no matter how far they may be.

Me: But those seem to be holiday photos. In one picture you're standing next to a Miami Beach sign and on the same day you're having cocktails in a hotel in Dubai...and might I add that your body looks different in that one. In fact your body seems to change quite a lot.

Guy: (he laughs) Well that's how meetings are conducted nowadays. No one does the boardroom thing after flying someone like me out. They have to show me a good time and unfortunately I do get bloated and pale because of all the binging and lack of sun.

Me: Yes, but...

Guy: I'm afraid that's about all the time I have to spare. I suggest you turn that camera off now!

Dwayne's Instructions:

- ✓ Talk about the paintings
- ✓ Comment on his looks
- ✓ Don't interrupt him or question his information
- ✓ Don't mention the article about him dating Karla Homolka. He's not ready to admit that he created that rumour.
- ✓ Don't ask about the photos of my wife and kids, or if you do, accept what he says and move on. My brother hates being cornered.
- ✓ Don't go without a camera and make sure it's on a tripod. He won't cooperate if he thinks you're not the real deal.
- ✓ Ask him about his face. That's when he'll give you the most information.
- ✓ You'll notice that his answers seem rehearsed, that's because he watches interviews and practises in the mirror.
- ✓ Don't even hint that you know most of his pictures online were stolen from social networks and photoshopped, he will get defensive and maybe want to hurt you.
- ✓ Lastly, don't (under any circumstances) mention his occupation as a low-budget porn star, stripper or escort. He would like to believe that that's someone else and he is me.

Journalism Lecture Hall

I got to class late and was relieved to see Professor Grovin standing in front. He was an interesting guy; bald head, t-shirts with South Park characters saying, "Fuck you," or worse, loose jeans torn at the knees and slops. He started off wearing black nail polish but his colleagues complained so he stopped. He was the type to tell us about his nail polish ban. The type that didn't give a fuck about rules and didn't take himself seriously. I often wondered what he got up to when he left campus.

"Right, everyone, just settle down real quick," he said, waving the pages in his hand.

He waited until we were all quiet.

"So, I'm sure you all know this by now, if not, you're not real journalists. Rihanna is all over the web wearing an Adam Selman sheer dress, baring all. This was at the CFDA Fashion Awards where she went up to the podium to receive an award and obviously spoke about self-expression. You can't not speak about that in a dress like this one."

He clicked on his remote and showed us a PowerPoint slide-show of the outfit.

"So, let's get to the topic of the day. Nudity and Celebrities! As you know I'm not going to spoon-feed you a bunch of pointless crap. We're going to discuss this and you're going to give me the different ways of handling such a story. Let me help you out, in case you're like, 'But Prof. Grovin, where the fuck do I even begin with this!' Here's a question: Is this just an artist expressing herself, celebrating her body, and all that feminist flowery stuff or...are we looking at just another publicity stunt gone viral? Go!"

Random no. 1: Well, I think it's a publicity stunt created and orchestrated by her and her managing team, along with the designer, to make sure that she stays relevant.

Random no. 2: But does Rihanna need to pull stunts like this to stay relevant? I mean she's the "good girl gone bad" that every girl wants to be, and she's signed under

Jay Z who's a hip hop mogul. I think, therefore, that this is self-expression, bravery and confidence.

Random no. 3: False confidence, more like. Who would bare all just for fun? This is a cry for help.

Random no. 2: No, but Cher did it, and Madonna also pushed boundaries in that department. I mean we've got Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus now also tapping into the whole sex/nudity arena. What's wrong with Rihanna doing the same?

Random no. 1: Please don't ever mention Cher and Madonna in the same sentence as those people.

"Ok, hang on, here's another question: How is she different from actresses such as...say Angelina Jolie, Kirsten Dunst, Halle Berry, and Kate Winslet, all of whom are talented and don't need to show their breasts but have done so in their respective award-winning movies. If the issue is showing breasts on camera, how is a red carpet any different to other mediums? Yes?"

Random no.4: Prof., I feel like the nudity in film has a purpose and has context. Out of the list you just gave, only Halle Berry's scene was a stunt to get people to watch the movie. The rest were engaging in a sexual act or were on the brink of insanity. It's about making the scenes look as real as possible. The focus there is not on the actress but on the character.

"Ok, ok, but what about sex tapes? Nikko and Mimi from the reality show, Love and Hip Hop Atlanta, recently released a sex tape, surpassing the profits of Kim Kardashian and Ray J's sex tape. And they willingly signed for this. They were having sex too. Is this now not a publicity stunt simply because they provided 'context', the context being porn?"

Random no. 5: But porn is for people who watch it. You have to go and buy the DVD or download it on the net in order to see it. It's a choice. And you know what you're buying as opposed to a red carpet event where you're forcing everyone to observe your inappropriate outfits and/or behaviour. Was the sheer dress that Rihanna wore daring? Yes, but was it inspiring? No.

Random no. 6: I just want to say that Rihanna is a boundary breaker across the board. She's an example for all women and young girls out there. She is using her body as art. Anyone who thinks differently is hating because they know they would never have the balls to do such a thing!

The class went into an uproar.

"Alright. Settle down, settle down. Shay, you're quiet today. What are your thoughts?"

I stopped doodling and looked up at Prof., unsure whether he had said my name or not. The whole class was looking me, waiting. I sat up straight and cleared my throat.

"I'm not thinking anything, Prof." I said.

"Hmm...Elaborate?"

"Well, are celebrities all we can talk about and write about?"

The class mumbled, some laughing quietly.

"Well, they're part of today's current affairs and they put bread on journalists' plates who would otherwise be starving because, let's face it, no one gives a fuck about malnourished children and dying dolphins anymore. The world has evolved into a fickle, shallow place and the News is moving right along with it."

The class laughed.

"Anyone can go on Twitter and do that kind of reporting. Why do we bother going to school for this then?"

“I get you, Shay, but more often than not, if you fight so hard to work against the tide when the whole world is run by what celebrities do, you’re going to be a struggling journalist for the rest of your life.”

He looked at me waiting for a reply. I didn’t have one. He continued.

“Ladies and gents, let me just be clear that I’m not teaching you to be celebrity fanatics. I’m teaching you to be journalists in the now and in the know. I want you to have the agility, sharpness and hunger required to cover any topic and to do it first. Also, I’m teaching you to start thinking of different ways to approach things, so you can stand out. I’m here to challenge you and show you, through your contributions to these discussions, that there are many opinions, all of which are valid, provided your facts are correct. Ok, so anyone else pro or anti-celebrity nudity?...or, such as in Shay’s case, is anyone anti-the whole topic?”

The whole class laughed again.

I went back to my doodling.

How to Fit Big Stuff into a Small Hole

“...Cause in love, love, love, love

You’d better act like...a woman...

And think like a man!”

I heard the theme song coming from the bedroom and wondered what it even meant. I figured it meant something I should probably try to figure out.

“Baby, take a break and watch this with me,” Sip called.

“How many times are you gonna watch that movie?”

“Come on, you haven’t watched it yet.”

I brought the “lounge blanket” closer and tucked it under my legs and feet. I was sitting on the couch using a laptop I had borrowed from Michael, a friend and gadget-crazy computer science student who had more of these things than he needed. Of course Sip thought Michael was a girl, a nonthreatening girl. If she had known the truth the laptop would’ve been a symbol of failure, like a man had one up on her, make that two up because he had a dick and she didn’t. My friendships with men made her uneasy, upset beyond comprehension.

“Ok coming, babe. I just have to finish this thing quick.”

Entry: 02/04/2013

The subject has a problem with (backspace)

Mr Wenton took me to his house and (backspace)

I went to Braydon’s* house and he couldn’t wait to lead me to the lounge where he showed me that he could fit an even larger object into his anus. Before he offered me coffee he took his pants off and folded them neatly before placing them on the arm rest. I noticed he kept his formal shoes and socks on. He bent over and rubbed his hands together while giving me an enthusiastic you-won’t-believe-what-I’m-about-to-do look. He then reached for different objects that he had put on a small table in between the sofas. He was well prepared...lube and everything. I had to tell myself it

was a magic trick with a twist as I watched different objects go in and out, varying in difficulty. It was unclear whether this was a sexual act or just a fixation with one's orifice and how much it can stretch. I kept watching to see if his penis was erect but it flopped around in between his thighs, occasionally smacking them when he abruptly turned around to announce his next trick.

"I've beeeeen waiting."

I looked up and saw Sip walking towards me. I hadn't heard her coming and I tried my best to shift the laptop so it faced the wall. She had other ideas, pulling the blanket away and tickling me so I would let go. I closed the laptop quickly, grateful that I could make it seem like a reaction to her poking my ribs. I hated being tickled but somehow it was different when she did it. She took the laptop, put it beside my now exposed feet and attempted to pick me up. I raised my shoulders and clenched my arms, pressing them tightly against my body. Just as she got me off the couch, 1 of my legs dropped, throwing her off balance. We fell together, a tangle of arms and legs. I looked at her, she laughed and I smiled. She untangled herself from the blanket and got to her feet. I lay there looking up at her as she pulled her pants up then offered me her hand. I got up and put my arms around her neck. Our lips touched.

"You're crazy, baby,...you and your dry lips."

"Maybe if you sat on them more often, they wouldn't be so dry."

"Seriously? You're so gross."

"You wouldn't be here if I wasn't."

She removed my arms and walked towards the room with an extra bounce in her step.

Fighting off a smile, I picked the blanket off the floor, folded it and threw it on the couch.

She knew she was right about that. She knew how to get to me, what buttons to push to get results. She had somehow read me and memorised me. It was something I both loved and hated – being so predictable. I convinced myself that it meant that she cared.

I followed her into the room, desperate to hold on to this moment even though I hadn't finished my article. She was already climbing onto the bed.

"I'm not done yet and they're expecting the article by 5pm."

"Fuck them, it's a Saturday. Tell them you had to spend time with your baby."

"You're lucky I still have 4 hours."

We got under the thick leopard-print blanket and cuddled while she reached for the mouse and unpaused the movie. She was lying on her back, my head on her chest, my leg wrapped tightly around hers.

"This hot water bottle is not hot at all," I said.

"Eish, girls and their whining. Put your feet in between mine."

I slid them in despite how cold they were. She jumped up as I had predicted.

"A-a-a-a, let me go heat this thing up rather. Yoh!"

I laughed and threw a mouse-bear-pig toy at her ass as she walked out. We had won it at a casino 1 night and loved it because it looked so weird, almost disfigured. It was always on our bed and every now and again we would look at each other and say, "What the fuck is this thing?"

Neither of us had an answer.

"Please get the chips too, nunu. Top cupboard on the left," I called after her.

"Yes, yes I know."

I paused the movie just as the title, *Think like a Man*, came onto the screen.

I had been dreading watching this with her. Any movie about relationships tended to make me emotional. Romantic comedies have a way of making you question your own relationship and whether you'll get a fairy-tale ending that looks just as perfect. It's stupid but I always questioned how much Sip loved me. I watched the love-struck hero stretch himself thin as mulberry paper to get the girl of his dreams back, and wondered if Sip would ever do the same. Had I made things too easy for her?

She came back with a half-finished bag of Lay's and a warm, bloated hot water bottle.

"You really murdered these chips yesterday, didn't even see you eating them."

“You know how I like to snack when I’m working.”

“As long as your ass gets bigger, I’m not complaining.”

“Haha, just get into bed already.”

She climbed in beside me. I got closer and rested my head on her chest while she wrapped the blanket around my back. I felt so good and warm I wanted to moan for no reason at all or make love and moan for a reason or just shut everything out and listen to her breathing.

“You’ll like this movie, it’s funny. Plus, it’s got Meagan Good and Gabrielle Union in it. I’d fuck Meagan in a heartbeat. That chick is way too hot!”

I looked up at her but she didn’t notice. I looked back at the screen with the words, “way too hot,” ringing in my ears.

I tried not to be a typical jealous girlfriend. Sometimes we picked out hot girls together but there were times when she just had a little bit too much excitement in her tone or times when she seemed to be thinking out loud, like I wasn’t there.

...Mr Wenton’s face lit up as though getting a bigger object in his anus was an accomplishment. It almost seemed as though I was invisible in those moments, like the beer cans, bottles and vases were the stars in the room and I was just the spectator who had to record it. I secretly wondered why he hadn’t asked me to participate.

Sip’s eyes were glued to the screen. Glued on Maegan. I opened my mouth to say something but I stopped. “Be cool, don’t ruin this,” I told myself.

“Not sure about Meagan but yes, Gabrielle is beautiful.”

“What? You’re not sure about Meagan Good? You’re such a hater bro.”

“Of course I am. My girlfriend has a crush on her.”

“Baby, you know you’re hotter than them combined.”

Half-smiling, I looked up at her. She kissed my forehead, rubbed my shoulder and pulled me closer. I watched her concentrate like she hadn’t seen the movie before. Her body was so warm under the layers of clothes, her heartbeat steady, alternating with mine, and her

strong jaw bone moving against my forehead. I put my arm around her and looked at the screen. I could see our reflection in between the characters.

“I love you, baby,” I said.

“I love you too, babe.”

Touch

I want to get to know her. I want to get to know her so bad and yet the fog between us won't let me see her. We stand facing the same direction, something telling me to face her but I stop myself mid-turn. We look up at the head above us spitting truces and loves, encouraging us to touch skin and lather each other up. But we have no business being there together, in a wet space where only true lovers go.

"Please open the window," I said.

"No," she said.

Her back was turned now, then quick brisk movements that went; face cloth, soap, face, rinse, face cloth, soap, torso, arms, rinse, face cloth, soap, legs, and final rinse. I stood ready with the gel in hand but she was done. I watched the spit gather at our feet, now turned to gunk and dirt. The drain had some of her in it. It knew her far more than I did and then swallowed quickly before it could tell me.

Above us, the head was still the mediator, still spitting unto us, telling us we messed up, telling us we need to resolve this, telling me I need to leave and stay at the same time. Touch her, it told me. Touch her skin and trace those tattoos, read those goose bumps like Braille and then find those places easiest, safest to step.

She used the small bar to ignore me and yet her shivering was bringing me closer. White lather ran from her hair to her face now. She reached for this thing that threatened this moment and shielded her from me. Towels are always too grabbable, too close. She opened the door and left, disappearing into this thick fog we created. Her black Mohawk the only discernible feature until it too became out of focus.

The floor remained cold. The head continued spitting. My soles turned numb.

Blurred Lines

We were drunk. That's how it started. That's how it always starts. At least that's what they tell us. They say we have no business getting drunk together because we start behaving like a couple on *Jerry Springer*. Last night was no different.

We always left the flat at 12:00 whenever we had a date planned. That way we had a full day to do what we always do – drink, fuck, drink, fuck, drink some more. We drove to Tops. I bought her Black Label and got myself a 6-pack of Hunter's Dry. We then went to our usual spot at the dam where people park their cars and have a braai. I loved drinking with her and hearing all her stories about the time she was a drug addict. There's something sexy about an ex-druggie talking about how they used to work for a Nigerian drug lord. It sounded like I was watching one of those American movies set in ghetto neighbourhoods or an episode of *The Wire*. She always got so animated talking about the worst time in her life, like she would go back in a heartbeat if she could.

We drank some more and got louder, happier, hornier. Miguel's "Adorn" playing in the background. She put her hand on my thigh. Our occasional kisses became frequent and dirtier. We played a game where I closed my legs shut every time her hand moved up. She looked at me and said, "Oh, so you're gonna act like you don't want it?" I said, "Yes," and laughed/blushed, feeling like a naughty little girl. Of course she always got her way eventually but yesterday was different, I held out until it was almost time to go home. I looked at her and asked, "Do you wanna go out tonight?" She replied, "I don't know, do you?"

We went back and forth, saying everything else instead of just saying what we really wanted to say which is, "I don't think I have enough money."

We were driving home and the tension in the car was as thick as marmite. That moment when we both know that anything said could set either of us off. We didn't need a reason to start blaming each other for things not working out. Even something as small as having to go home, because there's no more money, could trigger havoc and that's exactly what happened. We always started off hustling as a team, calling people we know to borrow

money. After a couple of unanswered calls and I'm-sorry-I-don't-haves, the air filled with desperation and frustration. We both knew what was coming.

"So what are we gonna do tonight?" I asked.

"I don't know, people seem to be avoiding us."

"I wonder why that is."

"Are you trying to be smart?"

"No, but you're sitting there acting confused and yet you know why!"

"I'm not acting like anything, you always talk shit and then you wonder why..."

"So this is my fucken fault now? I wonder why what? Am I the reason why no one wants to hang with us? Really! You wanna go there?"

"You know what, fuck this!"

She unbuckled her seatbelt and opened the door.

"Are you insane?"

I put my foot on the brakes and changed to a lower gear. She had already jumped out.

I continued driving, trying to comprehend what had just happened. I wanted to drive away but my heart wouldn't let me. I started panicking, wondering if she was ok. I stopped the car and made a U-turn to get back to her. She had gotten up and was walking in the opposite direction. I drove slowly behind her, hooting and shouting through the windscreen. I wanted her to get back in but she blocked me out and carried on walking. I parked the car on the little patch of grass and gravel on the side of the road. I got out and went after her, calling out to her, my heart sitting anxiously in my throat as I got closer.

I grabbed her arm and..., "Leave me the fuck alone!" she said.

I stopped as she walked but then started following her again, "Stop with the bullshit and let's go home," I said.

I threw a can of my half-full Hunter's at her. It landed next to her right foot, most of it spilling on me before I even threw it. She carried on walking. I looked back and realised I had left the car unlocked with the lights on. I ran after her, grabbed her and tried to pull her again...a move I shouldn't have attempted.

The Worst Power

In this place a fist represents strength, freedom and empowerment. They told us that in those institutions for fragile minds. With only a few years on Earth, we listened attentively to experienced superhumans who dedicated their lives to showing us how to live. We concluded that they must have dropped down on our planet to tell us what they see from above. We didn't know much back then. Small eyes looking up from wooden desks, scared that these superhumans would ask us questions or say the words "spot test" or check our homework to see if we regurgitated correctly.

They had a leader and the leader was their hero. She was our hero too, in fact she was the queen of the bee hive. Whenever people were sent to her lair she banged a fist on the table. At first I only heard about this fist but with time, I too found myself seated across it. It was more terrifying than the fist the superhumans banged on their desks whenever we buzzed a little too loud. Her fist sent a lump down my throat and seemed to shake the ground beneath me. I didn't have to go to her lair all that much, thankfully. I wasn't as interesting as the bullies, thieves and back-chatters. She saw them the most. I remember how she squeezed that bony fist until her knuckles whitened, her bones protruding through the skin, stretching it thin. She pounded it on her desk and used it to punctuate her words, to fuel them so they arrive quicker. It was then that I learned how loud a fist against wood can be.

Then they taught us about a superhero who was bigger than her. A man who had come out of a 27 year long struggle. He told the nation that in each single fist are a thousand reasons to keep living, to persevere and to form a unity. That was the latest meaning of a fist and it stuck. Every knuckle – a symbol of the country's colours and willingness to stand for something.

We accepted the strength of the fist because we were told these things, we saw it in action and we read about it.

Years later I'm clenching my hand hard to see what a proper fist is supposed to look like. I want to feel its power. I'm realising that a closed fist is not easy to make. I went on Google

and *Wikipedia* told me to curl my fingers into my palm and then lock them in with my thumb. This is also supposed to help me with my anxiety and help me recall information. I'm pretty sure I'm not doing it right. Nothing about it makes me want to stand tall, be proud and raise it to the sky. All that's happening is the escape of my blood and the surfacing of yellow fat.

It says that if I'm able to form a fist then I'll qualify for a fist bump – a display of acknowledgement and friendship, sometimes celebration or greeting, and the list goes on. Whatever I can't say through my mouth will be tucked away in between my fingers and then passed on through a collision with another fist.

I also clicked on a video where a fist was formed and then forced down a wet dark orifice, sometimes two fists down two orifices at the same time. The deeper it went, the harder the women or men screamed so I guess I should assume that fists also stimulate and bring about pleasure.

So why 5 knuckles?

Better to put a stamp with, my dear.

Knuckle no.1 – to imprint a lasting, prominent dark mark

Knuckle no.2 – to add a shade of green to the mark

Knuckle no.3 – to release passion

Knuckle no.4 – to get you to hear me

Knuckle no.5 – to show the world what is mine

Without these it would be impossible to show you how I love.

I imagined her telling me this when I came to on the ground. The car I had left idling, slowly dimming its lights now, trying desperately to hide me so that I may disappear into the night and pretend I was never there. The car has a lazy eye.

The street lights worked against me. They didn't know me enough to protect me or show mercy. The stones pricked my back, gave me tough love, pushing me to get up. Still I lay there like an injured stray dog.

The breeze brushed over the dry streams on my cheeks and gently carried the news to whomever it may concern. I saw it struggle to carry this heavy mess and drop it where it found it. It decided to wait until I got finished off so it can take my spirit instead. Spirits are far easier to carry.

I didn't know that even stars can form a fist – a replica for the 5-knuckled bony fist that collided with my face earlier and left its residue on my heart. The sky became a mirror, the stars now forming hearts around the fist. Mocking me.

This is how we take care of each other now. Raising fists in the air is no longer the ultimate gesture of power. Power is the thing that caused my face to swell. The thing that showed me love in its rawest form.

