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Selfie

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Selfie

By

Laryssa Brooks

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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Selfie

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September 16, 2015

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ABSTRACT

A complex field with many intersections such as race, class, and sexuality, feminism has many dialogues and tensions. *Selfie* is a creative text that examines the tensions surrounding white, middle-class North American women. Surrounded by patriarchal mass media such as television shows, movies, and books, these young women are inundated with a dominant encouraged identity situated within a heterosexual gender binary; it invalidates the actual lived experiences of women. Consequently, feminists and non-feminists alike disagree on a clear definition of “woman.” This conflict has escalated to the gender policing of women by women, and a significant decrease in the number of feminists in North America. Moreover, the existing gender binary may cause women to struggle psychologically. *Selfie* works to alleviate these feminist difficulties through language. It uniquely fuses the conventions of prose, theater, and free indirect discourse, transcending conventional genre labels. It unsettles the dominant gender binary and presents all competing woman-identities as valid. *Selfie* proposes negative capability as a way to resolve the existing conflict between competing conceptions of “woman.”

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Dad,
whose academic accomplishments inspire me,
and to Tabitha,
who faithfully sat beside me every step of the way.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
CREATIVE PROJECT: SELFIE SCENE A: PERFORMERS	1
<i>Many have multiple parts.</i>	1
SCENE B: DIRECTIONS	11
<i>You must meet audience expectations. If you don't, prepare to die.</i>	11
SCENE C: SCRIPT.....	16
<i>Agents say the best scripts don't need to be read.</i>	16
SCENE D: FORMAT	24
<i>Scripts have to look a certain way. This cannot be stressed enough.</i>	24
SCENE E: STRUCTURE	30
<i>Let the ending dictate the beginning.</i>	30
SCENE F: INTERMISSION	38
<i>Place at the end of an act.</i>	38
SCENE G: ONE-ACT PLAY	47
<i>A common arrangement.</i>	47
SCENE H: MOVIE.....	56
<i>Write a play instead.</i>	56
SCENE I: DIRECTOR	64
<i>The author of the play or film.</i>	64
CRITICAL ESSAY	75
UNSTABLE SELVES: HOW POETRY AND PROSE UNSETTLE AND REVITALIZE IDENTITY IN <i>SELFIE</i>	75

WORKS CITED	96
VITA AUCTORIS	99

CREATIVE PROJECT: SELFIE

SCENE A: PERFORMERS

Many have multiple parts.

She was right.

Chris lays on the bed's edge, his back to my face. I'd finally started to drift when he rocked the mattress, probably giddy from flirting with that bitch Britney, head of Fan Club Chris. And shooting at twelve-year old brats in Call of Shit. When he crashed, I gasped awake, pajama shirt clinging to my damp chest. Counted my breaths listening to his own, steady and slow. Shifted away so I wouldn't fall into the deep dip formed in the bed.

Counted ceiling tiles.

I'm so stupid. Sarah was right when she said I shouldn't sleep with him.

If mother was here --

Too late now. Three years later, I'm on the lease.

I lift up my head again to see the alarm clock on the dresser at the end of the bed:
4:47 am.

I could have sworn at least ten minutes had passed, but only one?

Maybe the clock's broken.

Allure says any light in your room keeps you from falling into a restful sleep.

When he bought the damn thing, I never thought its blue light would be worse than basic red. Can't even glance sideways at the numbers. Hurts my head.

4:48 am.

The clock works.

Allure says the perfect way to hide morning bags from a late night is to use a yellow-based concealer.

Did he really have to get the unit with the street lamp right outside the window? Curtains should be thicker.

At least they make the room look taller, since they're hung close to the ceiling. And the curtain rod's glass ends look like they fell from the pages of *Home & Garden*. Better than Ashley's boring white blinds. Buttons gnawed the corners so much Ash probably won't get the security deposit back.

Landlord must have picked these sheer silver fabric curtains because they look nicer than Standard Issue Plastic, Crooked.

Apartment needs fixing.

One. Window paint dangling from the inside sill; every brush or breeze flakes chips into the thin, rough carpet. Could slowly peel the paint like a scab.

Two. Ceiling tiles look like a bloody scene from *Dexter*, dark spots sprayed across eggshell white.

Three. Wish Chris had time to straighten that dresser drawer. I open it to pull out a shirt, and the right side falls into the drawer below, splinters shedding and pulling on soft cotton and lace.

Four. I thought living in a 900\$ apartment on the safe side of town would mean Robin's Egg Living Room Blue, and Kitchen Sunshine Yellow. Instead, I still get Standard Beige scratching the white baseboards, and Do-It-Yourself Oatmeal walls.