I lay there and closed my eyes, drifting deep into blackness and back again. This is the part in the movie where the girl clutches her t-shirt, rolls over to her side and gets into a foetal position while crying hysterically. She turns to her side so that the tears don't get into her ears. There were no tears though. I was on my back, stones still pricking me, unable to move. The loud sound of a fist still ringing deep in my ears. I didn't remember a fist against wood being that loud.

I turned my head to the side, took gravel into my left hand, formed a fist and watched the soil seep through.

Fists are so valuable they could be sold. The superhumans must have forgotten to tell us that.

Skype Conversation

Shay and John

Hello, Shay?

Can you see me? I can't see you, click the video icon.

Ok wait, it's trying to connect...oh there we go, there you are. Finally, hey. It's been too long since we did this, thank you for making the time.

So I wanted to speak to you because you went AWOL on us last week. What's going on, are you overwhelmed?

What's wrong, you don't look too happy. Is it personal or...?

Ok. Tell me more about the work.

Oh yes, I saw your email requesting to cover this story, I forgot to reply. Listen, just make this shit up. Everyone does. Not every story has to involve so much effort and stress. Just Google other articles on the same topic, choose 3 or 4 of them and use them to write your own. No one has time for groundwork, more especially you, with your studying.

Look, not all articles are original, you'd be surprised how many people do this. Our other writers go on Taboo and other sites, read stuff, and put their own spin on things.

Yes, but we're not Carte Blanch or Special Assignment. We're not investigating hot topics, we're covering unusual people. We've had this conversation a few times now, Shay.

We're not in a position to do that right now, but we seem to be getting a lot more traffic on the site, since you joined us, so don't take this the wrong way, we do need you, but we're just not big enough yet.

You get what I mean right? We can re-evaluate your contributions at a later stage. I'll get together with Dave and we'll up the amount per word, otherwise for now, you'll just have to do less. We appreciate your efforts and we know we're not paying you nearly as much as you deserve, hell, we're not paying anyone enough, including ourselves. But...ya...so what happened with the pregnant woman?

Shay, I keep telling you, journalists aren't psychologists.

And it ended up not helping her or you, now the site suffers because your so-called subject spazzed out. You've got to have a plan B when stuff like that happens. We have a lot of followers on Twitter and, as you know, our Facebook page has gotten a number of likes since we started. Our readers expect a certain number of articles a week, we can't slack now because some crazy people don't want to cooperate. We're not trying to fix them, in fact we need them to stay crazy so we can report about them. But we also need to do it from a safe distance.

Documentaries are great but, as you know, Taboo is doing them, TLC is also covering addictions and all sorts of illnesses. We would have to have a hefty budget to compete with those guys and then we would need someone to spear-head that medium.

...Sorry, I didn't hear that, you froze on me.

Yes, yes I understand you have the passion, but you don't have experience for that yet.

Yes, but you're also still a student. You've only been with us for a year, year and a half? You're still pretty much an intern. Look, I'll tell you what, when you're done with varsity and you've written enough articles and we start generating a lot of traffic, we might consider hiring you as our SEO manager. We'll pay you to maintain our blog and social media accounts. Otherwise, for now, just make sure you're submitting something weekly and don't rush the process. We all know it takes a while to build a following. We're just a start-up company compared to these other big guys.

So we're expecting 2 stories this week then. The phantom 1 is great, it's rare, and hasn't been done so you still need to write that. Then I need your proposed topic for this week, otherwise we'll just give you one. There are a few topics that the other writers haven't chosen so you can take your pick from the list. I'll email it.

Alright, I hope you'll sort the personal stuff out soon.

Alright, speak soon then. Goodbye.

Rats don't need a reason to run

We lay in the dark one night just looking up at the ceiling. Rats kept scurrying across and we kept guessing how many there were up there. I imagined it was just one fighting off demons and ghosts in the dark. We laughed at the idea and laughed harder that these demons chose to live above our bedroom. It was seriously the only rational reason for the constant running from one side to the other. Sip said there were two up there and that's why the scurrying sounded like frantic typing on a noisy keyboard.

"What are they looking for?" I asked.

"Rats don't need a reason to run. They're just natural hustlers, always on the move."

"Ok, rat specialist."

"I respect anything that finds a way in no matter what the obstacles. They always make sure there's a way out too should shit hit the fan. If we were to go up there now we wouldn't find a single one. Rats are boss!"

We laughed briefly and fell silent. The rats still creating a soundtrack similar to rain falling on aluminium roofs. The only difference was the touch of hesitation and desperation in their beat. I started imagining them tap dancing to pass time and bear with their struggles. Rats always look troubled.

We looked up together like we could see them. Me on her chest and she on her back. We hadn't had sex yet but it didn't seem to be on her mind. I wanted to but couldn't initiate it, she hated that. She liked me best when I waited for her move or resisted when she wanted it the most. I didn't always listen though. Sometimes I'd slide my hand down past her belly button and into her pyjama pants. She would immediately grab my wrist and place my hand somewhere boring, like just below her diaphragm. I asked her why once and she said it emasculated her to have a girl touch her like that. It made her look "moist" - a synonym for "pussy" or "weak". I was tempted in this moment though. The belly-up position presents a whole world of discovery. I wanted to explore her but chose not to move.

I broke the silence again.

"Let's become the rats," I said.

She held her breath in as soon as I spoke. She often did this when she pretended to be asleep. She exhaled long and hard and then seemed to pause as though she had changed her mind and had decided to be awake. I expected her to ask me what I meant but she said, "Ok, you start."

I cleared my throat and put on my nasal rat voice.

"Damn, Slazz. I'm out in these streets hustling all day and you sit there just expecting to be fed."

She kept quiet. I wondered what her face was doing. The darkness has a way of concealing the truth from those who need it the most. At the same time, when sight is taken away, other senses come alive, maybe I prefer it this way. I ran my finger across her eyebrow and found it relaxed. I smiled to myself anticipating a dismissive comment. I was like a naughty child hoping to get scolded.

"I've been telling you, this is not the streets. You need to chill out and calm down, Mo," she blurted out in a heavy low-pitched voice.

"We need to keep running, yo, Tom - the cat - is looking for us."

"Please. Tom ain't gonna do shit and he doesn't even know where we are."

"But look at this place, it's a dark, dusty dump and there's no food. We can't see or hear shit."

"Sit your ass down, dawg. It's too dangerous to go anywhere. Tom has one of his goons - Garfield - circling the neighbourhood."

"Hahaha, that's killer, babe. I never thought of Garfield as a thug."

"Haha, Garfield is a pimp!"

"Ok, I like what we have so far. What's your rat's story?"

"Story?"

"Yes. Like...oh wait, listen to that...there they go again scurrying to the other side," I whispered.

"My rat is probably the leader."

"Why?"

“Because he’s a gangsta.”

“Pssshhh, please, he just acts tough. If he was a real gangster he would want he and Mo to go back to the streets and face the music. Gangsters thrive on risks and danger, they don’t hide out in ceilings.”

“Slazz is smart. He calculates his moves.”

“Ok. Let’s hear what he has to say. Back into character!”

“Mo, stop running around like a crazy crack-whore in heat. Come here and let me teach you a thing or two about the streets. Listen, you never strike while the iron is hot. These cats are on the prowl looking for blood right now. My connects will tell me when it’s safe to be out there again.”

“What connects? You have informants out there?”

“Of course I do. I never told you this but I was part of a gang a few years back. See this tattoo? It was made with hot wire. I had to do it to show my loyalty. I had this friend I would’ve given my life for. His name was Clive. Clive and I would go to these uppity clubs and chat a few women up, especially if they were sitting alone at the bar. Clive would charm them while I reached into their bags and took their phones and money. Sometimes I would do the distracting, while he reached in. We were also in business with a Nigerian drug lord. He trusted us with bags and bags of cocaine, 1 of which I kept at home. Clive and I would hit up with some other friends and the boss wouldn’t even notice the shortage.

1 night we got so fucked up that I suggested we go hustle at clubs on the other side of town. He said it was a bad idea because our rival gang hung out there. I told him we could even push some coke and people would pay whatever we asked them in that area. He was sceptical but I pressed on so he went with it. We left the flat at about 1am. We were careful not to walk out in the open where the rivals would see us but as it turned out, they had seen us coming somehow. We went down a quiet bushy area behind a block of flats and they sprung out of the bushes, stopping us in our tracks. Their boss instructed the group to encircle us - amongst them, a few young teenage coloured boys putting on game faces. Nothing much was said but we knew that shit had hit the fan. I looked at Clive and he looked at me. A look that said, ‘fuck, run!’ but we both knew that it was pointless. I started pleading, saying we’ll go back to our territory but they weren’t having it. The boss disgusted that I had even spoken while he addressed Clive.

They attacked Clive without warning, pinning him to the ground. 2 young ones immediately held me back. The boss put his hand on Clive's neck, started squeezing his throat. My boy kicked around trying to fight him. The others stood around and watched shouting, 'Ja, jou naai!'

I cried out for him to let us go, almost frothing at the mouth, spitting. He kept strangling him.

Just when Clive was about to pass out he let him go, Clive still coughing, trying to move his legs. The boss signalled for 1 of them to give him something. The guy drew a gun and gave it to him. My heart jumped all the way to my throat and back, knees weakened and muscles gave up. I dropped my head in defeat. These fucks still holding me back.

The gun went off once and Clive was dead. I didn't look. I was so numb I couldn't cry but somehow my fight or flight nerves kicked in and I found myself angrily trying to break free from the kids. They were younger than me, surely my strength matched theirs. The boss walked over towards me and they threw my body at him. He had me pinned down on the ground faster than the sound of a bullet.

I stayed still and accepted my fate. At least it was gonna be a quick bullet to the head.

It was shortly after that thought when I realised what he was trying to do. He was taking my skinnies off. I started fighting, pleading, negotiating, trying to scare him but nothing worked.

He got the kids to hold my arms down above my head, his legs keeping mine apart. I

remember him saying he's about to show me that I'm a girl, not the boy that I think I am.

"Ek sal jou wys, ek sal jou wys," he kept saying while thrusting into me repeatedly. I had never felt dick before and had never seen 1 that big either. I felt my pussy muscles fight against him, my dry lips painfully trying to guard the door. Still he managed to get in...all the way in. The motherfucker was getting me wet no matter how hard my mind fought him.

When he was done he ordered everyone else to have a turn, all 8 of them. I was in and out of consciousness, the pain putting me to sleep and then waking me up just in time to hear the unbuckling of belts. The kids were hesitant but they did it too. I looked 1 in the eye and his voice said, "Jou bitch!" but his face was on the brink of exposing how he really felt. I was quiet now, my voice divorced from my body. I lay there bleeding ...Clive bleeding from the head. The boss said I should tell my boss that he did this and then I heard them walk away. Fight or flight set in again but it was too late now. I crawled away from the scene, wiped myself down with my cardigan behind the flats and did my best to walk back to my flat.

A few days later, the police were at my door. They arrested me based on blood samples, bags of coke and a dead body found across town. Before I knew it, I was in prison..."

A strange white noise filled my ears or filled the room, I wasn't sure. It was Mo's turn to speak but no more lines came to mind. I opened my mouth to speak but it just remained open so I used it to breathe instead, drawing in large breaths to calm my racing mind. It was as though Sip had snatched all the letters of the alphabet and left me with the useless ones like x and z. The darkness stared me down, nudging me to say something.

The darkness turned a watery blue. I could no longer trust my words, my eyes or my ears. I was submerged.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again all was back to black.

"Babe...I thought...I thought Slazz was a guy," were all the words I could muster. Words that I regretted as soon as they came out.

I heard her do that thing again where she held her breath and pretended to be asleep. But this time her long inhalations were followed by short rapid exhalations. I heard her heart beating loudly against my head, her stomach muscles now spasming under my palm. I reached around her torso and pulled her on top of me. My legs locking her in, my arms holding her tight. We stayed like that for a while. Her breaths becoming shorter, my eyes seeing a blurry blue once again.

Mannequin Bob

Mannequins: Deconstructed humans that wear crop tops with imprinted kissable red lips and leather leggings. They're shaped like question marks, positioned to either stare us down or pretend we're not there.

That day, I was wearing a tie-front tee with the American flag and white jeans ripped horizontally, baring tiny knees and plastic thighs. Their hairstyles differed but told the same story, described the same girl. She was collapsing, twisted and cared very little for posture. Stiffened but full of pizzazz.

Cool people have no shape.

I slid into a tube skirt and walked around like my thighs were taped together.

"Something about this says, 'hunch your back and only move from the knees down'," I said.

"Babe, stop complaining, you have 1 of those at home."

I threw a leather jacket on without a top underneath.

"Yes, now pose for me, baby, show those tits, yes, now pout like you want me to take that skirt off."

"You know I can't, I'm terrible at this stuff."

"Is that what you'd tell Tyra Banks?"

"Hahaha, luckily you're not her. Are you really making me do this right now?"

I parted the jacket and gave a mean pout, question mark pose and then a rag doll pose, falling over a few times. The staff member outside the changing room looking at us, laughing.

"I wanna change now, baby."

"Ok, just one more look. Put those high-waisted leather leggings on, that grey Mickey Mouse crop top and that denim vest. Throw your hair to 1 side and then give the paparazzi look."

Paparazzi pose –holding one’s hands out in front of their face so that the paparazzi can’t get a shot. They always do though.

I did the pose, making sure my face somehow came through the openings in between my hands. Sip enjoyed every moment of this.

“Ok, now the druggie look, babe. You’re in an ally and you’re leaning against the wall with your knee bent. You’re looking down and your hair is in your face but then just as you’re about to vomit – FLASH – a camera is on the side of your face!”

I looked at her without trying to look, my torso caving forward.

“Baby, I’m done now.”

“1 more look, babe, just the fish look now.”

The fish look – sucking in your cheeks and opening your eyes really wide. Somehow this was hot.

“You said that 3 looks ago, I’m done.”

“Damn, you would’ve looked so good in nothing.”

I blushed and went back into the cubicle. I changed into my orange maxi-dress.

It was her turn.

Sip pretty much stood there. She needed very little direction. She called it her “natural swag.” She hated having to take her layers of clothing off so she opted for caps and shades instead. She folded her arms and threw her head back like an American music producer, or Lil’ Wayne, when I took her pictures. Occasionally she’d rub her chin as well or hold her red hoodie up, at the chest, with two fingers per hand.

“Hahaha, this can’t get any cheesier, babe!” I said.

“Wait until I get on the ground and make ‘West side’ signs.”

“Sip, no.”

But she did it anyway, laughing at my embarrassment.

We put our phones away and seriously looked for what we came for, a pair of chinos for Sip.

I liked her in those. I had promised her a new pair because I accidently bleached the old 1.

The Jay Jay's floor assistants liked us even though they knew we probably weren't going to buy anything. We represented everything they wanted to have so they followed us around the store. We were this female couple that danced and kissed between racks, called each other "baby" all the time, made sexual gestures, took pictures and then left. We were good for business – there were those who liked watching us and then those who tried hard not to care but still found themselves staring or giving us the occasional disapproving side eye.

We always hung around the male section longer than we should. So long that the male customers realised we weren't just 2 friends or sisters looking for a gift for our younger brother. It's not that they hated seeing me there but it was her they seemed to have a problem with. We didn't care though. I thought she looked really sexy in chinos and I was going to tell her that out loud no matter who was listening. She always gave me a shy smile. She couldn't handle it when I complimented her. "Blushing is not a good look for me," she would say.

She picked up a pair but was disappointed when they weren't her size – a problem we experienced almost all the time. She comforted herself by saying, "I've seen many people wearing this 1 anyway!"

We left for The Fat and Carrot. It was almost 6pm.

"I think I'm gonna get a bob, like that mannequin...that way we'd both have short hair and maybe pick the same clothes."

"Hahaha, I'd kill you."

B.O.B - Punch will be provided

3PM

“Did you tell him we’re on our way?”

“Ya.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know, he just got off. Probably standing near the Greyhound bus stop.”

“Ok. This should be interesting. You haven’t seen him in so long.”

“Yeah, babe, I really missed him...Are you sure you don’t mind him being here for the weekend?”

“Of course not, baby. I think it’s good for you. This is good.”

We drove the rest of the way in silence. I had spoken to her cousin on the phone and we chatted on WhatsApp from time to time. I imagined that he looked like her, just as skinny and maybe the loud version of her. They had grown up together, eating at each other’s houses when the other didn’t have any food. Their mothers were close sisters so Sip was always hanging out with him and his friends. I guess that’s where she got her mannerisms from, that’s where she learnt everything she was. She told me he knew her well but didn’t know much about her gang life. He knew about her addiction to drugs and didn’t approve of her racy lifestyle. He was like her older brother, always looking out for her, even trying to explain her whenever I told him about our fights.

We parked behind the last bus, looked at the crowd on the pavement, and there he was, waiting for his luggage to be offloaded. Sip texted him. He looked our way and smiled. He had the same eyes – small and friendly – but that was it. His complexion was lighter and his stature bigger than I had imagined. He was wearing a red Barcelona jersey, jeans and training shoes.

Sip and I got out of the car as he approached.

“Ey, old man!” she shouted, giving him a hug, “look at this big beer belly, Tina must be feeding you well bro!”

“Hahaha, this is nothing, if you had seen me a few months back, I looked like someone’s father. And you, look at these skinny arms, what were they doing to you in prison?”

“Hahaha, what you mean, I’ve always been like this, come on man. Meet the wife, meet the wife.”

I stepped forward and gave him a hug. He was as friendly as he was on the phone. He seemed much calmer and more mature than Sip even though he wasn’t that much older.

“Nice to finally meet you in person,” I said.

“Yes, yes same here. And you’re more beautiful than your pics. Chap you should keep this 1, don’t mess this up.”

“Never chap! Let go of my girl’s hand now, you’re holding it for way too long,” Sip said.

We all laughed and got into the car. First stop – a dingy bottle store a street away.

We bought 3 bottles of Russian Bear vodka, lime juice, 8 litres of Lemon Twist and some ice. Tabz bought 2 bottles of Johnny Walker (Red Label) and 6-packs of Hunter’s, Black and Castle Lite.

“Yoh, you guys aren’t playing around tonight,” the cashier said.

“Nah, my man, we mean business. No one’s sleeping!” Tabz responded.

We got back into the car and drove home.

“Babe, will this be enough for the punch?” I asked.

“More than enough, baby, it’s a B.O.B so anyone who complains can just fuck off. I’ll throw them out myself.”

“Haha, babe.”

“For real.”

“It’s just that, punch is usually made with cheaper juice, like that mixer shit, so there can be a lot of it. I’m worried we’ll run out.”

“Well we’re offering them classy shit. It’s a classy punch. We’ll even throw in slices of lemon in the bowl for presentation.”

“Fuck, I forgot to get coal and flavour.”

I turned around and drove to the nearest Indian shop.

“Ah, babe, you know I don’t want you to smoke.”

"It's just hub, babe, it would be nice to have it there for the vibe."

"Ok, but you're not gonna smoke a lot of it."

"Ok."

"I'm serious."

"Ok, I won't. Do you have smokes at home or should I get more?"

"Nah, I'm good, baby, there's a box of 20s still."

I was in and out of the shop in about 2 minutes. I got back into the car and Sip was talking with a raised voice.

"And now? What happened?"

"Nothing man. Tabz just told me that asshole wrecked my mom's car and then came home drunk and started a fight. I swear if I was home he wouldn't keep doing this shit. Tabz, did this fuck hit her?"

"No, bra, calm down, it was just a verbal fight."

"My mom works hard to pay for that car. She didn't buy it for him to go around picking up random bitches. Why wasn't he home in the first place?"

"I don't know, he was driving towards town with his friends or something. Let it go, chap, your mom's fine."

"Where the fuck was he going? I swear to God if he lays a hand on her I'll get on the first bus and go fuck him up myself. Damn dog, sies!"

"Babe, you need to calm down, he's your father."

"No, man, he's a dog. He needs to get his shit together. The man buys more booze than he does groceries. Always out there flossing in a car he's not even paying for, making it rain for the whole neighbourhood. I hope something happens to him, for real. Who the fuck is gonna pay for the damages now?"

"Chap, it's not even that bad, relax now, relax. Everything is fine back home."

"Yeah, baby, good vibes today remember? We're gonna turn up and have a good time...I'll give you my phone later so you can call your mom, I'm sure she's fine. She's super strong, you know that. Don't let this spoil our night, please."

"Ok, babe, I hear you."

She placed her hand on my lap and I put mine on hers.

"Give me a kiss," she said, reaching over.

I slowed down a little and gave her a quick peck.

"I love you," I said.

"Yeah, man, love you too."

She took her hand away and asked Tabz to pass her a beer. We were almost home.

We got in and put the alcohol and ice in the fridge, leaving out the vodka.

"Ya, no, guys...your flat is proper!" Tabz said.

"Thanks, it was very hard to find," I said.

He grabbed a beer and stood on the balcony, making calls. Sip was opening and slamming cupboards, looking for matches. I held her shoulders and gave her a hug.

"It's gonna be ok, baby, don't let it get to you."

"Thanks, babe, I'll be ok, I just need the beer of champions and a smoke. I'll be fine."

"I bought a lighter for the hubbly so you can use that. Do you want me to cook tonight?"

"Nah, babe, let's just drink. There's bread and cheese so we're good."

She lit her cigarette and joined her cousin on the balcony while I sent a chain message to some friends. It read:

Hi ladies. Sip and I are having a young g2g tonight so it would be nice if you came over. It's not a big thing, just hanging out, talking, playing games, ordering pizza. I'm making a classy lime-flavoured punch (coz we're too cute for ratchet Oros! Lol) but please bring your own booze as well if you can. I hope I'll see all of you around 7pm! ☺

6:30PM

Tabz's friends had arrived and were hanging out on the balcony. 2 guys he knew from his hometown. 1 of them - a driver for a construction company, the other - an aspiring rapper and weed grower/smoker/distributor whose stage name was Oozie.

Sip and I went into our room to change. A big bucket of punch cooled on the kitchen counter.

“So I’m wearing my black short skirt, this black tank, and maybe my brown boots. How’s that?”

“No, the black ones, babe.”

“Overkill, no?”

“Ya, you’re right. Ok, looks good. I’m wearing my white skinnies, the white tank with a Paris sketch, and...let’s see...my black All Star sneakers. Neh?”

“Oh God, you know what those All Stars do to me. You’re gonna look fucken hot, babe. No cap though, show off your new cut.”

“Ok.”

We quickly got dressed. Her phone rang as we got out of the room. Her friends were on their way up. I went to the kitchen and poured some snacks into a few bowls. I always got a bit nervous meeting Sip’s friends. At least these were just friends she made while she still had the waitressing job.

Oozie was busy setting up the hubbly bubbly in the middle of the lounge. I had taken out a carpet that we found when we got there but removed. I figured some of us could sit on the floor. There were only 4 spaces on the couches, possibly 5 if 3 people shared the 2-seater. “Don’t put any weed in there, it’s a tight neighbourhood, they’ll be able to trace it,” I called out to Oozie.

“Hahaha, no, Shaza, what do you take me for? This is just the flavour, nothing else.”

I laughed that he had decided to call me Shaza. No one had ever put a spin on my name before. It’s a simple single-syllable name. He said that Shay sounded like it’s short for champagne. In his hood they called champagne, “*shaza*.”

Sip opened the front door and let her 3 friends in. 2 butch girls - 1 of them looking more like a soft butch in her low-cut purple top, leather-patched black joggers, and black Tomy Takkies. She went by the name, Lilo. The other one, a chubby hard butch in a white tiger-face tank with grey joggers and a pair of red Vans sneakers. Her name was Ace. The 3rd

person to walk in was Sip's gay friend. He was dressed in a short-sleeved denim shirt, buttoned all the way up, with a maroon bow tie and tan chinos rolled up at the ankles. He introduced himself as Vee. I couldn't help but stare at his high tinted box-cut afro, and his maroon suede Tassel loafers, as we hugged. She had told me a lot about him. She said he used to be made fun of at work because he always dressed in this serious semi-formal way and yet was such a joker.

He came in shouting, "Let's get this fucken party started, yo, where's the music?"

"There he is!" Sip shouted. They all hugged and sat down. Sip pouring them a glass of punch each.

"You guys have got to taste this, I don't care what you brought!" she said.

I had forgotten all about the music. Tabz helped me disconnect and move the computer to the lounge. I went into the music folder and played Ella Fitzgerald's version of "My Funny Valentine."

"A-a, baby. You see what I live with? These are the reasons why I used to get so stressed at work. I mean listen to this, next she'll play Nina Simone and we'll be listening to 'Dooooon't smoooooke in beeeed' the whole night. Play my hip hop playlist, babe, this is just depression right here."

We all laughed as I got up again and changed the playlist. Jay Z's "Tom Ford" track played first.

"Yoooh, friend, that's my jam right there!" Vee stood up, bent forward and did the *shmoney* dance as we cheered on.

I went out to the balcony and asked Tabz and his guys to come in and meet Sip's friends.

Oozie was the last to come in.

"Where are your friends, Shaza, I need some girls man, this is like hanging out with a bunch of dudes."

"No, no bitches are stepping into my house," Sip protested.

"Hahaha, babe, be nice, I already invited them. Not sure if they'll come though."

"Oh, you did?...interesting," she said, taking a large gulp of her Black.

I grabbed a glass jug in the kitchen and sat on the floor, preparing to start the games. The time was now 7:44pm and none of my friends had shown up or replied to my SMS.

“Right, guys, we’re gonna play drinking games so we all need to pour a bit of what we’re drinking into this jug so that whoever messes up, takes at least 2 shots of it as punishment.”

Everyone looked around at the Black Label, punch, Hunter’s, Castle Lite and whiskies in people’s hands.

“Yoh, it’s late for whoever is gonna drink this shit,” Vee said, leaning forward to start pouring.

“I think we should add more vodka,” suggested Ace, backed up by Sip.

We all followed suit, adding more vodka to the concoction.

“Right, now that we’ve done that, I think we should play Bullshit!” I said.

“What’s Bullshit?” Tabz asked.

“Basically, we all choose an animal we want to be, right, and the whole thing is, we’re all chilling in the Amazon, or whatever, and shit has been found on the ground. But no one wants to own up to it.”

“Bullshit sounds like a shit game!” Ace laughed.

“Hang on, let me explain. So we all start blaming each other. So, say you’re a lion and I’m a snake...I’ll say, ‘lion shit’, you say, ‘bullshit’, I say, ‘who’s shit?’, you say, ‘horse shit’, then whoever is a horse will say, ‘bullshit’, then you say, ‘who’s shit?’, and they pick someone else or pick you again. It just keeps going until someone fucks up.”

“Wait, wait, wait...so how do you mess up?” asked Lilo.

“If you say the wrong thing at the wrong moment. You’d be surprised how many people forget to say ‘bullshit’ when someone calls out their animal,” I explained.

“Nah, man, this is too complicated for me,” Tabz said.

“Ya, babe, maybe we should play something else,” Sip said, laughing.

Just then, my phone rang.

I got up and buzzed Noni in. She was one of the girls I had sent a message to.

“Baby, Noni is here,” I said.

Sip took a deep breath, downed her beer, and went to the kitchen to fetch another 1. She too became nervous around my friends but for different reasons. I was nervous around hers because I wanted them to like me. She was nervous and almost paranoid when it came to mine. She said they always gave her looks whenever she came across them, like they were judging her. She said she understood why they were mad but she just couldn't handle them. Sip was most fearful of Noni, for some reason. I concluded that maybe it was because Noni looked like she would actually confront her, given the chance.

"Hey buddy, looking good, long time no see!" I said as Noni walked in.

Sip now smoking on the balcony.

"Hello, hello beautiful people, I'm Noni."

She hugged me and then went around the room shaking hands. She saw Sip on the balcony. They looked at each other briefly but looked away again.

"Where's everyone else?" she asked.

"They didn't reply to my text so I assume they're busy or something. I didn't even know you were coming."

"Yeah, I wasn't hey, I've got a politics essay to do for Monday and I haven't done jack shit. We went out last night for Throwback Thursday and I got so smashed, I was like, I can't drink this weekend. Why didn't you come through?"

"I didn't even know you guys were out."

"Oh, Slim didn't tell you?...she must've forgotten. Anyway, I decided to come 'cause FOMO got too real."

"Hahaha, you've never liked missing out on things. This 1 will go out the night before a test but she'll still ace it. These smart bitches, hey!" I said, looking at everyone else, laughing.

The whole room was oddly quieter than before, except for Vee who kept agreeing with us and giving high-fives. Noni was a dark-skinned girl who always looked like she had just stepped off a hip hop music video set. She wore high heels wherever she went, had a big bushy Brazilian weave and often applied red, glossy lipstick that complimented her complexion. She was always made up. I was used to guys either being intimidated by her or asking her out when we were out in clubs and bars. She was always trying to put make-up

on my face, always telling me I needed to buy eyelashes because mine were non-existent. The large earrings I had worn to prison, that day, were hers.

“So what are you drinking?” Oozie asked, standing up.

“I’ll have some punch, please. I hope it’s weak ‘cause I need to wake up early tomorrow,” she replied.

“It has a little kick, just a little 1.”

He got up and poured her some in the kitchen. Sip walked back in, greeted Noni and sat on the arm rest, leaning forward to pour herself a shot of whisky.

“So we were just about to play Bullshit but everyone says it’s too complicated to learn.” I said.

“What? Oh, come on guys, like Bullshit is so easy, who doesn’t know how to play it?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine, we’ll just play something else.”

“Yeah, ok, how about the game where someone chooses a topic and we name stuff?”

“Oh yes, good idea, that one’s easy. So guys, someone will say, ‘Cars’, and we go around the circle, each person naming a type of car. We’ll go for 2 rounds and you can’t repeat what someone else has already said. Then we’ll change the topic to colours or something and do the same thing. If you take too long to think or say the wrong thing, you have to take 2 shots from the jug.”

“Oh my gosh, what’s in there?” Noni asked.

“Trust me, you don’t wanna know,” Oozie replied.

We played the game for a while, Sip and Tabz messing up more often than the rest of us. Sip started smoking more and getting drunk, Tabz slurring his words and Oozie and I having hub on the floor. Vee was looking for music videos he liked on YouTube and kept dancing to each 1. Lilo and Ace trying to learn dance moves from him.

“Shay, can I borrow you for a bit?” Sip asked.

“Yeah, baby, sure.”

We walked out onto the balcony and closed the sliding door. I leaned for a kiss but she looked away.

“What’s up with you smoking now?” she asked.

“Come on, baby, it’s just hub, nothing strong. Tonight is going so well, I’m just having a bit of fun.”

"I told you not to smoke this much, no girlfriend of mine smokes, you know that."

"Sip, not tonight, please babe, you know I don't smoke often."

"I don't care. What's everyone else gonna think when you're smoking like that. It's not a good look."

"Ok."

"Ok?...what the fuck is up with you today?...First you don't tell me you're inviting Noni, then you disrespect me in front of everyone."

"But what the fuck did I do wrong? You invited a good 3 of your friends that I don't know, at least I invited someone you've met."

"It's not about that. It's the disrespect."

"Ok, babe, I'm gonna go back inside, I don't know what you're on about."

"You're not going anywhere."

"What else do you want me to say? I invited my friends because I didn't want Tabz and his friends to get bored. They didn't pitch anyway so I don't get what you're so mad about. I'm going back in."

I was opening the sliding door when she grabbed my arm and slapped me across my face. My Hunter's slipped from my hand and made a piercing sound as it hit the concrete. She slapped me again.

"What did I do?" I screamed.

Oozie now rushing to the balcony and grabbing Sip's arms.

She head-butted me just as he was pulling her away, my cheek bone feeling hot. I stood there frozen as Noni came to the balcony screaming, "You're a fucken piece of shit, Sip, I've always said it and I'm gonna say it now. Touch my friend again and I'll take you to jail myself you good-for-nothing broke bitch!"

Sip kicked around telling Oozie to let her go, wanting to charge at Noni. I walked back inside.

Tabz's other friend was coming from our room explaining that Tabz had passed out so he put him on the bed. He asked me what got Sip so mad but I couldn't answer him. I couldn't even remember his name.

Noni walked back into the lounge and picked up her bag, "I'm out, dude, I can't do this."

She stormed out and slammed the door. I looked at Sip staring at me with rage on the other side of the sliding door, Oozie still holding her, trying to calm her down.

“Are you ok?” Lilo asked.

“Ya, what happened, bra?” Ace asked, standing up.

“Goodnight guys, it was nice meeting you.”

I walked into the bedroom and shut the door.

11PM

She came into the room and found me standing in front of the mirror. She closed the door and leaned against it, staring at me. I softly rubbed my cheek where the red mark began and ended, wiping away the tears.

“I...I brought you some ice,” she said.

I walked to the edge of the bed and sat down, her cousin still passed out on the far left. I leaned forward and took my boot off. She walked towards me, put the ice on the table and sat down next to me. She touched my back. I jumped and sat up.

“I’m sorry,” she said, removing her hand.

I reached down for my second boot. She slid off the bed and knelt in front of me. I looked at her and she cupped my face, gently, like it would pop if she pressed. She studied my eyes, ran her thumb across my forehead, then held the back of my neck, pulling me closer. I let her. She kissed my eyelids, cheeks and then my lips. I looked away.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, “So sorry babe.”

She brought her face closer to mine again, this time slightly opening her lips. I clamped my teeth together so her tongue wouldn’t get through but it only made her try harder. She slipped her hand under my skirt. I closed my legs shut. It only made her breathe deeper,

want more, her hand even more determined to get further in. It was as though she knew I was already getting wet. She kept trying to kiss me, now grabbing my breast. I pushed her hand away and yelled, "Stop!"

She got up and sat next to me, resting her head on my shoulder, smelling my neck. After a minute she hesitantly moved away, leaned forward and put her head in her hands. I pulled my skirt back down and started taking off my boot. She turned her head and watched in silence.

"Ok...this is awkward...I'm gonna go chill with the bois. I'm sorry."

She got up and left the room. Her friends still drinking in the lounge.

I took off my skirt, pulled a blanket from the wardrobe, put it over Tabz and slid under the duvet on her side of the bed.

3AM

I woke up to her climbing into bed. She had taken off her All Stars, her clothes still on. She got on top of me and kissed my lips. I looked away but she held my jaw in place and kissed me again. Her legs slowly spreading mine.

"M-m get off," I said.

"Sh-sh-sh-shhh...please, baby," she whispered.

She took off her jeans and cardigan, leaving her briefs, socks and t-shirt on. She started kissing my neck, pressing her groin against mine. I held her shoulders, trying to push her off. She grabbed my arms and held both my wrists above my head with her right hand, her other hand holding my face in place.

She kissed me and I let her, raising my knees. She slipped her hand into my underwear and slowly rubbed my clit. I lay still. She took my top off and kissed my breasts while making her way down to my pussy.

“No, don’t,” I said. She carried on.

She started taking my underwear off. I reached for it and grabbed it before it passed my knees. She bit my hand but I didn’t let go. She used both her hands to yank it from me. It tore. I let go.

I gasped when I felt her tongue. I tried not to make a sound, not to move. Her cousin shifting around next to us. I grabbed her Mohawk and pulled. She continued. I grabbed her shoulders, pushing her away. She pinned my hands to the bed on either side and continued. I yanked my hands from her grip and grabbed my pillow on either side. My breaths became deeper, louder, I let out a moan.

“Sh-sh-shhh,” she said.

I watched her frame in the dark. My breasts rising and falling. She, now reaching in between her legs and rubbing, increasing the speed of her tongue, opening my lips wider. I arched my back. Gripped the pillow harder.

“Stop,” I said. She didn’t listen.

I pulled the pillow over my head and pressed it against my face. I let out a moan as I gyrated rapidly in her face. I felt it coming.

I let out a scream, biting the pillow as my body jerked.

I threw the pillow on the floor, closed my eyes and waited for my spasms to stop. My arms now lying lifeless at my sides.

I looked down at her and found her staring. The lower part of her face glistening in the light coming through the window. She took off her briefs, t-shirt, JT top and got on top of me, pressing her pussy against mine. I opened my legs wider and held her ass as she breathed heavily into my mouth. Our tongues occasionally coiling.

“I fucken love you,” she said, her heartbeat thumping violently against my breasts.

She straightened her arms so her breasts would hang over mine. I rubbed my nipples against hers then nibbled on them. She tossed her head backwards, her mouth open, trying not to let out a moan. She dropped to her elbows and pressed her breasts against mine again, now gyrating wildly, harder.

The mattress bounced up and down. The springs mimicking our movement.

I heard Tabz raise his head and look at us, then pull the blanket over his head.

“He’s awake, baby, stop,” I whispered.

“I can’t, babe, it feels too good.”

We carried on thrusting, rubbing, breathing. Sip now gripping my hair, me moaning softly.

“Fuck, I’m gonna cum!” she said.

Tabz now shifting further away from us. The bed creaking at its loudest.

I felt her teeth on my shoulder as she let out a deep moan. Her body shuddering, her legs stiffened. After a few moments she collapsed, her whole body weight on top of mine. Her heart was beating faster than before, sweat dripping down her neck onto my chest.

We lay like that in silence, my inner thigh muscles pulling, aching.

“I think we wet the bed,” I whispered.

“I think I got you pregnant,” she said, getting off and throwing herself into the small space between Tabz and I.

“I’m so embarrassed...I think he heard us.”

“No he didn’t, he’s out.”

“He looked at us, Sip.”

We fell silent...

“So did you fake it?” she asked.

“Fake what?”

“Did you cum?”

“Yes, you saw me.”

“Exactly, I know what you do when you cum.”

“Ok then, I didn’t cum.”

“Fuck! I hate it when you do that.”

"I hardly ever fake it, though, you know that. Only in the early days when I was nervous."

"What about now?"

"He's awake, babe."

"So?...why not just tell me to stop if you know you're not gonna cum?"

"I did."

We fell silent again.

"Is this payback for earlier?"

"No."

"Fuck, Shay, you know how to knock a dyke down."

I didn't reply. A few seconds passed...

"Are you scared of me?" she asked.

"No."

"Not even a little?"

"Sometimes I think you might kill me."

"I would never."

"You also said you'd never hit me in the face. Look where we are now."

"That was...I don't know what that was...it won't happen again, I promise. Why do you talk like I'm some kind of monster?"

"You say that each time. You promise each time."

"I mean it this time. It won't happen again."

I turned around and had my back towards her. She reached for the tissues on Tabz's side, wiped herself down, put on her briefs, JT, and t-shirt. She spooned me, reached for my crotch, and wiped me before tossing the tissues into the bin next to the table.

"You give it to me so good, babe," she whispered, kissing my back.

I shut my eyes and felt a cold breeze brushing over my stinging cheek.

"I didn't fake any of it," I said.

Shape Up

If everything is set to right angles:

Rectangular doors, rectangular windows, rectangular beds with rectangular pillows and rectangular desks all in square cells.

Surely these shapes will correct them. Rectangular passages will keep them in check.

Don't become a square, they say. Play on that rectangular pool table, or option 2: Go out into the rectangular courtyard and slide across rectangular benches. This is how people fix their minds.

Chances of survival are minimal unless you're a butch and have a rectangular hairstyle.

If you have flowy hair and lipstick on, you'd better be a wife otherwise you'll get a rectangular bar of pasty green sunlight shoved deep inside you as punishment. No one believes how much an abundance of soap burns.

An abundance of rectangular shapes burns the mind, destroys the will to live.

Join a clique or have your rectangular tray of food thrown on the floor.

Furry and hairless animals: white, black, brown, albino and hooded – gnawing at the bars, throwing themselves against the walls until the skin bleeds, pulling out hair and then walking out with a cool bounce when it's time to perform.

Some walk around in circles in square enclosures, contemplating ways of exchanging information on rectangular paper.

In that rectangular enclosure is a square, in that square is a heart.

Domestic rats differ from wild rats in many ways: (*Wikipedia*)

- They are calmer and less likely to bite
- They can tolerate greater crowding
- They produce more offspring
- Their brains, livers, kidneys, adrenal glands, and hearts are smaller.

Wild rats join the domestic rats and eat them.

Tattoo

“Ok, babe, so first thing you do is put on your safety belt. Then you check if your gear lever is in neutral before you turn the key and start. Then you...”

“Agh...babe, do we have to do this right now?”

“Yes, baby, otherwise you’re gonna forget everything you learnt in the learner’s test.”

“But I’ve got Black waiting for me in the fridge. How about we do this tomorrow?”

“Babe.”

“Ok, ok, carry on.”

“Right. So you switch it on and then put your left foot on the clutch, your right on the accelerator. Wait, is the hand-break up?”

“I think so.”

“Ok, press down on the clutch.”

“A-a, Shay, I’m gonna crash this car, let’s not do this.”

“Just relax, babe, you got this. So press down on the clutch.”

“Is the hand break still up?”

“Yes, it won’t move. You’ll release it when you’re ready.”

“Oh my God, can’t believe you’re making me do this.”

“Well, you’re always saying being in the passenger’s seat makes you feel like a pussy. So let’s get you driving. Clutch in, then you take the lever to the first gear...alright then you do what is called clutch balancing. You press down on the accelerator while slowly letting your foot off the clutch. They must be equal more-or-less.”

“I feel like a fucken kid.”

“Ok, I’ll keep quiet. I’m sorry.”

“Can we just drive to the dam, there’s space there. Our street is just too narrow for this, I don’t wanna fuck up your car.”

“Ok. Whatever you say.”

“I’m taking the beer of champions with us though.”

“Babe, why? This is a serious lesson.”

“Stress, baby, stress...gotta calm down the nerves. I swear I’ll focus, come on I can’t stay sober through this shit. I promise I’ll save it until after the lesson, ok?”

She kissed me on the cheek, switched off the car and got out.

“I guess you should bring me something too then,” I yelled as she got into the building. We drove to the dam in silence. First thing she did was open a can of beer. She looked straight ahead as she reclined the seat and stretched out her legs.

“Why are you so quiet all of a sudden?” I asked.

“I’m just thinking.”

“About?”

She took out her cell phone and held it close to her face as she often did. I figured it was so that I couldn’t see what she was up to. She started focusing on it, pressing keys and ignoring me. I never understood her mood swings. 1 minute we would be chilled and happy, the next everything would change almost as though a button had been pressed. I wondered if I had pressed that button, maybe I pushed her too hard, maybe I made her feel weak. I wanted to repair the damage but I didn’t know what to say. It was already too late.