When I moved in, I absolutely adored this loft. The spiral staircase leading up to the bedroom was like that treehouse in Tati's attic. We used to stomp up stairs winding

around an old gnarled tree, past yellow walls with dirty handprints singing *fee fi fo fum we're the King and Queen*. Push away branches to disappear behind a cobwebbed, glass-knobbed door, folding our hobbit selves into the space inside its cavernous, ancient trunk. We'd shut the door and put up our sign, pink marker across a cardboard square from a box of Rice Krispies, scrawled with No Boys Allowed, unless you pay a \$5.00 fee. Add another sign, torn white paper with purple Crayola: hearts and smiles around S+T. Sink into bean bag chairs, soft violet seas rising around our skinny crossed legs and knobby knees. The chairs would grow like stalks, and we'd ride them like giant growing beans: two tickets to Jack and his sky-giants, singing *you're not the boss of me*. With magic marker, we traced around the buttons on the bags; our sticky fingers captured the escaping beans. Fixed the rips with safety pins and whispered tongue twisters as fast as the wind. She was Sailor Moon, I was Sailor Mars, flying in a space sea.

I never got to be Sailor Moon. Except that one day when she wanted to be Sailor Venus.

Maybe I could fit some bean bag chairs in the corner near the end of the bed.

4:53 am.

I would string up some lights, too. Like that picture on Pinterest, fairy sparks draped across a headboard at a country inn. Chris and I could pour some expensive wine, a thirty dollar splurge; sit the mismatched mugs on the nightstand, *Boob Inspector* for him and *Bridget Jones* for me. He'd lay back in a bean bag chair and I'd pose near the bed's end, pigtails, outfit, and a cute curtsy.

Lofts are so romantic. The first time I saw it, I mean sober, not like that first night with Chris, I thought of us as Robert Redford and Jane Fonda, starring in our own *Barefoot*

in the Park: Sleeping in a petite closet, spooning for warmth under a hand sewn quilt. Giggling as we wrap it around our shoulders, stumbling to the roof in a dizzy haze to stare at the silver starlight. Resting my chin on the soft fabric of his steady shoulder. Listening to smiles: future dreams and beats.

Chris's nose is squeaking as he breathes. It's cute.

Slowly, Sofia. You don't want to wake him.

Curl arm behind his waist. Snuggle face behind his head.

Damn. He stopped snoring.

"Get off me, bitch. You're too hot. I can't breathe."

He's just tired and groggy.

4:55 am.

I never get any sleep. Tomorrow is girl's day. Melissa said we're going downtown. Probably The Bar. Why does it have to be Friday? The teens always flock with their fake IDs.

Don't work next 'til Tuesday from 11-8.

Need to try harder; stop making mistakes. Get your manager, I refuse to pay, the line is slow, I wanted two sugars and one cream.

4:57 am.

So bored. Where's my phone? Maybe Facebook will tire me out.

Chris Brown & Rihanna kissed | TMZ

Why We Don't Care About Charlie Sheen's History of Violence | Thought Catalog

Mel Gibson Tells Girlfriend She "f*cking deserved to get hit" | Democratic Underground

Mel Gibson is Hot | Facebook

13 Reasons Why Charlie Sheen is Cool | Ask Men

Shirtless Pics of Chris Brown | Tumblr

25 Women Who Want Chris Brown to Beat Them | Buzzfeed

Mel Gibson in *What Women Want* | IMDB

4:59 am.

Tomorrow: Trim nails, push back cuticles, glue on French manicure, shave legs, pluck eyebrows, moisturize legs, practice winged eyeliner, whiten teeth. Buy milk. Doritos, too. And clean off that sticky spot on the bottom shelf of the fridge.

Make bed. Clean kitchen sink. Vacuum living room rug. Dust loft ledge.

5:00 am.

Okay, Sofia.

Goodnight, Sofia.

Curl. Up. And rest. In sheep.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Stretch arms and swipe eye-sleep.

What time is?

I can barely see.

Chris' alarm was set.

It's Thursday. He doesn't work.

"Chris."

I shake him. He just beats my hand back between snores.

"Chris, your alarm."

If I touch his clock, he'll be mad at me.

“Chris. Can I please turn it off?”

If I do...Is he still asleep?

He'll never know.

Rise up. Follow beeps.

What is – why is the alarm's light winking at me from its base?

I lift the clock. A small, square, silver package occupies the space beneath.

“Ribbed for her Pleasure: Now Glow in the Dark.”

A corner is ripped.

The square is empty.

Sofia. Just turn off the clock. Put it down. Go back to bed. Breathe.

The plush mattress hugs. My shoulders and. Lays me. Heap.