Every time she was on her phone I got nervous, wondering who she was chatting to or planning to go to. But I could never ask her who she’s chatting to...not that she wouldn’t tell me, she would but it would annoy her and make me more suspicious so I stopped asking altogether. She always asked me though and I’d have to show her the exact conversation and the time the last message was sent. If it was someone I hadn’t spoken about before or someone she didn’t know, she would be cold until I put the phone down. Now here we were at a driving spot not doing any driving. It was my fault.

“I think you’ll learn quickly, babe. You barely studied for the learner’s and you passed so...so driving should be a piece of cake,” I said to no reply or acknowledgement.

I let out a deep sigh, reached into the plastic bag she had brought and fished out a can of Hunter’s. I switched the radio on and reclined my seat. 5fm started playing some annoying loud song I couldn’t recognise. I switched to Metro FM but the DJ wouldn’t stop talking. I switched it off and looked out the window at the tall dry trees hovering above us. I hadn’t planned to drink. It was a Sunday. I had class early the next day. I took a long sip and closed my eyes hoping that when I opened them again, everything would rewind and stop at us

cuddling on the couch before deciding to go out and drive. I hated looking at the steering wheel and the stupid gear lever. In fact I hated the whole car.

"I want a tattoo of your name," she said suddenly, holding her phone in my face.

"What?" I sat up.

"Look. I've been looking for a few days on the net and I haven't been able to find a design I like."

I looked at the enlarged image of a name tattooed in black on pale skin.

"I want it right here," she said, running her finger up and down her forearm, "What do you think?"

I stared at the image in disbelief...almost grateful that it was there instead of all the things I imagined she was looking at. I looked briefly at her arm and then turned my head back to the screen.

"Baby, we need to focus on driving," I said.

"I know, babe, but..."

"Why do you want it?"

"Cause you're my wife. You mean so much to me, Shay, I wouldn't have passed my learner's test if you hadn't been there. I'm telling you, babe, and before you say anything let me tell you something. You know I'm not much of a talker and I hate this sappy shit but...I really love you...I...I know I don't show you that I do and I know I put you through a lot, I know I've broken your heart so many times but just know I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to be."

"Are you sure about this?"

"Yeah. I want to turn this gang one into my sister's face 'cause I'm done with that life. I already spoke to a guy about that. On this side, I want your name written across."

"Why are you being so sweet, what's the catch?"

"Nothing, come on now. I just really want this."

"But we fight so much, what if...what if we fight and then you have this thing there...what if we break up?"

"I keep telling you I'm not going anywhere. If we fight I'll get over it. It will be something I can show to the world. These mofos are jealous coz I've got a good woman. They keep saying we won't last so I wanna stick it in their faces. I don't care what they say, I love you...this is me proving it."

“Ncawww, baby,” I said putting my hand on her lap.

“Serious, babe. I’d marry you today if I could.”

“Then why don’t you?”

“Hahaha, yoh, your dad would skin me alive.”

“True but they would get over it eventually.”

“Being with you is enough for now. As long as I have you I’m good.”

“Ohhhh, baby,...where’s all this coming from? It’s either you’re avoiding carrying on with the lesson or you’re trying to get laid.”

“Oh, snap. You caught me!”

We sat back in our seats laughing. She sat up again, brushed my chin, pulled me towards her and kissed my lips lightly.

“I appreciate you, ok?” she said kissing my forehead next.

“Ok, babe, I appreciate you too. Just understand that when I push you it’s because I see so much in you. I know you dropped out of varsity and you don’t wanna go back but I still think you would learn to drive very quickly, and not just driving, anything you wanna do. You’re so smart, baby, I wish you believed that. I’m just trying to make you realise that. I want you to be happy.”

“I know, baby...I know.”

Strong Coffee

I walked into the coffee shop wondering what people usually order on dates with strangers. It was a hot day, too hot for coffee, perfect for a cocktail, but maybe not. Irish coffee was the best option but ordering it would be breaking the rules. Drinking on the job was prohibited, but whatever, fuck it.

I spotted a table in the corner and sat there before anyone could direct me to another. The place was relatively empty, most people probably in and out with the lunchtime rush. I looked around for the waitrons but realised that there were only 2; 1 making lattes, the other taking orders at another table. This place attracted the old and young equally. From the outside it looked like a normal small coffee shop but when you stepped inside there was House music playing, a blue-lit drinks counter and a smoking area on the balcony. It felt more like a bar. I thought I'd be fancy, for once, and order a cappuccino, or maybe an espresso.

The café was noisy. Sounds of coffee grinders, filters, and blenders slowly gnawed at my nerves. Against that, was the frantic stirring of teaspoons, sounding like a triangle player on steroids. Clearly I wasn't the only nervous 1 in there.

There were 7 people. I counted. There was a table of 4, then 2 and 1. The group of 4 were men, the 2 were women and then 1 man, sitting at a table across from me. It was him I focused on. He looked anxious. I watched him punching the keys on his phone like he was too early for a date, or was she late? He had a clean-shaven well-put-together look. It must've been a special occasion judging by the rolled up fashionable jacket, his slick blonde hair and how quickly he stood up when a brunette walked in. I watched him give her a hug and then he said something. I couldn't hear him but I noticed that his body language had changed, his gestures were slightly exaggerated. In my head I imagined him speaking in a high-pitched voice. The thought amused me.

The waitress came to my table and took my order.

"A double Irish coffee, please, decaf," I said.

She scribbled on her notepad and then asked, “What happened to your lip?”

“Oh, this?...I fell in the shower.”

She nodded politely.

I felt embarrassed at first but then I really looked at her face. Her problems were obviously bigger than mine. She had acne that she tried to hide with concealer, base and powder. Bright pink lipstick stuck out of her face, perhaps to deflect our attention from the paste. Smart – I thought. At least an attempt to solve the problem was evident even though it was a fail. Even the darkness of the room didn't help. She smiled and I wished she hadn't. But at least she could muster a smile without her face cracking. She walked away and I grabbed a magazine from a tube seat near my table. I opened it on a random page and held it up.

Concealers don't conceal anything.

In came the 9th member of our unofficial bar committee – a woman in a grey pant suit, dressed for business. She was rocking a blonde bob. I saw her meet another corporate-looking woman I hadn't noticed before, sitting on the other side of the bar. I named them Suzy and Betsy.

The 11th member entered. I named him Mr Down-and-Out. He went straight to the bar and ordered a straight whisky. I looked at my watch and shook my head disapprovingly; at least I had the dignity to mask my drink. I imagined that my date would give me 1 look and shake her head too. I found myself laughing at the thought.

The 12th and 13th members entered, laughing like they had an internal joke of their own. A young couple that sat down and immediately locked lips. Maybe that's what Sip and I looked like – nauseatingly in love. I named them Charlie and Samantha, something about them was typical, cliché.

I named the waitress as she carefully made her way to my table, balancing my coffee and cocktails for the anxious guy (Mr High-Pitch) and his date (Foxy Roxanne). I called her

Primrose. Primrose because of her 60s hairstyle. Primrose because no one names their child that anymore. Primrose because of the red bud sprouting from her face.

Our 14th member came in and just stood at the door. A woman with long grey hair. One of those Earthy people who tie themselves to trees so no one can axe them down. An environmentalist – the type that doesn't believe in wearing bras, wears loose pants or was it pyjama pants?

She was carrying a cell phone and a black moleskin diary. She looked around and then fiddled with her phone, put it against her ear. Mine rang immediately. She didn't look like a professor but as she walked towards my table, I knew it was her. This was the woman who had emailed me, asking to give me something in person.

A Primatologist's Diary

19 Feb.:

It happened again today. I thought I had stopped but that lasted all of half a day. I followed her. ~~A charcoal, dark, short-haired, tall girl with firm buttocks that were shaped like a ...~~
I can't do this right now.

23 Feb.:

The fact that I don't have anyone in my life doesn't surprise me at all.
Maybe it's better this way. It would be even more difficult to explain why I do what I do.

24 Feb.:

Writing like this reminds me of my teenage years when it was all about getting attention from the boy you want and never getting it. I told my psychologist I've never done this diary-keeping thing before. He suggested I write about my days. He was rather disappointed that I didn't have a salacious story to share about my childhood.

28 Feb.:

I am a mutation - an interspecies that depends on clit throbbing to be reminded that I'm alive. Bonobos stay peaceful because they offer sexual favours in tense situations. If I just got undressed every time the Dean and I disagreed I would have better days and he wouldn't keep telling me about the decline of interest in Primatology amongst postgraduates. Sex solves such irritations...but I'm not that brave.

02 March:

I am sexier after I've climaxed...orgasms are a high I cannot explain. Like I've just consumed the whole world in one gulp and I own everything and everyone. They're all trapped in the bottom of my gut and will only get released after I have that post-orgasm pee. I feel a strange mix of vulnerability and power.

When I'm doing it people don't know. They look my way and seem to be looking at something else as they walk past. It amazes me that I've been able to keep a straight face. Is

it possible to go undetected every time? We are animals and are designed to show what words can't always express. There are no words to sufficiently describe an orgasm. That's why people moan, scream or resort to onomatopoeia. I close my eyes and open them again...a slow blink that could be an indication of fatigue. I also try not to spasm or jerk suddenly. I stiffen my body, wait, experience and then breathe.

04 March:

I couldn't concentrate today. The lecture room was full. I often wonder what they think of my long blonde-grey hair, my green crocks, striped socks and layers of unmatched faded clothing. I am what they probably call a hippie. Hippies are light-footed...harmless...

05 March:

~~I was naughty today. I gave the students a task which involved a demonstration....this is pointless...~~

~~I mean why should I...~~

~~I just had supper. My entry was incomplete earlier. It feels strange to leave it unfin~~

My hand was restless. It went into my fanny pack, loosened and tugged at all items of clothing in its way and slid down to where it wanted to be. None of my students could tell and yet everyone was watching and I was doing it.

When I felt my orgasm coming I dropped my pen and stayed down behind the podium for a few seconds before coming back up.

There's a sickening feeling that follows when it's all over. If I could go home when I start to feel this way I would but I still have to be Prof. Dalton. I still have to gamble through the rest of the day...shaking hands and discussing the future of things or determining which research project should take precedence over another.

09 March:

I was on the train today. I left my car on campus. Why? I don't know.

I couldn't stop looking at him. He had earphones on. His pants were loose and yet he was still bulging. Big, loud jeans with African flags and American rapper faces imprinted on them. He had one of these iPod things in his hand, looking down at it the whole time. He had a back-pack. His pants sagging under his buttocks as the packed train frequently made him lose his balance and made my breasts vibrate, nipples rubbing against my top and sending sensations all over my body.

What if your pants fell and maybe you're wearing boxers with an opening at the front. Wouldn't I see your penis? And how big would it be...

I had to. I watched him. I put my briefcase on my lap. Despite my protests my hand slid down and did what it's good at.

If he were a gorilla I'd be in trouble...he would smell my desperation. Made me think of the time I almost got attacked by one. He came charging at me with all his black fury muscular arms and distinctive face with features much like this gentleman's. Perhaps the gorilla didn't want to hurt me, maybe he wanted to mount me from behind and then leave me there weak and defeated but unharmed. The only difference here is that gorillas aren't well hung. I ran away that day due to an overwhelming feeling of fear but I certainly didn't run today. I wouldn't have been able to even if I wanted to.

13 March:

No one has said, "I've seen you. I saw you do it." Why? Is it possible they don't see?

The female chimpanzee is unable to hide her arousal or orgasm. Secretions, clitoral swelling, vaginal thickening and expansion give her away. When she orgasms she hyperventilates, muscles tense up involuntarily, arms and legs spasm, she clutches tighter, her facial expressions change as she frequently opens her mouth to let out a panting vocalization. We are not told any of this, we see it, and I've seen it.

I wonder what I do...I'm sure that just like the chimp, I grin and pant unawares. After all, we can't control everything. If we could the orgasm wouldn't feel as good as it does.

14 March:

We should be able to watch each other in the act without being reprimanded like children. Nudity would solve such problems. If I could walk around campus nude, if we all could, there would be nothing to keep closeted. We would all communicate through our bodies and we would understand.

Primates are designed to observe or monitor and facilitate each other's stages of sexual arousal. When a woman can't speak, her erect nipples, protruding clitoris and flushed face speak for her. Laws prevent us from using this language and so it's only spoken behind closed doors. What a shame.

22 March:

This is why I don't have girlfriends. Girls will lead you to believe they're on your side no matter what but all they want to do is snap your spine and then sink their stripper heels deep into your skin until you're uglier than before. With girls you're never ugly enough.

I choose to use them as objects without them even knowing.

06 April:

Marriage: I would have a better chance as a lesbian.

11 April:

Today I came home, fixed an avocado sandwich, took off my shoes, made tea, ate, watched Say Yes to the Dress, took a long bubble bath in the guest room, dried my skin with a white towel, put Lilly-scented lotion on, tied my hair up, fetched my laptop, put it on the crispy white linen, fetched my cupless patent red corset and put it on tight, put on my leopard print six-inch heels, then my red lipstick and Catwoman mask. No underwear...they like my bush exposed.

They were all online. The fans of Milf_puss!

I put on a live show for all 129 of them, doing everything they asked me to do.

Why did I do it? Because red looks good against pale skin and I look better with my legs spread.

12 April:

The physical body is an ancient symbol of misery!

I want to invent a body suit that lets me move through spaces without being seen.

Sometimes I want to do more: I want to smell, I want to touch, I want to taste and consume.

I felt that way when I looked at him...

I rode my bicycle to the park. I started to tingle almost immediately when I saw him coming. He was rummaging through the bin and had dark-brown pants (with a broken zipper) tied high around his small waist with a tired black belt. I couldn't see anything through the zipper but the dark opening was so large that I thought his penis would peek through. He had dirty dreadlocks, a torn leather jacket and was bare-chested. I sat on the bench and watched as he got closer. Most people would walk away quickly but I found myself stuck to the bench. I wanted to see him hard and maybe provoke him enough so he shoots a load at me like the "creepy" men they always warn children against.

I wasn't sure whether to show him I was doing it as he glazed over me and hurriedly walked past.

I tried hard to orgasm but my thrill was gone.

I figured he didn't see anything he liked.

03 May:

I changed my hair colour to a red orange last night.

Studies have shown that men get hypnotised by the colour red. They hate to admit this but they are closer to non-human primates than they think. They also don't know that they're easier to control when they see red. Just like female baboons and chimps use their swollen, red genitalia to manipulate, entice and tease their male counterparts, I'm using my hair.

Unfortunately, the state won't allow me to expose any other natural reddish pinks on my body.

09 May:

The neighbour's cat keeps sitting on my plants.

Mammals can sense when another of their kind is wounded.

16 May:

The psychologist is awful. I watch him sink deeper into a dark, sweaty world of bewilderment with every session. A world he created himself. All he needs to say is that he sees nothing wrong with me but instead he perseveres...all in pursuit of self-gratification.

He brought up my childhood today, his last resort I'm assuming.

I suppose he's not allowed to let me roam free just yet. There has to be a problem otherwise he doesn't get paid and is frowned upon by society when I become a registered sex offender. If I stop going to him I would be breaching the contract I signed when I was born, a contract named Normalcy. I suppose both our professions pay for us to pretend.

17 May:

I've decided not to cut my nails.

18 May:

Money is a much bigger reward when it's dirty.

Today, one of my online clients asked me to do something. I suppose he was inspired by the red hair. I refused for nearly 20 minutes, and then stood hesitating for 10 more. I think he liked that he had made me vulnerable and out of sorts. When I finally did it he told me that he almost left and that I'm lucky I still have him. 20 Minutes is a long time in the cyber world. He rewarded me by paying 40% more than he usually does – his last gesture of humiliation for the night.

I found myself staring at my cell phone, reading the notification I received from the bank over and over. I had done that. I had made that happen.

In Public

Doing it in public turned us on. This was never discussed, it just was. Our favourite spots included public bathrooms. We had done it sloppy several times on top of several white seats. It wasn't so that anyone could cum but rather to scratch an itch. The idea that someone might hear us was at the back of our minds but we didn't really care. Sip was never loud but she liked that I was.

The Fat and Carrot was no exception. I fed her a slice of pizza just after we realised it was our anniversary. We liked the pizza with the most on it; salami, ham, bacon, avocado, feta and garlic with some added chicken. It was ridiculous but we couldn't help ourselves, we liked the taste of meat – raw or cooked. It was the 17th day of the month. It was our 8th month living together but we had done a year and a half of on-and-off dating before then. It was unlike me to forget things like anniversaries or mensiversaries. It was my job to remember.

She started going to the bathroom alone a few times. Choosing just the right times to grab her phone and stand up, like when we had just laughed about something and the mood was casual. I watched her walk away each time and ordered a shot of caramel vodka. This was probably the lightest of the vodkas but a vodka none-the-less. Its effects aren't felt until a bit later. She would return around the same time the waitress brought the shot and immediately complain that I hadn't ordered her tequila. Both the waitress and I knew what a bad idea that was. The waitress knew us well, I suppose all the waitresses did. Sip cracked jokes as soon as she got back to the table, eager to fill any space of being questioned about how long she took in the bathroom. She joked about wanting to make the waitress her second wife, amongst other things.

I liked it when she referred to me as her wife. "My wife," to me, sounded like, "I love you," even though I knew the difference. It meant I was special, at the top of the pyramid or food chain of sluts she spent most of her time flirting with on WhatsApp. My place was higher than the slut that was pestering her on the phone, the slut that was asking where she is, the

slut asking her to bring something to eat, the slut she was itching to go to. I was higher. I was higher.

The shots kept coming and so did the messages. It was getting harder to smile and even harder to swallow the, "I'll be right back". But this was not our battle ground. Too many people looked to us to be an example and too many students hung out there. I let myself sink into a numbness that wasn't numbing at all. She leaned against the wall next to our table and wanted me to lean against her. When I did she groped my breasts and kissed my cheek.

Where about are u now?

The moment was interrupted but she chose to ignore the message staring both of us in the face. We ordered another round of drinks, now completely abandoning the pizza. She leaned forward and whispered, "Happy anniversary, baby, I love you."

I turned my head to kiss her on the lips. I turned my head again and found the waitress shaking her head at us while she cleared the table. "You guys are so in love it's sickening," she said. I smiled, as I had been doing the whole night, and reached for my drink.

Are u still coming?

"Whatever, just give us a doggy bag for the pizza," Sip said, locking her fingers into mine.

Just let me know when ure downstairs.

"Eish, my cousin is in town and she's sleeping over at her friend at res. She's been bugging me to go and give her something."

"What?"

"Money."

"When?"

"Now."

I slowly sat up and signalled for the waitress to give us the bill. I stood up but sat down again, losing my balance.

“Are you ok, babe?”

“Yes, you cunt!” I thought, but simply nodded.

I walked in the straightest line possible to the bar and forced my way in between two men. I ordered two more caramel vodkas, ignoring their comments about my rudeness. I paid, took the shots quickly and made my way back to the table. The bill was waiting for me. Sip quickly put her phone in her pocket as I approached. We went downstairs to settle the bill and left, smiling all the way.

We were quiet as I drove her to the res. I knew my way around campus even when drunk. Just as we were about to arrive she said, “Now my cousin wants me to sleep over. She’s such a baby.”

“Hmm...And her friend?”

“She’s sleeping at her boyfriend’s res.”

“Oh.”

I parked the car in front of the res and looked at her. She sat there for a while, looking straight ahead, rubbing her chin.

“Are you cool?” she asked.

“Yes, why wouldn’t I be?”

“I don’t know, you don’t seem fine.”

“I’m perfectly fine.”

“Ok....I’m gonna call you later to check if you got home safely, ok? Oh, and can I take the pizza?...she said she’s hungry.”

“Do whatever, man.”

“Are you sure you’re ok?”

“Go, Sip!”

She hesitantly kissed me on my cheek and then slowly opened the door as though a loud sound would wake me from a deep sleep. No one was sleeping. It was her way of making a polite exit. An exit that said nothing about all the fucking she was about to do and the pussy she was about to eat out. I watched her in the rear view mirror as she walked towards the entrance, her phone against her ear. I had imagined she would stop midway and come back

but she carried on walking. I started the car, reversed and swerved violently, making a screech before speeding off. The car sped beyond my control, bouncing through all the speed humps. A cat, randomly running across the street, would've had no chance, not even Garfield the thug. I carried on driving this way even after I had left campus. I wanted to get arrested or die or something but nothing happened.

I slowed down a little and looked at my left hand on the steering wheel. She had taken this hand in hers a week ago. We were sitting near the dam watching insects flying too close to the water's surface and then suddenly plummeting to their deaths. She made me face her when she took my hand. Her face sweating, her words struggling to come out, her legs unable to keep still. She had taken a deep breath, looked me in the eye and said, "I don't know where this is coming from but what I do know is how I feel.....I fucken love you...whooo, it's hot out here, damn!...Anyway....here goes nothing...fuck....Shay will you marry me?"

Suffocating Freedom

Tired and drained, I walked down the alleyway, following the sound of drunken voices and exaggerated laughs. The sound of my heels bounced off the walls of the buildings on either side. With every echo, I looked back to see if anyone was following me. The night was dark and windy, the only lights coming from Barbados - a bar not so far from our flat but not close enough either. The name of the bar flashed bright green and got bigger as I approached the entrance. I was safe at last.

“Sorry, ma’am, the bar is full. We’re not letting anyone in anymore.”

“Come on, I come here often enough.”

“We got a group of tourists in there, filled up the whole place.”

“Your shift doesn’t even officially start until 9pm, stop being a douche, let me in.”

“Ma’am, please, we...”

“You know what, fuck the tourists! What is special about this place anyway, the name is bullshit and you know it. There’s nothing exotic about this place, you’re out here acting smart and yet you know nothing about Barbados or where it is on the map!”

I stepped forward and forced my way through, feeling as though I had triumphed. I pushed through the crowd at the bar and pressed my chest against the counter. The room started spinning but only slightly. Suddenly the sound of men and women, ordering drinks, became too loud. I got a double Jack Daniels and lime, looked at it sceptically, and walked towards a table occupied by one guy. I pulled a chair and sat down.

“May I help you?”

“Sure.”

“How?”

“Don’t bother me while I’m sitting here.”

“Oh, how typical, a woman walks into a bar and sits exactly where she is not welcome, then assumes everybody wants her.”

“You haven’t asked me to leave, have you?...clearly I did you a favour. I’d be happy if an attractive woman came and sat with me instead of sitting by my miserable self!”

“Who said anything about me being miserable?”

“Oh please, look at you, your loneliness is written on your face. That’s why I’m here and that’s why you won’t ask me to leave. Relationships are formed out of convenience. In this case, our primal instincts were to forge a partnership as the only lonely people in this bar.”

“You’re assuming I’m not waiting for anyone. For all you know, she could be on her way.”

“No, she’s not. You lack the confidence for that possibility. There are all sorts of women in this bar and yet your eyes have not left your beer. Your body language screams defeat, like you’re unaware just how attractive you are.”

“So you sit down at my table, make assumptions about who I am and yet you’re the one dressed up for a night out alone?”

“Oh, I’m not ashamed of why I’m here at all. I’m here because my girlfriend is busy fucking someone else as we speak and I’m the one who dropped her off at her new woman’s place.”
He reached for his drink and took a long sip.

“Never saw that coming...so you’re gay?”

“Why, does it change anything?”

“No, I’m just surprised.”

“Don’t be. Are there any waiters here tonight or do I have to push through the crowd again to get a drink?”

“I’m still on my first drink. Slow down I’ll go and...”

“What is love?”

“Huh?...nah don’t do that, don’t make me have that conversation, not now.”

“Ok, how about this; are we gonna have sex?”

“Whoa chill. At least ask for my name first.”

“Why? So we can bullshit each other?...so you can sell me dreams and pretend to care? You’ll forget about me as soon as I get up to take a piss, so why should we bother with formalities, shouldn’t we just accept this for what it is?”

“I didn’t know there was a ‘this’ to accept.”

“I’m offering free pussy. Take it or leave it.”

“Ok, I’m taking.”

“Good. Your place in an hour.”

“You sure?”

“Yes. I think I’m high enough now.”

“Why sleep with a man if you’re a lesbian?”

“You need to fix it!”

I took a long drag of my now 3rd cigarette out of the box of 10s I had hidden from Sip. I took off my heels and stood up. The way to the bar was long as I pushed through the crowd. After 10 minutes, I made it back to the table expecting him to be gone but found him waiting for me. I handed him a beer, lined up 3 shots of tequila and took them 1 by 1.

After staring at me in silence he asked, “What do I need to fix?”

“You need to make me stop loving her.”

I folded my arms and lobbed my head on them. Sip loved tequila.

Bitched

Shaniqua was making her way back to the table. I wasn't necessarily pleased to see. I called her Shaniqua but her real name was Tammy. She was loud, feisty and had a Cassie-inspired hairstyle – one side completely shaven and the other with long wavy hair. She had put a purple streak in there and tattooed “bitched” on the bald side. I never quite knew what that meant. Was she the bitch or did she mean it in a, “you got served,” kind of way like, “you just got bitched son”?

She always wore torn jeans, boots and a loose tank. Her bottom lip was pierced and her eyebrow was pierced at least 4 times across – the rings gave that away. She had dark eyeliner on that made her green eyes pop. She was a bartender at *Lazy Lash* – a lesbian bar/club that we went to every now and again. She was what they called a Futch – a lesbian that's not a tom-boy or rough enough to be called a Butch but also too hard or tom-boy to be a Femme. I had dared Sip to get her number when we were there one night. I thought she wouldn't get it but she did. We hung out with Tammy after her shift and she found it funny that we had a bet on her and that we both found her attractive.

We had hung out with her a few times so I guess she was our “friend”. She said she lived with her girlfriend but we never saw her with anyone. She always came alone when Sip invited her out. I wasn't sure if she was trying to get Sip or if they had fucked and I was just in the dark. She never hit on either of us and she always went on about how hot we were as a couple. Sip never invited her to the flat because, “we didn't know her that well,” but to me that was code for, “I think she might actually be game for a threesome and that freaks me out a little.”

Why Shaniqua?

Shaniquas always steal your man/woman secretly by doing some hood tricks in bed with him/her and then coming and hanging out with you afterwards. A Shaniqua has great timing. She will never call at odd hours of the night because that will make her a side chick. Your man/woman will be so impressed with how well she understands the situation and

how well she behaves around you that he/she will leave you for her. Shaniquas sell dreams and are well-versed in this practice. Shaniquas can be your best friend.

Tammy was the epitome of cool. She was almost too cool to be true and that made me hate her a little. Plus, one should never completely trust a hard biker chick with a soft name. I heard Sip's name being called on stage. I wasn't even aware that she had written down her name. She jumped up without looking at me, got on stage and picked up the mic. "Hi, it's your girl Sippy. I'll be singing 'Sunday Morning' by Maroon 5."

The DJ started the song. The crowd started screaming and singing along. She shouted, "Brrrah brrah brah!" over and over when the instrumental part was playing. It was the only time I had heard her voice get really loud. She said a couple of other things that couldn't be heard like they do in dance hall or Rastafarian clubs. I cheered her on and Shaniqua, I mean Tammy, cheered louder than me. "Yeah show 'em how it's done!" she shouted and then looked at me.

Something about karaoke made Sip come to life. She held her head up and pushed her shoulders forward like some kind of alpha male up there. It was as though her alter ego came out and the shy person I knew was no more. Of course, the 4 drafts she had had were helping out a lot.

She finally got down from the stage and came straight to me. She seemed more drunk now than before she went up there. I guess adrenalin does that to a person. She stood next to me, put her arm around me like some kind of a rock star and said, "Give me a kiss." I leaned in and she licked my lips. It was a game she loved playing. Sometimes she would lick my lips and nose and then laugh as I wiped in disgust. I fell for the 'kiss me' trick all the time but it was funny for both of us. She grabbed my waist and made me face her. She gave me a long kiss, even sticking out her tongue so we could rub and wrap our tongues around each other out in the open. I couldn't believe we were dirty-kissing in public but then again, PDA was what we did best.

"Ok, love birds, enough porn for the night!" Tammy shouted.

We sat down; Sip on the chair, me on her lap.

“You wish you could fuck this, Tam,” Sip said, grabbing my ass.

“I do, bud, you know I would,” she laughed.

Somehow her response turned me on. I didn’t want Tammy around but in this moment, after a couple of shots and a few Hunter’s Drys, I wanted her naked. I looked at Sip in a let’s-just-go-home-and-fuck-her way but Sip simply looked into my eyes, took my hand in hers, and kissed it.

How Shay keeps her weight down

- Keep calm and take long baths
- Do 100 squats before bed
- Refill your water bottle 4 times a day
- Walk to shops, or to campus, at least once a week
- Only eat twice a day
- Only eat 6 spoons of rice or pasta per meal
- NO BREAD
- NO SWEETS
- 1 tablespoon of brown sugar a day, with Kellogg's bran flakes
- Skimmed milk
- Snack on peanuts and lightly-salted chips
- Drink hot water with lemon juice around lunchtime

Kitchen Heat

Dishes must be done:

We did our maths sums in the kitchen while washing dishes. Comparing, exploring our equal signs until we came up with a solution. A solution that eventually leaked, dropped, dripped and smeared across the page. We shared everything, criss-crossed and squinted until our eyes rolled all the way inwards. I worked on yours and you worked on mine. Trying our best to fill the blank white.

The stove was parallel to the kitchen counter. A space almost rectangular in shape but probably more square. This right angle provided too much space and so we drew a diagonal line from top to bottom corner and then there we were focused on the centre. We could both create these shapes and we made them join.

The bubbles started escaping from the sink. Popping then joining, becoming bigger and then smaller. I likened them to our chests.

Aromas filled the air. The smell of raw meat, rinsed wet and ready. Two divided pieces. Each with a slit in the centre like a stuffed wallet. Collapsing on one another only to separate when cooked. Flavoured and spiced – naturally. But what of this sum?

I put my brackets around the equation to isolate this moment. I found it rather complex, an entrapment of sorts but it felt good. It was drawn to me and I to it. It looked at me and said, "Solve it to finish". I took it apart and unlayered it but it refused to be vulnerable. It stopped me. You looked at me and reassembled it, "That won't get us there, stick to what we know."

Steam made Os as it left the scorching dishwater, moved through and around the cupboard handles and shaded the window frosty. We made Os of our own and then turned them into 6s and 9s because we could. Now separating and spreading equal sided triangles so that it could be easier. No one would see.

We both looked up at the rolling pin hanging low from the ceiling. You said, "If I insert this cylinder, will it help you?"

"It will depend on the diameter," I said.

I really meant no. Cylinders are fancy and unnecessary superficial shapes designed to sell us dreams.

At first the denominator and numerator weren't obvious. You assumed the position of a numerator and I focused on the denominator. My feet flat on the tiles and cold now. Numerators get cocky, especially when the denominator can fit snugly in.

Taking measurements:

100ml of egg white and oil gushed out, pouring onto the flour

Sticky –

Just enough whipping, beating, stirring. A clapping sound against different parts of the circumference. Stir harder. Your favourite part.

1 cup of sugar already included.

Oven at 120 degrees Celsius.

Now to bake.

I noticed you watching it and then I watched, "Is it supposed to rise and get this big?" I asked.

"Yes of course. Flour rises and swells...sometimes hardens. This is its swollen state."

You resumed duty and opened the oven slightly, putting four fingers in.

"Not yet," I snapped, tapping my fingers on the kitchen counter. Soon my palm flattened and started banging it over and over.

You stopped, "Are you tapping out?"

"No."

140 degrees Celsius

I grabbed the oven mitten...

160 degrees Celsius.

Now holding and squeezing it, I sunk my nails in.

200 degrees Celsius.

“Too hot now! Not yet, not yet,” I said, “Take it back to 180.”

You worked the knob a little more and then stepped back.

Set the temperature at 4:

You ran your finger in a circular motion until the plate got hot.

I bit my lip and breathed heavily through my nostrils.

You turned the knob higher...4...5...6

Highest boiling point now!

You watched with a fork in your mouth and then used the fork to stab: gently, lightly, hard, grazed, stroked. I jumped, squirmed, and then let out sighs and sharp-pitched short sounds.

I could see it coming.

“Countdown,” I whispered.

You fixed two fingers, dipped them in, dug even deeper before tasting, “You’re gonna burn.”

“Please, I eat meat on the daily. Give me the best you’ve got.”

I failed to stop you but really didn’t want you to.

The spillage indeed burnt you, you were so messy. It started to boil harder, higher at a temperature of crazy and then...

EXPLOSION!

Oily water all over the kitchen floor, oven, stove...your face...hand.

You laughed.

Dishes now broken, lying around shattered in obtuse and acute angles.

My eyes opened and closed, my mouth still gaping...producing foreign sounds.

Eventually our chests settled and my mind returned. I said, “What of the equation?”

“I believe we just solved it.”

“That was a big one.”

“Biggest one yet.”

“You tricked me.”

“I know.”

“Now what? The kitchen is a mess.”

“Fuck it, we’re getting take-aways.”

Ten minutes later...all knobs back at 0.

Head

I stood in the queue wondering if it was really the shortest out of all of them. Something about Wednesdays makes everybody go to the supermarket at once. I could never understand why. Surely people would choose to shop on a Monday so that they have the whole week sorted, or maybe on a Friday in preparation for the various weekend events. Our Pick n' Pay ran on a different system. I guess we were all disorganised, at least that's why I found myself going on Wednesday afternoons. I didn't like shopping much and Sip hardly got out of bed at all during the week. She hated being around people, except when we went window-shopping at clothing stores or were out and about club-hopping. I had to do the grocery shopping before we spent all the money for the month on booze and junk.

I looked at my grocery list:

~~Chicken (braai pack)~~

Potatoes

Pasta

Tuna (4)

Chips

~~Bacon~~

Cheese sauce

~~Apples, bananas, grapes~~

Stuyvesant (10s)

Peanuts & raisins

Muesli

Yoghurt

My eyes were focused on the cigarettes. I hadn't bought them yet and wasn't planning to. Sip smoked a lot and I was trying to get her to stop. It was silly that we had included them in our grocery list as though they were just as mandatory as fruits and veggies. We started off with 20s. She would get a box of Stuyvesant blue cigarettes a week. I told her it was too much so she said it could be cut down to 10. That backfired. The 10s were bought more frequently; sometimes by me and sometimes by her, secretly. Whenever I asked her why

she had to smoke so much, she used stress as an excuse. "Stress" was her excuse for everything: drinking, smoking, cheating, everything. This time, I decided she was going to go cold turkey, no more laying off the stuff gently. It was cruel but necessary, even though I knew it would lead to an argument.

The man standing before me was at the swiping stage of the paying process. I hadn't realised that the queue had moved that fast or that I had moved with it. I was feeling anxious, like I had done something wrong or that I was a bad girlfriend, an evil girlfriend. I took my phone out so I could call her and tell her that I wasn't bringing her smokes but I couldn't. I pictured her curled up in bed sleeping or watching a movie and waiting patiently for her smokes.

The cashier signalled for me to step forward. I took my groceries out of the trolley 1 by 1. "Plastic bag?" she asked.

"Yes please," I replied, taking out the money in my bag. I had missed the window where one realises they forgot something and quickly runs to go get it, pissing everyone behind them off. I was paying now and was leaving without the smokes.

I hung around the entrance as though I was waiting for transport or collecting money for some Hospice. I couldn't shake off the feeling I had. I didn't trust that things would be ok when I got home and I wasn't in the mood for a fight. I turned around, walked back in and bought the smokes.

When I finally left, I had a feeling of relief but also one of defeat. I was an enabler. They call people like me feeders. A feeder gets pleasure from feeding an already obese woman so she can become immobile and completely dependent on them. Those people get pleasure (sexual or not) from watching the eater eat and get bigger. I, on the other hand, just wanted to keep the peace. My pleasure came from satisfying Sip's needs even though I was scared for her health. She often said, "It's either this or drugs, babe, you choose!" when I raised my concerns. That always shut me up. The idea of her being back on that shit freaked me out and she knew it.

I was walking towards the exit of the shopping complex when he came up to me. The same Johnny Depp look-alike, from the queue, was standing in front of me asking for a lighter. He had heard me say, "Fuck!" when I was having my cigarette meltdown, and he smiled. I guess we had an unspoken bond now.

I told him I didn't have 1 so he asked for a cigarette instead.

"Hardly the same thing," I said.

"I know, I've got some pretty shitty Camels so I'll pay you R5 for one."

"Are you kidding? Why not add a few more rands and get a pack of 10s?"

"To stand in a queue and have to think what my pin is again? Nah, I mean no...I meant no. I've got a short-term memory, or maybe selective forgetfulness. I'll make everyone stand there for a minute, a decade, I mean."

I opened the pack slowly. We had stood there for longer than any strangers should. Besides, who says no to Johnny Depp?

I gave him 1 and he gave me R5. I suppose I could've walked away but something about him intrigued me. I watched him flick his lighter 3 times and take a long drag.

"Oh look, a lighter magically appeared," I said.

"A lighter is a less daring thing to ask for and it makes for a killer opener. Not that I'm trying to...I mean I don't want...not that you're not wantable, attractive, I mean. Wantable, hey, what the flaming fuck!?"

I watched him mumble something, scratch his head a few times and then look away as he exhaled. He had kept all that smoke inside him the whole time. I was fascinated. If smokers weren't trying to make O's in the air, they were trying to perfect this deadly magic trick. Sip just enjoyed blowing it in my face.

"I'm gonna go now," I said.

"Please, wait until I finish, I'll give you a lift...unless you're driving...a car. Of course you'd be driving a car, what am I, 3? I swear he rubbed off his stupid on me. Don't you just hate people who just come and mess your whole vocab up?"

"I can't say I relate."

“Lucky you.”

He scratched his head again, a few times, and then ran his hand through his shoulder-length hair with frustration. I stared at his fashionable clothes for a bit; his V-neck short-sleeved top, those skinny chinos that guys roll up to expose their bare ankles and, of course, pointy, shiny shoes. He had D&C shades on but kept taking them off and putting them back on almost routinely. He looked like a French fashion designer straight from Milan.

“I think I’ll take you up on that offer. You think you need the exercise and you’re strong enough to carry bags of groceries so you leave your car at home, forgetting that supermarkets are tiring as hell.”

“Preach it sister! I mean...I totally get you. Gee-wiz, put me in a can of beans and shelve me. I’m terrible today. I promise, this is the worst I’ve been in a while,” he said, letting out an awkward laugh.

“It’s ok,” I said.

He threw his butt on the ground and motioned for us to walk.

“I mean we went to the same school, had the same teachers and everything, yet he chooses to say, ‘Probable,’ when he really means, ‘Possible’. Then he keeps talking despite my obvious discomfort and he says, ‘End,’ instead of, ‘Conclude,’ he says end...end! I mean am I going nuts here? I could’ve stabbed him with a fork but then he would say something like, ‘Ow,’ when he means, ‘Ouch,’ and then he would be upset, no he would be displeased. I meant displeased! You see how it rubs off on you so quickly?”

“Yeah, these people,” I said.

We got to his car and I couldn’t believe how fancy it was. I was never good with cars but anything with a retractable roof and a matted body screamed ‘money’ to me.

“Anyway, let me take you home. I will take you to your house,” He said, in a much calmer voice, as we got in.

“Oh, it’s just a flat, thanks again for the offer.”

“Flat, not house. Because a flat is a different establishment altogether...establishment? No I should say building. Fuck!”

I wasn't sure what to make of this situation but it felt good to have to work hard at figuring it out. Most of my subjects made it so easy; most of them knew what their obsession was and were too aware of it to be interesting to me. Some of them claimed to be obsessed with something only to find that they meant they just like it a lot. Some made up obsessions just for the attention, so they could say they had an article written about them. It was never clear who was telling the truth, and I guess that's what made it interesting, visiting them and finding that small slip up that would scream, 'fake'.

I watched his lip movement and the thing he did with his hair. I timed him to see if he had an invisible clock in his head that made him rub his head after a number of seconds. I realised that there was. He waited 15 seconds before rubbing for 2 seconds. Even when he was driving.

I started wondering if this was a tick or a syndrome or a disorder, a strange addiction to words or an obsession with being perfect. He wasn't a perfectionist and yet I couldn't rule that out. Sometimes the distinction between these terms was fuzzy. It was something I struggled a lot with when I started working for the site. How would I weed out all the other possible conditions and get left with obsession? What exactly is obsession and what triggers it?

My mind tried to process him as he dealt with his own mind. I was surprised he didn't have any bruises and had a full head of long hair. I started thinking that maybe this "he" that he kept referring to was someone he wanted to be with but couldn't. Maybe that was the trigger. Yes, my new subject was a straight man in love with another straight man, I concluded. Or no, my subject was just ranting like any of us, he was being like this because he just had a dramatic reaction to a pet-peeve.

I hadn't noticed that I had directed him to my flat. Neither had I noticed that he had followed the directions. The drive seemed short and I wasn't sure if I wanted to see him

again. I didn't like the fact that he now knew where I lived, I didn't want any of my subjects to know that information. I prayed that Sip hadn't seen us as I took off my seatbelt.

"Bye...thank you for the lift," I said.

"Yes, yes get out!" he said.

In just a matter of seconds I had gone from being the silent confidant to a heathen that was in his car for some reason. I got out of the car wondering if we should add chauvinist or sexist to the list, but aren't those terms reserved for mucho men? He was anything but. As soon as I closed his door he lunged into the middle of the street and sped off. I suppose I should've been more concerned, more upset, more shaken and confused but I was intrigued instead. All I wanted to do was write about this mysterious man.

I walked into the flat and Sip was standing at the balcony. Shit, she had seen us. I often felt so guilty after I had been around a man. A guilt that was beyond reason. I hadn't done anything wrong.

"I'm back, babe," I said.

"Who was that?"

I took her smokes out of 1 of the plastic bags and handed them to her.

"A guy from class. Saw him while I was shopping."

"A guy from class with a car that fancy?"

"Yes, baby. You know how rich these students are."

"Why is it opened?"

"Funny story. He bought one for R5 just to avoid going into Pick 'n Pay...what a character."

She stood there staring at me as I unpacked the groceries. She stared at me the same way detectives stare at a suspect in the interrogation room. Like she was waiting for me to crack.

I packed everything away and left the chicken on the counter.

"Are you ok, babe?" I asked.

"Come here!" she said in a low voice.