OPEN CURTAINS. *The loft bedroom is in the back of the apartment above a wooden spiral staircase. The bedroom is long and rectangular, with the short end being the loft's edge. It hangs over the bathroom, darkened with the door slightly ajar, and over half of the living room, shadowing a cracked, softened brown leather couch and an impressive wall-sized high-definition television, stage right. A railing runs along the loft's edge delicate wooden spindles absorbing noise from the room below like a dream catcher's silken web. A well-loved white dresser holds memories and lace, nestled against the side of the bedroom. Its paint is worn and peeling in a charming country-chic manner. A tall chrome alarm clock with large numbers sits on it, projecting an ethereal blue glow across the room, light encroaching on the living room's shadows below.*

It is around 9:00 am. Curtains hang stage right above a large window in the bedroom. Morning light softly radiating through their sheer silver fabric, caressing a white duvet cover forming soft snowy hills on the bed. Hugged by chestnut nightstands, their corners worn soft and round, the bed fills most of the room's space. SOFIA lays on her back half under the duvet, arms free. Soft pillows rise around her hair that shines in the morning light and forms a halo around her head. Bach's calming "Goldberg Variations" begin. SOFIA stirs, eyes blinking as she groans and wipes away sleep. Light from the window grows brighter and shimmers like a kaleidoscope on the ceiling for a moment. She sits up and looks out the window.

SOFIA. (Stretches arms. Sinks into the pillows.) I'm floating on clouds; both sides of the mattress are mine. This is the most succulent time of day. (Stretches arms again and lays on her right side, facing the window. She closes her eyes.) Sleepy morning light caresses my lids and warms them. (Smiles. Fills lungs. She falls asleep, mouth open, relaxed.)

CHRIS emerges from the bathroom, loudly bumbles up the ladder, and crashes into the bed. Classical music abruptly ends. The mattress shakes. His breathing is laboured as he turns towards Sofia, her eyes still closed. She stirs, grimaces, and closes her mouth. The sun goes behind a cloud and the room darkens. The alarm clock lights them in a ghostly blue haze. Corners of the room are shadowed.

SOFIA. (Her body tenses and she sighs). Don't clench teeth. Don't stiffen jaw. Pretend to sleep. (Her breaths become regular and timed.)

CHRIS. Babe. Baby. (louder) "Woman!"

SOFIA. Let out a fake snore. Slowly and loudly, so it seems realistic. *(Snores)*. 1. 2. 3. 4. *(Chris pushes her shoulder. She goes limp, her face mushed into the pillow. He gets under the covers and lays on his back, breathing loudly)*. Wish I worked today. Hair net and polo shirt, Ms. Café *(Pause)* Finally. *(Pause)* Can't hear anything but raspy breath. Don't open eyes. He's on his back. *(Waits)* Maybe he fell asleep. *(Sits up and picks up a magazine)* 10 Strategies for Avoiding Morning Sex. *(Flips through the pages)* One. Don't wear those silky, sexy pajamas you bought on sale at La Senza for a steamy Valentine's night last year. Two. Wear those flannel pajamas your ex-boyfriend gave you for Christmas three years ago. The ones with matching tops and bottoms. The ones covered in pictures of kittens. *(Looks at her own kitten pajamas)*. Three. Tell him how even though you and your ex broke up, the pajamas still remind you of the good times you had together. No, you don't miss him. They remind you of the times before you got together. When you and your ex were just friends. *(Smirks)*. We were never "just friends." It was complicated. Four. Pretend to sleep. Don't move. If you stretch, he might look at the curve of your body. *(Looks at Chris, then lays down and pulls duvet up to cover her chest)*. He's asleep. It worked. Five. *(Shuffles duvet)*. Lie on your side, facing him. "Sleep" with your mouth open, so he can smell your evening breath. If you're planning ahead, don't brush your teeth before bed. Eat shawarma with extra garlic sauce for dinner. *(Checks breath by breathing loudly onto hand, then sniffing, and grimaces.)* Six. Don't lie on your back, on your side facing away from him, or on your stomach. Stick your butt at an awkward angle over the edge of the bed. Clench your legs together. This prevents easy entry. *(Swallows, shifts away from Chris a few inches, and turns on her side away from him)*. Seven. If you have to, snore like a pig. Avoid quiet, feminine sleep sighs. He might

think you're having a sexy dream. (*Chris grunts. Sofia speaks more quietly*). Eight. Softly say your ex-boyfriend's name. Nine. If he tries to wake you, pretend to sleep-talk about fan-girling over Justin Bieber. (*Chuckles, then smirks*). Say you love him. Quote his lyrics. Say you hate your boyfriend's favourite band. Ten. If you're planning early, use the sheets he doesn't like. The ones in the back of the closet that look like vomit. They have questionable stains you can't wash out. They scratch his skin. (*Runs hand along sheets, vomit-green, and smiles. Closes magazine and puts it on nightstand*) Eleven. Fall back asleep. (*Pauses*) Ok. Calm thoughts: safe, fleece bed sheets stretching around my clammy feet. Kaleidoscope sun stars shifting on my lids. The tree outside, swaying in --