I sighed and closed my eyes briefly, preparing for what was to come. I walked towards her.

She grabbed me and pushed me against the ledge of the balcony. The concrete digging into my back.

She turned me around and pushed me so that the ledge pierced my upper abdomen and my head hung over. She pressed herself against me and slid her hand down the front of my leggings and underwear. I was expecting her to say something but she didn't. She pulled down my leggings and stuck her hand in between my thighs. Her fingers touching me. I tried to turn around but she put her hand on my back and held me there. The neighbours were sitting on their balcony next door. They saw my head peering over the ledge and greeted, probably wondering why I was leaning over so much.

"Nice day today," Rosie shouted out to me.

They were an elderly couple. The type that always stopped us in the corridor to have lengthy conversations about cats and irrelevant shit. Sip intensified her touch, parting my lips and rubbing more vigorously. I could hear my breaths get deeper and loud but I still had to answer Rosie.

"Yes...uhh...yes we're lucky today...the sun is...oh God...the sun is our friend."

I replayed the sentence in my mind and didn't quite know what I had just said but it entertained Rosie.

"Yes. We're lucky indeed. How is school dear? And what are you studying again?"

Sip went down on her haunches. I felt her tongue making its way through my thighs.

"Ahh," I exclaimed. It was the sound I always made when I was pleasantly shocked.

She spread my legs wider.

"What dear?" Rosie asked, pushing her ear forward.

She and her husband were both hard of hearing.

"I...mmm...I'm studying j...journalism."

Sip started spanking me. Not the loud slap but a groping-hard-and-then-releasing type of spank. I wondered if Rosie could see the orgasm build up on my face. I wondered if females

could recognise such things in each other. Sip always watched my face and she knew to stop just before I came, so I could be hungry for her and almost beg for her to finish the job. She couldn't see my face now but she understood my body language.

"Oh goodie, I see...Working hard, hey?"

"Yes...yes I am..." I paused for a moment and breathed, "Mmm...Fuck, babe," I said under my breath.

"Speak louder. You know how we old folks are," Rosie laughed while slightly leaning over her ledge. She was always so intensely interested in us. It seemed like seeing us was the highlight of her days.

I wasn't sure what conversation I was having or if I was talking English or the language of sex. Sip was now working with both her fingers and her tongue. I could feel her lips on mine, her hands like giant slugs moving slowly, roughly, gently. I felt a heat rush going down my spine. It intensified as it travelled lower, around and in between my curves.

"Not very talkative today, are you?" Rosie said, still looking at me.

"Rough, deep...deep day...mmm...hot Rosie...really hot." I said, making a fist, biting my knuckles.

Sip increased her speed.

"Oooh dear, you should get a cool drink or ice water, look at the sight of you."

I held Sip's head in place. It was coming. I grabbed onto the ledge. I closed my eyes, held my breath, gripped her hair, bit my lip, scrunched up my face, and then spasm spasm—spasm—spasm, spasm spasm spasm—spasm....spasm.....spaaaa—sm. Before I knew it, the heat was leaving my body in rapid, violent contractions. I clenched my teeth trying hard not to scream, my chest rising and falling against the cold cement. Sip continued for a little while longer and then stopped.

"You remember that next time you're with him," she said standing up and wiping her mouth. She stood next to me and peered over the ledge.

"Oh, hi Rosie," she said, lighting a cigarette.

WhatsApp Conversation

Shay and Michael

- Hey babe. Was just passing through when I saw your profile pic. You're really clit deep in this lesbo stuff hey?
- Lol @ "passing through" and "clit deep". She's an actress that my gf and I like. She plays Frankie on Wentworth. Dope series that. You should check it out, you'll wanna do her too!
- Lol y'all are crazy. How u been?
- Been busy hey. U?
- Ag travelling, getting my hustle on, handlin' bidniss!
- Nice. U back now?
- Girl I beeeeen back. What u been up to?
- Making a documentary...Journ assignment *rolling eyes*
- Hectic. How's that going?
- Stressful as fuck!
- What is it about?
- Lesbians. No surprise there lol
- Ooooh must be sexciting, I mean exciting erhhm!
- Lol it's much deeper than that
- What more is there to say? There was pussy and then there was another. They started slipping and sliding against each other, then Mike came through with the D, they had a 3sum. The end!
- Lol u wish buddy!
- Can't blame a nigga for trying hahaha. So how's life been now that you're a lesbian?
- U say "NOW" like I woke up and decided one day.
- Well u kinda did...u joined the lesbo trend.
- Trend?
- Yes. Every straight girl wants to try it at least once. #everygirlinvarsitybegay
- I'm not tying it. I'm in love

- Lol that's what they all say initially. U just need THE D! But not just any D, u need to call a brother up so we can go turn up and then pick a girl up, take her home and have a 3way freeway. I'll be going from tunnel to tunnel with this train until we all ARRIVE at our destination baybay baybay!
 - Haha good luck with that. Sip would fuck both of us up.
 - Oh she can join in, 4 is better than 3. We can tag team on dat ass!
 - Lol ure so gross.
 - And u like it. Lol
- So I was with the girls last weekend just catching up. They say u guys don't hang out anymore because apparently you've "changed".
- What? How?
 - They were talking about how y'all were turning up at Lavidia about a month back, next thing they knew u were trying to fight some honey at the bar.
 - Oh so I was the one looking for a fight? Ok.
 - I don't know exactly but they say ure a ticking bomb...especially when you're drunk. I leave for one month and ure out here trying to sock a bitch in the mouth! Lol They say u were even taking earrings off and shit. I was like whaaaat? That can't be Shay.
 - Oh wow. They really filled you in didn't they.
 - Well I don't know what exactly happened but the girls are saying you've become so angry now and whenever they go with u to places, u cause drama.
 - Good to know.
 - It's not u that's the problem. They blame Sip. Ever since u shacked up with her ure unavailable all the tym and when u are it's either u hardly stay or u stay and all is good until u get fucked up.
 - No surprises there, they've been against this relationship from day 1. And I'm not the only one who's had rough nights. Did Slim fill you in on the night she got her hair pulled out trying to fight a heavyweight at a hotdog stand outside the club?
 - No. When?
 - Exactly!
 - But that's her, it's not u. U can't blame the girls for being concerned.
- (26 minutes lapse)

We've been telling u to get out of that situation. I mean the girls say they saw u with a black eye on campus 2 weeks ago and u lied about it.

- Whoa this convo got real serious real fast!
- Lol...for real though, uve even called me a few times crying and shit.
- U guys shouldn't worry. We're in a much better space now. She apologised...she didn't mean it. End of convo.
- Alright...if u say so.
(9 minute lapse)

We haven't done lunch in a while, how about we catch up properly at 2pm 2moro?
my treat.

- Sounds good
- So I can teach u some etiquette. Clearly your ratchet ass don't know how to behave no mo! Lol
- Lol. Goodnight.
- Goodnight. Don't be in the streets acting crazy 2nyt ;)

WhatsApp Conversation

Sip and Shay

- Hey baby, how's it going with Layt?
- Hey bbe. Still gud. Drinking the beer of champions. Having a bromantic nyt lol
- Lol you're so gay babe. What time do you think you're coming home?
- Not sure hey
- Ok...I miss you☺
- Miss u too bbe
- Come home
- Ncawww soon bby soon

(46 minute lapse)

- Hey, can I get some money for the nyt? We're goin out. We'll come get it...u won't have to bring it.
- Oh...but I thought you said Layt got paid and she wants to make it rain tonight.
- Yeah she bought 6-packs and a bottle. I just wanna have money when I go out.
- Isn't she paying? She invited you
- Babe, ure making this weird
- I'm not, just that we haven't bought toiletries yet
- Don't worry abt that I'll get money 2moro
- From who babe?
- Fuck it. Nevermind
- Babe. I have R280 here, I'm not saying there's no money. You know I give it to you when you want but the timing sucks.
- U don't trust me, it's ok I get it!
- Baby come on
- Ure being a bitch and just coz u got paid now u think ure the shit.
- And now?...you're taking this way too far
- I don't gv a fk! Thanks for spoiling my nyt.

- Come get it then babe, come get it.
- Nah Im gud.

Lasered

I am alone because I'm with you.

I cut the line and banged on the door. A white door. A latched door. Shadows of feet shuffling under it. Two feet? Four feet? shuffle shuffle...

OMG he's so not my type! He's just so gross the way he spits in your face as he talks, I mean eeeuuw.

...Close together, apart, then on top, then off. I called out her name and the movement halted but I could feel them...

Did you bring your eyeliner?

...My heart, my hands, my breasts against the door on which they, I mean she was now leaning. I felt her heart through the wood. It was pounding with excitement. Bursting...

No girl, we're not walking, he's our ride home!

...I closed my eyes and could feel her feeling her. A transparent colour had crept up on me and secured a muffler. I stood and felt as she put her lips on Red...

Yeah I know hey, I thought I saw him twerk too.

...She grabbed her waist, pulled her against her. I could hear, I could feel...

People are so gross, someone puked in here!

...She told her she wanted her so bad and Red blushed, giggled and then no yes no yes breath breath yes yes shuffle shuffle and then silence...

My heels are killing me, friend, please hold my drink!

...My yellow was dead. It was the colour of piss, diluted, drained, floating somewhere in the depths of nothing. Forgotten. Removed.

Someone flushed and I opened my eyes. Someone shoved me out of the way and banged on the door.

Get out bitch!

I stood away and watched as drops of burgundy flowed and hit the floor.

She was a bright blue, me a bright yellow. As we started dancing and grinding against each other I became a red-orange. "Can we go to the bathroom to relieve me of this colour?" She only blushed a misty blue and the movement continued. We locked legs, we kissed and

more red-orange between us getting brighter and brighter and more on my end. The smell of her cologne – robust – cologne and cigarette combined. The eyes still above us, on us, between us. We never forgot them. We embraced them.

Across us were a bunch of reds, each a different shade and make. Crimson in the corner – Flash - Ruby on succulent lips ordering a drink – Flash - Rossocorsa on the floor getting wet – Flash - Scarlet walking up the stairs. Everywhere RED and they were loud, enticing, vivacious. I watched my yellow shrink but it never gave up. It dropped to the floor a few times but still clawed its way up my legs. I felt it. It never gave up, I mean I didn't give up. More colour and the place was filled up. By then we were sitting down with the colours right there with us, mine faint, yours ripening with time. Shot of Patron. Shot of Grey Goose. Shot of Blue Label. Shot of Chivas. Shot of emptiness. The green in my purse diminished and then we diminished, I mean I diminished.

Pain never looked this good.

I was searching through the crowd with my jacket and drink, in 1 hand, and a Black Label draft in the other. Colours are a nuisance and so is their brightness. Men stood lined up against the wall, throwing their darts at me, trying to rub off their orange-purple on me. Girls occasionally throwing shades of green at me. The steam was set off and all the colours became meshed. Bodies everywhere, the colours now a milky blend. I was surrounded by burgundies, violent violets and navy blues as I walked, pushed, shoved, and stumbled through the crowd. Colours are a nuisance. Some managed to escape the eyes and some were completely exposed. I wasn't hiding. I wanted to be found.

We were out together once in one of those rooms. I was a bright yellow and she was a blue - a Miami Beach blue. I liked sitting next to a blue like hers, she a blue and me the yellow of the sun, we created the summer, became it, and everyone wanted to be part of our shine. My shine. We drank several cocktails filled with boisterous peaches, oranges, purples, greens, more yellows. We smiled at each other from here to the roof, exchanged our happys, stirred, exchanged shades, touched and created greens, kissed in shades of lilac. I the queen and you the King, I mean Kween.

Living in the now because there is nothing else to live in.

Systematically I picked up my drink then she did and then I would. We were looking in different directions but sitting at the same table. Our bodies moved slightly, swaying just a little to the bouncing sound. She snatched her happy away from me and I was trying to chase it as it ran. She got up and disappeared into the distance, where the colours began. She drew my happy out of me and dragged it with her. I watched them swallow her, take her. She wanted to be taken. I diminished.

The tune changed and I began to feel a green. It was that bad witch colour, that matt green. There's nothing sadder than when a striking, slippery, dripping wet yellow-purple becomes a cold, dry green and even darker towards a black. It's a moment when all dreams come to an end.

In there we were all the same. No colour, just one fluorescent blinking bulb swaying to and fro, magnifying our desperation. We were all led there because our bodies were tired of playing pretty. There was no glamour in that space. Stretch marks were visible. Teeth were stained. Weaves were exposed. Acne pushed through the powder. Lips were dry, lipstick smudged. We were dull. No colour.

The multi-coloured laser beams pointed in different directions. Each shooting from a glass eye fixed on the wall. Each eye rotated until everyone was scanned. The colours were the gods, the eyes the master decider. We were under surveillance. We didn't choose them, they chose us. Our job was to become. Be. Elude. They created what we should look like where, how and when. Sometimes we only had one eye on us. It picked you, it picked me. Sometimes our eyes multiplied, or should I say theirs. I'd had some fixed on me before: some on my back, some on my hair, some on my breasts and some on my legs. You can't pay attention to them, they will swallow you whole, I mean us, I mean me.

Bent at the Knees

It's the wanting you

Never getting you

Keeps me wanting you

- Jhene Aiko (You vs. Them)

When I thought I heard the door open I took out 1 of my earphones. It was indeed her but she didn't put on the lights. I remained still in a foetal position on the edge of the bed facing the wall. My head covered. I could hear her kicking off her shoes, taking off her clothes and walking towards the bed. My pillow drenched. She got into bed and spooned me, her arm around me. I felt relieved and disappointed at the same time. I was afraid that everything had changed. Even in my sleep she was using me for something. She cuddled me because she was cold, at least that's what I was thinking. Usually I associated cuddling with love. I wanted to believe she did it because there was nowhere else she'd rather be. Tonight I wasn't sure.

I let her stay there; her breasts pressed against my back, her crotch against my ass, her thighs and knees against mine. A perfectly fitted piece of a puzzle. Except in this instance the puzzle was far from complete and the other pieces were unobtainable. I loved it and hated it but couldn't really express either of those feelings. I pretended she wasn't there, that she hadn't come back.

Her heart hammered steadily on my back. I put my 1 earphone back in and adjusted the other one, so that they were both in so deep that I couldn't hear anything from the outside world.

If you go away on this summer day,

Then you might as well take the sun away

All the birds that flew in the summer sky

When our love was new

And our hearts were high

- Neil Diamond (If you go away)

I couldn't control them, the tears kept coming. It was only a matter of time before she would feel my stomach muscles spasm under her palm. I tried not to sniffle. My mother had taught me to be strong even when things were grim, even when it was impossible to breathe because of the lump in my throat. My father had taught me to be kind, to love, share and the rest of it. I had done what he had taught me and it had resulted in this - a situation that I couldn't even explain to myself. I was with a monster that inflicted the deepest wounds and then was there to lick them when the blood oozed uncontrollably afterwards.

As I listened to the lyrics I wondered why it is that we play sad music whenever we're sad. Movies use it for emotional effect and to make sad scenes as gut-wrenching as possible, what do sad girls like myself use it for? – Punishment, I concluded. My songs were selected from the “emo jams” folder on my phone. A playlist that made me feel either romantic or utterly destroyed. I felt the latter and yet still...

*If I stay right here,
I'll die inside
Ran out of tears,
I can barely get by.
It's fair to say,
That we tried
You know I wanna stay,
But if I do I'll die.*

- Floetry (I'll die)

I felt her hand move down my tummy until it rested just below my belly button. I thought she had passed out but she was still awake. I wondered if she had been trying to talk to me the whole time, maybe she had an explanation that would make me change to the “feel good jams” playlist. I took out 1 of my earphones but there was nothing. The air wasn't dense with information or stale with the smell of her Black Label Draft like it often was after

her nights of bingeing. Instead the leaves were rustling as a weak twig swished to and fro outside our window. I waited a bit before I escaped this world again, her hand now moving down further and gently tugging at my underwear. I removed it. In fact, I removed her whole arm and felt it collapse against my back. She didn't move or say anything. I put my earphone back in.

Would you catch me if I fall for you?

'Cause I'm falling

- Leela James (Fall for you)

I listened as the song took me deep into my memories. I thought of the time I first realised I was in love with Sip. I went further back to the time when I met her at the prison. I closed my eyes shut as the pain in my chest persevered. I hated getting sentimental over this shit but I couldn't stop. The tears were coming out again. I felt her put her arm around me. She pulled me in, closer to her. She knew I was crying and that's probably why she was still up. It was unlike her to get into bed and stay awake this long. I wiped away the tears and sniffed as I reached for the tissues next to my bedside lamp. I sat up and blew my nose while she lay still. I folded the tissue, put it beside me and slid back down into the covers, covering my head again. I could tell she didn't know how to approach this or how to deal with it.

She felt around for the earphones on my face and gently pulled them out of my ears. I picked up my phone lying just below my chin under the covers and pressed pause. She still wasn't saying anything but I knew her all too well so I spoke even though I hadn't thought about what to say.

"I give you everything I possibly can. I try to understand and be there for you. We fuck whenever you want. I try to make you happy. Cook your favourite meals. What the fuck else are you looking for?"

She kept quiet. The room was silent for a while with my words ringing and echoing somewhere in the dark. I was surprised at how I sounded like every other girl.

"Are we going to be together forever?" I spoke again.

"I don't believe in forever but I believe we will be together for a long time."

"Until when?"

"I don't know."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Then you should know."

"I can't predict the future, Shay, all you need to know is that I'm not going anywhere. I want to be here."

"Then what was up with you tonight?"

"I don't know, babe, I took E and couldn't think properly."

"I was right there. People could see you. You kept following her around the club like a hound wanting to draw blood. I was watching you and you knew I was."

"Shay, I didn't mean for any of it to happen, I don't know what came over me. She was calling me and..."

"Don't blame her. When I walked up to you guys and asked what was going on you told her to walk away."

"Because you were trying to start something and I didn't want it to get ugly."

"It was already ugly. It was ugly as fuck!"

"Don't shout! You know what that does to me."

"What it does to you?...What it does to you?"

"Shay, come on, bra."

"That's all you know how to say. Don't shout! I was embarrassed and alone yet I went there with my girlfriend. I was knocking at the door in the bathroom and you could hear me but you didn't give a fuck. I looked crazy out there and to top it off you let me come home alone."

"What was I supposed to do Shay? You know how you are when you're angry. I couldn't open that door."

"Because your hands were occupied, or maybe your mouth was or both! If you don't want to be with me anymore, you should leave."

"I would never leave you for a floozy..."

“Oh, she’s a floozy now. A few hours ago she was your queen that you had to protect from this random girl that you happen to live with. I was scum and she was everything to you. You didn’t even care when I left, you stayed with her. Now you come back and everything should be ok?”

I hadn’t realised that I had sat up.

“I don’t know what else to say. I don’t want that girl, we’re not dating. I don’t know what came over me.”

“Is she 1 of the girls you chat to on WhatsApp?”

“She has my number but I don’t chat to her.”

“You gave her your number?”

“Yes, but it was just...”

“Then go and be with her. Why are you here?”

“Because I love you.”

She reached for my thighs.

“You obviously don’t know what that means. Don’t touch me, don’t you dare touch me. You didn’t get to fuck her tonight, so now I’m the next best thing?”

“I’m sorry, ok, I’m sorry. Please, Shay, I don’t know what I was thinking but I don’t want to lose you, you’re my peace of mind, my best friend, my everything. She’s just a floozy, let’s stop talking about her please she’s not worth it.”

“I said don’t t...don’t f-fucken touch me.”

“Please, don’t do that, don’t cry. I won’t contact her ever again...Shay, say something...can I hold you? I won’t try anything I promise, I just want to make things ok...I was stupid, I didn’t mean to hurt you...Can I hold you?...Baby, I’m sorry.”

“Why would you take E, are you back on that shit again?”

“No, babe, she had some and she offered. That’s what made me like that.”

“This is the second time now. Second time in front of me.”

“I know, babe, fuck I’m an idiot.”

“I want you out tomorrow.”

"I know you don't mean that. What we have is real, I'm not giving up on us that easily."

"Just leave me alone. Goodnight."

"Can I just....I didn't....goodnight, babe,...I'm sorry."

I put my earphones back in, pressed play and skipped Leela James...

'Cause I can't make you love me if you don't

You can't make your heart feel

Somethin' that it won't

And here in the dark, in these final hours

I will lay down my heart

And I will feel the power but you won't

No you won't

'Cause I can't make you love me

When you don't

When you don't

- Adele cover (I can't make you love me)

I closed my eyes. I had stopped crying. She had stopped trying.

Phone call from Sip

I saw my phone flash a number of times. It was Sip. I had put it on silent because I was busy with a “client”...if I could call my subjects that. It flashed repeatedly – a distraction to both me and this girl. She was explaining her breast measurements and daily breast enhancement routines and regimens. I was vaguely interested. I excused myself and went outside to answer the phone.

“Hello.”

“Hey. Where are you, it’s 8pm. I’ve been waiting for you.”

“I’m just wrapping things up, babe, I’m at Tony’s house.”

“Who’s Tony?”

“Just one of the people I interview. I’ll be home soon.”

She hung up on me.

I stood out there for 5 minutes longer just staring at my screen, confused. I went on WhatsApp and checked her status. Her statuses were always updated when she felt strongly about something. If she hadn’t changed it since the afternoon then we were cool but if she had changed it and it was negative then I was in for it.

“Fuck!” it read, with an angry red emoticon.

She had posted that about 3 minutes ago and was still online.

“Babe don’t worry I’ll be home soon, please don’t get mad. You can eat without me, we have leftovers in the fridge,” I typed. I sent the message but she was already offline.

Just as I was about to go in again she called. I picked up.

“Shay, who the fuck are you with?”

“I told you I’m interviewing someone. I...”

“Who is this guy?”

“It’s a girl, babe, you don’t know her. She emailed me. I’ll tell you about it when I get home.”

“I want you back now!”

“I said I’m coming, babe.”

“Shay, I’m not playing. I’ll fuck you up!”

“Don’t talk to me like that!”

I hung up.

I hadn’t expected to have such a strong reaction. I always tried not to lose my cool because it made things easier. I almost dialed her number but decided not to. I was too irritated and angry to talk. She knew how to fuck my day up in less than a minute.

I was turning to walk back in when she called again.

“Sip, really?” I answered.

“I’m sorry, babe. I’m sorry. It’s just that I miss you. I haven’t seen you since this morning. You know how I get when you’re not here. It’s torture. It’s even worse when you mention people I don’t know. I just don’t want some perv rubbing against my wife...I’m sorry, ok?”

“Ok,” I said. I wasn’t in the mood to argue.

“I’ll wait for you. Just finish up there, ok babe?”

“Ok, babe. Just...you need to understand that I’m working. I hate it when you go off at me like that, it fucken hurts...and it just throws me off.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“Ok.”

“Now tell me what you want me to do to you when you get here.”

“Really? Just stop, I need to focus.” I was melting already.

“Haha, I’m kidding. See you now now.”

“Ok, nunu. Love you.

“Alright. Thanks.”

“Oh, we say thanks now?”

“Ok, ok, I love you too Mrs Sippy.”

“That’s more like it. Bye, babe.”

“Bye, baby. Take your G-string off on your way home.”

“Haha, bye, Sip.”

“Promise you’ll do it first.”

“Baby. Hang up.”

“Hahaha, ok bye, babe.”

The Trippy Life

We left the car at home. We had decided to walk to the park. I had my camera, the meat, spices, marinade, green salad and blankets in my overnight bag. Sip carried the bean salad, snacks, cutlery, paper plates and cooler bag filled with man-size cans of Black Label, Castle Lite, Heineken, Hunter's Dry, and a bottle of Sky vodka. Nash carried the braai stand, coal and camp chair. I could see they were tired but they persevered, adamant that I shouldn't carry anything heavy. Nash was Sip's friend. We had invited her down for Sip's birthday weekend and pumped up the air mattress for her in the lounge. She had arrived the night before and the two of them hadn't stopped catching up since. They hadn't seen each other in 2 years.

I didn't know much about Nash except for the little that Sip had told me and the few pictures she had shown me on Facebook. She was attractive...more than her pictures. I could see why they were friends. They both liked loud skinnies and were into joggers, cheeky t-shirts and Vans sneakers. Nash was quite different though; she didn't have any visible tattoos, had long blonde dyed dreadlocks and big hazel eyes. She had a bounce to her walk that made her dreads swing a bit. I liked that she had tied them up in a high ponytail. She was great to look at, they both were. As much as it hurt me when Sip cheated, I could see why girls were so easily drawn to her and was proud as hell to be her fiancé. I felt proud in this moment too; walking with them filled me with desire. It made me feel cool. I wanted them to touch me and eat me out at the same time.

It was a slow walk to the park, a long one made even longer by the sun. I was wearing a short summer dress that Sip had picked out. I too had my hair up in a ponytail and had put on my shades even though they made my face sweat more. Sip and Nash went back and forth about whether Drake was a rapper more than he was a singer, or if he was a singer trying to rap. I wasn't listening to their debate, instead I kept giving Sip my I-want-you-right-now look. She grinned but carried on with the conversation.

I had organised this day and the weather couldn't have been more perfect. Sip didn't know that I had taken down a few numbers from her phone and called up all the friends she had

kept in contact with and spoke often about. I told them I was planning a surprise braai for Sip and that I'd like them to come down for her birthday weekend and bring their girlfriends. Almost all of them stayed with their girlfriends. I had asked them to pay for accommodation at a relatively cheap B&B near our flat. All 5 of them had arrived with girlfriends in tow. They were waiting at a hidden spot at the park. The idea was to surprise Sip.

We were 1 street away from the park when I noticed the golden Labrador pup. As we turned the corner, I glanced back and saw him. He seemed to be following us.

"Guys, look." I said, glad that I had cut their debate short.

Sip and Nash stopped and turned around.

"Come here, boy, come here you big boy you." I said, sucking my lips and crouching down to the pup's level.

He came running and jumped all over me. Licking my face and wagging its tail before jumping and excitedly running around Sip and Nash's legs.

"Chap, you know I'm scared of dogs." Nash said in a frozen state.

"Oh come on, chap, this cute little thing?"

"It's not little, bro, I can't."

"Don't worry he's just excited, he'll leave us alone if we keep walking."

He didn't turn around though. He kept following us until we got to the park. By then, Sip had named him Juicy, after Nash had joked around about making the dog carry the cranberry juice we had brought to dash the vodka with. We didn't care much about the tag around its neck. Juicy was ours at least for one afternoon.

We crossed the park, passing various cars playing house music, some hip hop, some *kwaito*. Groups of men and women having braais just as we planned to. It was those types of parks. Dirt clearing amidst parched patches of grass and scattered trees. Not the kinds where people jog, take walks and play Frisbee with their dogs.

The environment hadn't scared Juicy away. He was still trotting silently behind us, stopping every now and again to sniff on bones thrown on the ground. The vibe was great – everyone animated, singing, car boots opened all the way up and speakers blasting while girls danced

and cheered each other on behind or next to their cars. Some stared at us or Juicy, we didn't care. Teenage girls waving flirtatiously at Sip and Nash, some guys calling me and offering me a better time. We ignored all of them, at least I did, to avoid the day turning into something else. I didn't mind when girls would hit on Sip or show interest but she blamed me whenever men hit on me, especially if I looked at them. But my mind was focused on spotting Sip's friends.

They had chosen a quieter spot further into the park. I spotted them after one sent me an SMS: "I see you guys there looking lost, look on your right under the big tree." We walked towards them, Nash talking as loudly as she could trying to distract Sip from looking straight ahead. I was so excited I couldn't contain it. She often spoke about them and the things they got up to back when they were studying together. I quickly ran in front of Sip to block her vision.

Slightly startled she said, "What's wrong, babe?"

"Nothing, I just, just look at my face and nowhere else ok. Keep walking."

I was smiling stupidly at her, occasionally holding her face so she wouldn't try to see behind me.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"You'll find out in a minute."

I could hear voices. We were close enough.

"Happy birthday, baby!" I said springing out of her way.

"Surprise, motherfuckerrrrrrr!" they all shouted at once.

"Oh my God, what!?"

Sip dropped everything she had on the grass, including the back pack she had put the dash, salad and snacks in. She walked slowly towards her friends with her hands cupped over her mouth. She couldn't speak but her eyes were open wide. She kept looking back at me as she walked towards them.

"Come here, fool!" one of them shouted, walking towards her with arms wide open, Nash hugging the others. I watched Sip and Nash embrace their friends while I greeted the girlfriends and asked for their assistance with laying everything out. Sip came over to me and gave me a long kiss on my forehead.

She said, "You're the best." And then turned around and shouted out, "This is the wife boys. Can you see why this is the wife!?" she kissed me long and hard on the lips while the others cheered her on, "Go in, chap, go all the way in!"

We stopped kissing and laughed. I was blushing so much I couldn't keep my mouth closed. It was a feeling I couldn't describe. I had butterflies and wanted to cry with joy. I felt like a cheesy love poem. This was a "violets are blue, roses are red" moment for sure and I basked in it for as long as I could before Sip said, "Let's get this party started!"

Things had settled, the salads were laid out on the blanket, Nash manned the braai while Sip and her friends stood around the braai-stand catching up. I sat in the camp chair seasoning the meat while the other girls poured their drinks. We spoke about our crazy girlfriends and how nuts they were gonna be after all that beer they were drinking.

"Toolz knows I don't like her drunk, plus she's the one driving today so she'd better pace herself."

"And the whip goes katooshhh!" Another said and we laughed.

"I think we should let them be as drunk as they wanna be, I'm sure you can let her get away with it at least this once." I said

"And who's gonna give me loving when I'm horny later?" another interjected, "I get horny after a few so she can't just pass out tonight."

"Exactly, we're in another city getting turned up so we might as well turn it all the way up in between my thighs too!"

"Yassss, girl, I heard that!"

We got along better than I thought we would. I usually didn't fit in so well with girls but this bunch was easy going. I took the meat over to Nash and she took the bowl, smiled and said thanks.

"Ey, ey, ey, Nash, I'm watching you chap," Sip said jokingly.

"Hahaha, I'd never boi, not your woman, sani," she replied.

Nash had this thing about her. I wondered why someone like her was single, someone so smooth and funny...seemingly responsible and capable. I found myself standing there longer than I should, comparing her to Sip who was giving Juicy orders to sit, get on his hind legs, jump and spin –then rewarding him with a few drops of gin on his mouth. Juicy seemed to

hate the taste but he couldn't resist licking the gin off. He appeared to like Sip, she gave him the most attention. I looked back at Nash who was now bent down looking through the backpack for a fork. I noticed a tattoo, of music notes sprouting out of a tree, on the back of her neck when her dreadlocks fell to the side. It was an odd tattoo but I found myself fantasising that she could play the guitar and would play at Sip and I's wedding in nothing but a wife-beater and chinos. She had very strong arms.

As the meat cooked, I set up my tripod, placed the camera and switched it on. Realising everyone was looking at me, I stood next to it and said,
"Guys, I'm doing a documentary for Journ. Don't pay too much attention to the camera, just carry on as normal. I might ask a few questions here and there but nothing serious."
"What is it about?"
"People having fun," I said, suddenly feeling weird about saying the word 'lesbians'.
"She's lying, she's hoping everyone will strip down and start fucking. She's shooting a porno!" Sip joked.
"Can I be the front stuntman?" Nash said putting up her hand.
"Just sit down, Nash, no one wants to see your cum-face!"

We all laughed and made our way to the blankets laid out on the grass. The girls now dancing to a house beat from a car parked nearby. They were charged with everything from vodka to Hunter's Gold to gin. There was so much alcohol we could've opened a *shebeen*. It wasn't long before the girls started twerking on their girlfriends to the song "Wiggle" by Jason Derulo featuring Snoop Dogg. It was blasting from Toolz's car. Juicy now wrestling with a bone near the braai stand.

While Sip rummaged through the cooler box, I took my phone out of my bag and looked at the questions I was planning to ask.

What challenges do you come across as openly gay women in the workplace?

What does it mean to be butch and how are you different to your girlfriends...who are feminine?

Do you ever think, or rather, do you ever feel threatened that a man will come and take your girl away?

How do your parents feel about your sexuality and dress sense?

They just seemed stupid now and there was no window for me to ask such questions. I locked my phone again and joined in the twerking...which ended up in a lap dance because someone put Sip in the camp chair, blasted "Partition" by Beyoncé in the car and then came back shouting, "Yo, Shay, the birthday boi deserves a lap dance!"

I felt myself turn red like a naughty little school girl. We had done so much more in public, I told myself, but this was gonna be a testament of my skills, not Sip's. I slowly walked up to her with the best game-on face I could make. I then turned around and sat on her lap, gyrating and bouncing, lifting my dress a little at the back so she could see my ass shaking in her face. The rest cheered as I turned around and straddled her, bringing my lips close to hers and then turning away just as she was about to kiss me. She wanted me there and then but couldn't have me and I loved it. "If I had a dick I'd be inside you right now." She said while grabbing my ass. "Babe, you're not supposed to touch the stripper," I whispered in her ear.

"Hay, ladies, haaaaaaay, how you dzoin' it's your boi, Nash, I'm out here with a number of married mother fuckers but I'm still free..."

"Sit down you thirsty fish!" someone shouted.

"Hahaha she said 'How you DZOIN' even."

"Hey, voetsek, I'm trying to holla at the ladies here," Nash laughed and looked back at the camera. While licking her lips and rubbing her tummy she continued, "So ya, ladies, I'm free to mingle, you know, a little bit of fuckin maybe, anything you want. I can fuck all y'all today! At the same time! 1 butch! 2 hands! 1 tongue! Your pussy! My mouth! All day! Errrydzay!..."

"Ohhhhhh, she pulled a Kevin Hart!" Sip shouted. Everyone else laughing.

"Never mind Kevin Hart, this nigga thinks she's LL Cool J!" Toolz added.

"Hey, you're messing up my take, dawg, you're messing up my flow!" she looked intensely into the camera again, "So call a nigga up or find me on Facebook, the name is Jazzy

Nash...ha! coz I be spittin' and flowin' to a jazzy tune givin' you a taste of my big sax, leavin' the vocals up to you, if you know what I mean. Yeah, hahahaha, but on a serious note though. I'm Nash comin' to you live from Botanical Park. See you soon....oh and just a few Ts and Cs: No ugly bitches, only yellow bones please. Oh and...only girls with big clits can apply!"

"Ohhhhhh, snap. She went there. Tell 'em son!" Sip shouted as she got up and high-fived her followed by raucous laughter amongst all of them, except their girlfriends who looked at each other and giggled.

I laughed at their silliness. Even Juicy jumped up and down, excited by all the shouting, head locking, and tackling. I watched him hesitate then bound all over the two bodies that were now on the ground, limbs entwined, laughing hysterically.

It was almost 5pm when the others started rolling a blunt. Their girlfriends looked on disapprovingly while they argued about the best way to roll and which weed was the best in the market. I was lying in between Sip's legs, leaning against her chest.

"I hope you're not gonna smoke," I said in a low voice so the others couldn't hear.

"Heee, baby, come on, my boys are here and it's my birthday."

"I just don't want you passing out early. You know how weed just makes you look even more drunk...I don't want you to act crazy either...this day is going too well."

"I'll stop acting crazy when you give me a son."

"What? What does that have to do with anything?"

"A man straightens up when he has kids."

"You know that's a long process though, nunu, we can't just find a random sperm donor and do it tomorrow. Besides, Juicy can be our baby, I saw how you were with him."

"Haha, a puppy is not a baby. Plus, Juicy will probably go home after this....and I want a baby boy that looks like both of us."

"Do you think I'd make a good mother?"

"Of course, baby, I don't wanna have a family with anyone else. I want to know that my kids will be in good hands when I die."

“Who said you’re gonna die first?”

“Trust me, I know.

Ey, look at Juicy over there with his paws in the air. Haha, I think we killed him, chaps, we killed Juicy!” Sip shouted, laughing.

“We didn’t do jack, your gin killed him,” someone said.

“I’m teaching him to be a man!” Sip said, laughing harder.

“Hey students in lecture land. We just finished braaing for my pimp Sipso! Heading for the club now to get turnt up like motherfuckers! Oh, and check this out real quick, this is Juicy. He has a name tag on his collar but fuck it, he’s Juicy to us. Juicy hung out with some niggas and turnt—the—fuck up today. He drank some gin, passed out nigga style under the tree with his paws twitching in the air. As you can tell he’s a proper white folk pet, he’s all well groomed and shit. Ha ha, shiny fur and shit. Ha ha. Excuse me students, I’m trippy like a fool right now, high as a motherfucker! So Juicy here woke up after an hour and had the munchies so we gave him some salad and bones. Just look at this glossy fucker, he’s part of the niggas now, ha ha. I wanted to give him that “get yo ass up” kind of weed but these mofos stopped me. Juicy was already getting loud, barking out of character and shit. Ha ha, Juicy was freestyling. Ha ha....oh maaaaaaayn I’m trippy like a fool right—now—yo!”

“Ey, get away from the camera, Toolz, no one wants to see your ugly face!” Sip called.

“Ey, fuck you and your long ass gay lashes nigga. Hahaha.”

“Order, order comrade!” Nash laughed.

I walked to the camera to switch it off and pack it away, but before I did, I stuck my face right in front of the lens.

“So yes, guys, we did it. My baby is happy, I’m happpppyyyyy, a bit drunk but still standing. The night is young and so are we. Time to go home and get glammed up Rihanna style before we hit the clubs and get turnt up! As you can see behind me, some couples are kissing, some people are drunk – we all are, some high, some drunk and high at the same time which is bad but shhhhh don’t tell anyone, heehee, yeah man what can I say...it’s the trippy life!”

The Game

Laughter filled the air as we stumbled out of the cab and walked into the building. We had been surrounded by noise until then and the silence seemed foreign. We spent a few minutes asking the security guard at reception if we had any visitors during the day, each of us asking him the same question, over and over, in different ways and then walking away laughing.

None of this prepared us for the game that was to come. We weren't aware we would have to play it. After obsessive pressing of up and down arrows the doors finally opened and we stepped in. I was still smiling as we took off. We all were, following Sip's loud burp. The time on my wrist read 3am.

I hadn't noticed the mirror when we walked in and yet it spread across one of the three walls. I kept turning around, studying myself, and rating myself. My hair was a mess. My eyeliner now faded and slightly smudged. We were all situated somewhere within the space, almost as though a body was assigned to each wall to form a triangle. That's when we fell silent and then it started. I blame the shape.

We played a game together, us three. It was unintentional but not completely unexpected. We stood waiting to get to our final destination. The ride was slow; one of those where wired ropes and strings are mechanically connected to lift and tug until someone ends up suspended in mid-air. My hand covered my mouth as it often did in these situations, and then my hand was replaced by a loosely tied scarf.

The mirror exposed us and introduced us to each other in a completely new way. I saw folds and creases I had never seen before, I heard the sucking of teeth, saw lips pursed and then opened and smacked in ways I hadn't thought possible. I looked at myself again and saw my mascara now on the brink of running from all the sweat. The red lipstick was now a faded pink. You wiped it away with your lips earlier, or she did. The mirror and the fluorescent

light magnified your unease. It was raw and sculpted across your face, all our faces. The small enclosure had sucked out all the oxygen and humour. It was different now. Just a few moments ago it was smiles and laughter, a secret butch handshake between you 2 and loud talk of who is the best at things in general. That was before we stepped in.

Just above the entrance, the enclosure glowed 1 and then eventually 2 as though giving us enough time to do what our bodies needed to do. I saw you flex a little and hunch your back as though preparing to seize this moment. Hands in pockets, then hands out. Balls in sockets then balls out. I leaned against the mirror in anticipation.

We were still suspended when you served first. It was glowing 5 now and almost 6. You pressed a button and everything halted. A stillness that blocked out the noise outside and elevated the sound of your breath.

She started pacing, moving towards me and then quickly back to the middle. You sent balls with a black speck towards me and I tilted my head, ducking them and sending mine up so that they bounced on the ceiling and then dropped. They collected at my feet. My shoes were suddenly interesting. I nervously bounced them on the mirror a few times and then sent them towards her but you caught me so I hung my head low as they gathered at my feet again. Her balls came my way and I covered my chest...crossed my legs. You stood with your legs apart, hands in pockets and fixed your balls on my face. Now sweating, she turned and fixed her balls on you, mine still bouncing at a rapid pace from wall to wall. Rubber balls are hard to control unless one is a pro. We were amateurs so our balls went everywhere uncontrollably. Mine especially.

I wondered how long the wire would hold and how much exposure my skin could take. I wondered how long we would be able to breathe in the enclosure. I started biting my nails when I figured it was a long way until the game ended. It carried on in silence and I turned my head to the side each time our balls met. I wanted to reach 9 but realised we were still glowing at 6.

You dominated the T.

Never this much, never everything

“So you’re fucking Nash?”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“I don’t know what you’re on about.”

“I saw you kissing.”

I swore I heard my heart stop beating at least for a minute. I lay there in the dark staring at the ceiling as though it would open up and swallow me on cue. It never moved, nothing did. Not even the trees could rustle the leaves loud enough to block the sound of guilt escaping through my breath.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about babe. Maybe we should sleep.”

She grabbed my wrist and held it tight, digging her nails into my palm.

“Don’t tell me to sleep after lying to me like that. I saw you two kissing at the bar.

Remember that? When u both decided to go and buy drinks at the same fucken time!

Remember that?”

“Baby, please calm down. We were just a bit drunk, I don’t know how it happened but I told her it was wrong. We spoke about it. She knows. She feels bad babe. I feel bad. I promise it won’t...”

“You feel bad? You fucken feel bad? These motherfuckers have been jealous since I got you and then you go and give her what she wants, you prove to them that they could have you if they wanted?”

“Babe, these are your friends.”

“Friends? Friends my mother fucken ass! Where were they when I was locked up?”

She let go of my wrist and I rubbed it immediately. It felt like a thousand needles had pricked my palm in the same spot. I rubbed it but the pain seemed to worsen. I let the air take care of it while listening to her pace around the room.

“Sip. Babe. Calm down, you’ll wake people up.”

"I don't give a fuck about people, I don't care about any of these fucks including your bitch Nash! You didn't care about people when you sucked face with her in the club. I always knew you were a fucken whore! This uppity 'I'm a saint, good school girl, larney accent' bullshit and yet you go around opening your legs!"

"Baby, I didn't fuck anyone!"

She grabbed the duvet and threw it on the floor. Then she grabbed the tight tank top I was wearing as though she wanted it to rip apart. I felt a scratch running across my breast.

"Babe!" I screamed but she had me up on my feet against the wall.

"I'm sorry," I tried to say. Her fist jammed against my throat, my top lifted and held tight in her grip.

"I'm gonna fucken kill you, you bitch! Today I'll give you something proper to tell people about!"

I heard Nash barge into the room and put on the lights.

"Ey, what's going on here! What the fuck chap? No man!"

She put her arms around Sip and tried to pull her to loosen the grip.

"Let me go, you fuck. You're fucking my girl. You're laughing acting like everything is cool and yet you're fucking my girl. I'll kill both you fuckers right now. You and your whore fucken making me look dumb, like a fucken pussy!"

Nash managed to pull Sip away from me. They fell on the bed. I slid down against the wall, my legs limp...shaking. They wrestled on the bed until Nash had Sip in a head lock and had wrapped her feet around her.

"No, chap. No, boi, this is not what we do. This is not how we treat our women bra."

"Late night messages on your phone, men driving you home, men on your computer, mysterious meetings! I should've fucken known!"

"Sipzo, what are you saying bra?"

"Ask her, ask your bitch, she's right there!"

“Calm down, chap. No, man.”

After a while, Sip stopped struggling and just lay there breathing heavily. I got up slowly, holding onto my neck. Everything in my body shaking, including my lips. I met her gaze as I got up, she looked at me disgusted and didn't blink once.

“I'm fine let me go,” she said, still looking at me, frowning with her lips pursed.

“Chap, I will but just don't...”

“Bra, let me go right now I'm not joking.”

Nash let her go and I found myself moving slowly towards the door. Sip stood up from the bed and pulled her boxer briefs out of her ass. She walked towards me, Nash hurrying to my side.

“Don't worry, she's not worth it. You can have her.”

We watched as Sip picked up the backpack next to my feet and started packing. She threw the duvet back on the bed and started putting on her skinnies which were lying on the floor.

“Baby, please...” I shouted but Nash put her arm across my torso, blocking my words, blocking my body from meeting with Sip's.

“Sh-sh-sh, not now,” she said.

We kept quiet. I watched Sip stumble around the room looking for her cologne, her roll on, her body lotion, forcing them all into the backpack. She then took down her suitcase from the top of the wardrobe and started throwing shoes, pants, a coat, and jackets in there in no particular order. Not bothering to fold them.

“Baby!” I shouted again but she ignored my hoarse, cracking voice.

Nash still not letting me go to her.

“Sipzo, I'm leaving tomorrow chap, don't leave your girl please. She loves you, come on man. What you have is deep don't throw that away. Look at her chap, come on man.”

Sip ignored her too and put her jacket on followed by her cap. She put the backpack on and briefly looked at herself in the mirror. She picked up the suitcase handle and looked up at

us. Nash pulled me so I could get away from the door. Sip pushed past us. I heard her grab her face cloth, toothbrush and underwear from the bathroom. She had threatened to leave me before but she never packed...never this much...never everything. I was used to her calling me names and leaving, only to return after a day or two.

I threw myself on the bed and wailed like a lost child. I wailed like the world had ended and there would be no more sun. I wailed like a mother elephant trying to revive its stillborn. I wailed like I wanted to cough my heart out so I could fix it manually. So I could fix everything. I wailed so hard that it hurt to breathe.

Nash walked out of the room.

“Boi, please, you can talk about it tomorrow. Don’t do this, it’s late, where are you gonna go, bra?”

Sip brushed past her and headed for the door.

“She’s yours, boi. Good luck,” she said. The door slammed behind her.

Unarmed and Unprepared

I walked around in the house like I knew the owner well. I felt as though I had a right to after all he had put me through. There's something about seeing a man's asshole twenty or more times that makes you feel as though you know him through and through. Like you know him enough to wander in his house without permission. If I hadn't been raised well I would've invaded his fridge like he had invaded my phone. He had shown me things that I didn't think were possible and he could easily qualify as a stalker. I wasn't sure whether I hated him or blamed him or was disgusted by him or turned on by him. All I knew was that he was giving me unusual attention, naturally I had to find out why.

I had allowed my curiosity to lead me to his house, ring the bell and let him lock the door behind me. I didn't understand what it was about me that dared the universe and challenged it to make something bad happen. I had always wanted to die creatively like this but I wasn't ready to die just yet. Still I wanted to see if he was that crazy and if I was crazy enough to let him. Even in this dangerous situation he was my subject. But truth is, he had stopped being my subject the minute I stepped into his house without a camera, voice recorder or notepad. I came unarmed and unprepared. Flirting with a disastrous outcome. I had nothing to lose or gain. I didn't really care.

He opened the door and greeted me with a wide smile. I nodded, looking up at his face, his hair and his clothes. He wore glasses, I strangely liked the look. Sip had them but never wore them. I thought she looked the most attractive when she had her NERDS on but she didn't believe me. Wenton was probably in his early 40s. He had just come back from work and was about to open a bottle of red wine – I assumed so because he had a cork screw in his hand. He had beige chinos on and a light blue short-sleeved shirt with a pullover that had diamond shapes filled in with beige and dark brown. I looked at his heavy brown shoes with the label Bronx on the side and then looked up at his face. He took off his glasses as he let me in and closed the door, almost apologetic, like glasses weren't considered cool for my age group.

He showed me the seat I sat in last time and he sat opposite me on the same couch he had put a show on the first time I was there. This visit was different though. He seemed far more nervous and unnaturally cordial. He said, “Hello”, “how are you?”, “Did you find the place alright?”, “May I pour you a glass of wine?” all in succession as though he was being tested on etiquette. We were long past this polite and cordial bullshit. I had seen so much of him, so deep into him that I couldn’t look at him without seeing the pictures he had spent the past 5 weeks sending. It seemed he was desperate to uphold some kind of an image all of a sudden. His eyes were less excited and kinder, his legs were crossed and his elbows were on the arm rests, his hands laid neatly, 1 on top of the other, on his lap.

He reminded me of a guy I had met on Mxit back when I was still in high school. A guy I had been so inappropriate with; sending dirty pictures, videos and talking for hours about how we would fuck each other senseless in person. The day came for us to meet and suddenly we had remembered our manners and how to act around strangers. We sat spaced out on a bench while having a polite conversation about his pets until he left. Wenton was doing the same. He sat across me like he wasn’t the same man who sent me dirty pictures with captions like, “Next time I want you to mercilessly shove this vase into my asshole unexpectedly!” I remember thinking who says, “Mercilessly” and “Unexpectedly” when trying to be sexy? He sounded like an English teacher who would die before he offended the English language by saying, “Fuck me hard.” Maybe he was an English teacher, given his semi-formal attire, I couldn’t tell.

I sat across him with a what-happens-now attitude. He still sat there bothering with pleasantries like a psychologist trying to convince me that this was a “safe place” to be. We both knew it wasn’t. I agreed to a glass of wine and that’s when he got up and disappeared into the kitchen. His house – a small double-storey with furniture spread out and sparse. There were no cheesy family pictures either, just a random metronome on top of a book shelf packed with DVDs and books. He had an old TV set on a stand and 3 chequered sofas. It was almost as though he had been stuck in time. The cream rug on the floor not helping much either.

I stood up and went upstairs. My boots landing loudly as I stepped on the wooden staircase. I didn't care that he could hear me, I didn't care that it would piss him off or offend him...he owed me this much. All that was up there was his bedroom - decorated with vases, bottles, rods and everything cylindrical. He had lined up a number of oversized dildos on a shelf above the bed. Had he taken them out for this special occasion or did he like looking at them? I didn't spend too much time on this thought.

A computer was on a desk at the bottom of the bed. I had imagined him to be ashamed and private but he turned out quite the opposite. I had no desire to touch anything because I knew where most of those things had been. My eyes returned to the dildos. There were 9 of them, arranged in no particular order. I walked over to the shelf and couldn't help but fix them, even dildos should be arranged in order of size. But once I was done it seemed there was still something wrong...there were only 9, not 10 but 9. 9 is such an odd number, not just numerically but in general. 9 is like the preview before 10 makes its grand entrance, it's just there to create suspense. I felt sorry for the number especially because I was a 9. Sip told me I was a 10 but my dress sense brought me down. I spent days trying to figure out just by how many points it brought me down and why. She wouldn't tell me why. I hated 9 but here it was looking oddly at me like I was the incomplete one. But then again, maybe I was. Maybe I am.

I heard him walk up the stairs and then stand behind me. I turned around sharply. If he was going to attack me I should at least see it coming.

"Here's your wine," he said.

"Thanks."

I took it from him, his big hands almost burying the glass. I took a sip while looking at him, the wine looking like dark blood in his hand. I had hoped he would be angry so we could have an argument. I was dying to have an argument...with anybody. Instead he looked at me and hesitantly opened his mouth.

"So this is where the magic happens."

He had stopped pretending that he wasn't the same man in those pictures, the same man who gave a live demonstration during my first visit.

"So what exactly do you want?" I said putting the glass on the window sill. I expected him to be taken aback by my question but he remained calm and relaxed.

"Ok, straight to the point. You see...," he put his glass down as well and put his hands in his pockets, "Every time I do it myself it's by choice. I lubricate, I gradually increase the sizes so that my body doesn't go into shock and also, to avoid the wrong kind of pain and/or bleeding. Basically I'm always careful and mindful of how each of these is going to feel inside me. I'm used to the feeling but I don't want to be, I don't want to expect or to prepare anymore. I want to be helpless and desperate. I want to relinquish all control."

"I have to ask, why don't you have pictures of family anywhere in the house?"

"Uhhh...wow...wasn't expecting that. I'm just not a pictures guy." He winked and laughed.

I studied his face again and noticed the deep markings from the glasses on his nose. He obviously wore them all the time and was squinting despite trying hard to act like his sight was sharp.

"Why did you take your glasses off?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"Put them on."

He reached in his back pocket, pulled them out and wore them without any fuss. He looked at me as though he was waiting for the next instruction. I reached for my wine and took a long sip. We were silent now; a different kind of silence where he stood expecting and I stood hesitating.

"Take everything off!" I said.

He walked away from the staircase and stood on the other side of the bed. He took off his glasses again, followed by his watch and then...

"Where should I put my clothes?"

"On the floor. And did I say you could remove your glasses?"

He got undressed and left his clothes on the floor, then took his glasses again and put them on. I expected him to start stroking his dick but even in this dirty scene he still maintained this polite facade. Sip would've looked at me like I was crazy, I never dared to give her orders like this. She said I made her feel like a child when I asked her to do things, even if my tone was gentle or soft. Maybe Wenton wanted to be treated like a child. His hands remained at his sides but his eyes started to show an excitement that looked all too familiar. It was like the first time we met except I was in charge this time. I was worried I would hurt him but he seemed to want it that way. I had only seen one or two dominatrix pornos but neither of them started off like this. I heard Sip say "What the fuck are you doing?" somewhere deep in my mind but I carried on anyway.

"Get on the bed!" I yelled, feeling strange.

He got on all fours on the bed and looked back at me. I hated him. I hated him for making me do this. I walked to the shelf above the bed and reached for the longest, biggest dildo. I wanted him to feel pain, I wanted him to scream as much as I was screaming inside. I struck his ass hard, expecting him to jump up and tell me to stop. He didn't. He made a face and looked away for a moment but then looked back at me and nodded.

"Again," he said, his dick still hanging.

I struck him harder...and again...and again. He reddened but still hadn't flinched once. I reached for his lubricant and oiled the second biggest dildo, leaving the other one next to the computer. I put this one down on the table too and then ran downstairs to the kitchen. The half-full bottle was on the counter, I grabbed it and poured as much wine as I could down my throat. I grabbed the second bottle he hadn't opened and took both upstairs. My hands greasy, struggling to keep a firm grip. I ran back up the stairs and found him on the bed, still on all fours, waiting. I put the bottles on the window sill and drank the rest of the wine in the glass. The dildos looked so big now that they were isolated. Nervously, I put the glass down and picked up the greased dildo. I didn't quite know what to do with it but before I could think, my hand had already jammed it up his asshole. He yelped and started breathing heavily. I wanted to pull it out but he quickly regained composure. Something that angered me in a way that I couldn't understand or explain.

“It hurts, damn it! Just say it hurts!” I screamed.

I shoved it deeper in and left it there, walked over to the bottles and finished the rest of the wine in the open bottle. It tasted bitter and made me queasy but I carried on anyway, now getting buzzed and slightly dizzy but not as numb as I wanted to be. I looked at Wenton looking like one of his pictures. He could fit things far bigger in there but this dildo woke him up in ways I hadn't seen before. It shook his whole body, all except his dick. It was still hanging as limp as before. I wasn't doing it right.

I walked over to him and pulled the dildo out. He was quiet this time and I wanted to call him a bitch, I wanted to tear him apart and make him apologise even though there was nothing to apologise for. I grabbed the empty wine bottle on the window sill and said, “I'm gonna teach you a lesson you filthy bitch!” before shoving it neck first into his asshole. He moaned loudly and continuously like an injured animal or a man about to cum. I couldn't tell which one it was. He was looking straight ahead now, his head tilted up. Everything was starting to get blurry now, my head slightly heavy. His dick still hanging.

I had gone to his house hoping to feel better. I fantasized that he would beat me up and hold me captive in his basement. I would have something new to worry about then, like when I would see the sun again and when he'd let me go upstairs to take a shower...if ever. At least then I wouldn't have to think about the flat, the smell of Sip's cologne which still hung around. I wanted him to make me his case study. In my head, suffering seemed appealing and my body liked the idea of being probed and investigated daily by a psycho. In fact it wanted it.

I pushed the bottle deeper in and grabbed his dick. I started giving him a vigorous hand-job but he took my hand away from it. I grabbed it again and stroked it even harder but he hit my hand away this time. I left the bottle in him and grabbed the big dildo again. “You don't want me you bitch!” I screamed while trying to balance and strike his ass at the same time. I started beating him harder and couldn't stop. I didn't understand what this was, I didn't understand any of it and his dick still hung there, unmoved, mocking me.

“Why don’t you want me?” I screamed and hit him hard before collapsing on the floor. The room was spinning, my tummy rumbling and slowly sending its contents up my oesophagus. I lay on my side, breathing heavily, wiping my tears with my sleeve. I felt him try to lift me so I could stand but I was a rag doll. I felt like a druggie knocking at death’s door except I was too conscious to be dying. I could feel his hands digging into my armpits. He was asking if I was alright but words were suddenly so hard to form. All I could say was, “Call Sip...call my baby...tell her to come back.”

I heard him say, “What?”

And then black.

WhatsApp Conversation

Shay and Sip

- Hi
- Hi
- How u?
- Good. U?
- Good...what u up to?
- Working
- School stuff?
- Yes
- Oh let me not disturb u then
- Ok
- (20 minute lapse)
 - Can we chat?
 - I thought we already did
 - Yes but...ure distant
 - How did u expect me to be?
 - I don't know
 - Then I don't know either
 - Shay
 - It's been 3 weeks. 3 whole weeks. Not an sms, not even a "how's your neck?"
 - I know, I was angry
 - Turns out u weren't
 - What do u mean?
 - Where's your gf...does she know ure chatting to me?
 - She doesn't matter right now
 - She matters. She matters a lot...on your WhatsApp, your Facebook everywhere, she matters.
 - It's not what it seems
 - Really? How so?

- I don't want her
- Correction: I'M THE 1 U DON'T WANT!
- Shay u don't understand. I thought u and Nash were together.
- I'm done explaining and apologising for that. When ure ready to stop using that as an excuse let me know.
- (4 hours 33 min. lapse)
 - Shay
 - Yes
 - I changed the profile pic. You can check on Facebook too.
 - Oh so I guess I should celebrate then
 - Babe I'm sorry
 - For what?
 - I dont know...I want to come bk.
 - After everything? U gloated to our friends and paraded your new girlfriend just a few days after u left. I'm not stupid, I know what that means. Now clearly things aren't working out between u and her and now here u are.
 - It's not like that babe. I swear
 - I'm tired. All I've been doing is crying myself to sleep since u left. It sounds corny as shit when u hear that in songs but believe u me I can honestly say I know it's possible. I had people asking me questions, calling me confused. That was me these past few weeks while u were busy fucking your new chick.
 - She's not my wife tho. Shay I have intense feelings for you...I know I'm like a cancer kuwe, I suck u dry bt wat i feel for u is deep i swear n iv been trying to bury it bt it keeps coming back...don't know wat to do serious.
- (next day - 3:45pm)
 - I'm sorry for everything Shay i neva meant to hurt you. I understand if u never want to talk to me again. I will always love you bt just...take good care of urself...im really sorry
- (6 hours 15 min. lapse)
 - Why do u love me?
- (4:27am)

- I love you cause u go out of your way to make me happy, i love u cause u care n its nt forced you do it effortlessly, you should see the way you look @ me...i love u cause i knw youv gt my back...i love ur confidence even though i broke u in more ways than 1 bt u still rise...i love you because youv got a good heart i dnt have 1 n i dnt want one...you do the good for me.
- (4 min. lapse)
 - You know Im nt the type to express nor show my emotions...plz dnt do that to me again☺
- (5 hour lapse)
 - You left me. You just left me.
 - I knw baby, I knw. I'll do anything to make it ryt again.
 - And your gf?
 - Dont even think abt her babe, she's not around anymore
- (At 9:45pm)
 - Goodnight baby. Sleep well...keep urself warm. I love you.
- (next day – 7am)
 - Hey babe. U didn't reply to my msg last nyt...hope u got it. Have a great day at school. I really love u Shay.
 - Thanx.
- (6pm)
 - I didn't fuck Nash and you knew I didn't.
 - Babe, I was angry. She kept calling me after she left. She explained baby. I know it was nothing nw. I'm sorry I left like that.
 - You hurt me so much. I had to cover my neck and my whole chest up.
 - I'm sorry baby I'm such an asshole. I just couldn't listen at the tym. I won't hurt u like that agn I promise. Just trust me and let me come bk babe. I miss u, I miss us, I miss your cooking, your pussy...just everything.
 - You've got someone for all that.
 - Its not the same.
 - I don't trust u
 - Take me back, I swear we'll work on everything, il go to counselling if I have to. I knw my temper gets in the way. I cant lose u. I wont lose u Shay.

Continuous, inevitably...

I watched the drops of water fall. The water was getting cold and I let it. I wanted to see if the drops would stop dripping. I didn't need this problem. I had just tried to beat the tap to scare it into stopping. I closed it as tight as I could but it wasn't helping. I sat back in the tub and stared at it. I wanted to control it with my mind like the man who bends forks or the woman who moves objects with her mind.

I stared until I started calculating how often the drops came per second. I wanted to know if there was a system behind the time lapse between each drop. There wasn't. No results.

Sip + me = A complete fuckery

Sip – me = No results found

-Sip +me = A dripping tap

I raised my knees and slid forward to pour hot water. I had succumbed, become the tap's bitch. I reached for the bubble bath. Pink is love, femininity, romance. Pink is misleading. I poured the pink under the tap where the water would hit. I turned it on and watched the new bubbles form and slowly crawl up my shins. I wanted to be covered, totally submerged. I slid back a little and pulled my knees towards me until they crushed my breasts. I rested my chin on them.

The door opened.

"Uhhh...I'm gonna move your stuff from the middle shelf...to make space."

"Ok," I said.

I picked up my phone – 08:17pm. I had been in there for 47 minutes. I dreaded going back to the bedroom, seeing her unpack, smelling her, smelling someone else. I was convinced she had packed her in the suitcase and that I'd feel and taste her in the air, on Sip's breath...skin.

The water made me nauseous, it felt cold and dirty. I pulled out the stopper. The bubbles were left sitting pitifully in between my legs.

I stood up, stepped out of the tub, grabbed the sponge and started scrubbing the sides. Sip was coming in next. I rinsed and watched the rest of me disappear into a dark hole. I opened the bathroom door and was greeted by coldness. The thick mist was gone. I walked towards the bedroom. Sip was already walking out. We brushed past each other, her in boxer briefs, me in a white towel. My towel fell on cue and we stood there looking at each other. Her eyes on my breasts and legs, mine on her bare chest and then her face. She turned slightly towards me and then back, turned towards me again and back towards the bathroom.

“Is the water still hot?” she asked over her shoulder, scratching her head.

“I think so...I don’t know,” I said picking up the towel.

I walked into the bedroom wondering what would’ve happened if the passage had been longer, wider.

I tied my hair up, wore a loose tank and French briefs. Slipped into the piercingly cold sheets. A lavender-scented Sta-Soft smell. I had changed the linen after her phone call. I lay back, listened for her usual singing but all I could hear was the tap.

She was back in the room in less than 15 minutes. What was she washing off? Or who? She put on briefs and a vest. Her skin was covered in goose bumps. She got into bed and I could feel her heat. She rested her hand on top of mine. It felt heavy and hot...almost suffocating. I moved my fingers and she slid her palm off but kept her fingers on. She rubbed the back of my hand, slowly tracing my veins. I shuddered – from the cold, but also her touch jolting like electricity from a faulty plug. I retracted my hand. My pussy clenching, releasing.

We both lay there staring at the ceiling. The darkness. The tap dripping. A space big enough for a whole river between us.

“Hey, Shay?” she called.

“Yes?”

“Let’s become those rats again...like last time.”