(*The blanket over Chris starts moving.*) His raspy breaths are now raspy pants. (*Swallows*) An acidic centipede is crawling up my throat, secreting last night's dinner. One hundred legs are curling around my tonsils (*Gags and swallows*). There are no tiny, crunchy legs stuck between my teeth. Okay, Sofia. Tighten abs. Close throat. Pillow's fluffy down whispers with sheet-sea against right cheek --

CHRIS. (*Moans*) Britney. Oh babe. (*He moves his head from side to side and the duvet begins to move faster.*)

SOFIA. Maybe just the pill isn't enough for me, maybe I should go get checked out. (*Pause*) No. Breathe. (*Deep breath*) Autumn's sienna leaves sway with the trees as the fresh breeze. (*Pause*) Does the walk-in do pap tests? (*Deep breath*) Sepia grass rustles as plump squirrels scoop soil and the sun rises in (*Pause. Voice becomes panicked.*) No. Please no. (*Squeeze eyes shut. Furrow brow. Deep breath.*) Okay. Deep breaths should slow my heart rate down. (*Pause*) The bed is bouncing faster. (*Panicked*) Not again what do I do what do I do what do I -- (*pauses suddenly*). He stopped. (*Waits*) He better not be

looking at me. I was up so late last night. *(Chris reaches for a remote on his nightstand and presses a button. "Every Breath You Take" by Sting plays softly in the background).* I just want to sleep. Alone. I want to relax for two hours. *(Anxious)* Please. No. Not this again. *(Grimaces as her head retreats into her neck like a turtle.)* No. My muscles have tightened. He'll know I'm awake. *(Slowly breathes in)* 1. 2. 3. *(Steadily breathes out.)* 1. 2. 3. *(Desperate)* Please. *(Music stops).*

SCENE B:
DIRECTIONS

You must meet audience expectations. If you don't, prepare to die.

CHRIS. *(Turns on his side and raises himself on an elbow, facing Sofia. He places an arm on her shoulder.)* I know you're awake.

SOFIA. *(Tightens muscles, pupils dilating while nostrils flare. Swallows.)* Stale, moldy morning breath is scuttling across my cheek and crawling into my nose, filling my nasal cavity with two hundred rotting, crunchy legs, riding on my throat, slick with old, congealed mucus. *(Gags. Curls into a ball. Buries deep under the covers, desperate).* There's like six feet of blankets on me. Maybe he'll think it's too much work. *(With hope)* What time is it? Maybe he's too tired to care.

CHRIS. *(Moves his hand from her shoulder to her breast, leaving a greasy orange Dorito-trail on her pajamas.)* Move.

SOFIA. *(Uncurls from a ball then lies on her back, then squeezes eyes tightly).* I'm outside in the grass, feeling the sleepy breezes on my skin. *(Inhales deeply)* Warm breath settles on my forehead as I inhale the fresh November Dorito air. *(Chris begins to fondle her breast).* *(To Chris).* No. Please. I don't want to. *(Holds breath. To herself)* 1. 2. 3. *(Pause)* 4. 5. 6. *(Breathes out).* 7. 8. *(To Chris)* Chris.

CHRIS. *(Dangerously)* When I got up, I saw that my clock moved. *(Hand slowly moves from Sofia's breast to her bicep).* *(Barely controlled anger)* You've been going through my things. *(He swiftly pushes the covers off Sofia's body; they fall to the floor in a wave. His hand slowly tightens around her bicep. Sofia clenches her jaw and stubbornly*

stares at the ceiling, but her eyes begin to water the tighter his hand becomes. Upon seeing her pain, Chris smirks and loosens his grip.)

SOFIA. *(To self)* That pinch hurt! *(To Chris, frightened)* N-No! I just – I just. Turned the alarm off. *(To self)* 1. 2. 3. *(Swallow)*. 4. 5. 6. *(Pause)* *(To Chris)* This morning. I didn't want it to wake you. Since. You have the day off. *(To self)* 7. 8.

CHRIS. *(He tightens his grip on her arm again, this time quickly, indenting her skin.)* I told you not to touch my shit. *(Leg tenses beside Sofia; hand releases her bicep and reaches for her hand. Hers is small, completely enveloped by his. She winces as he slowly tightens his grip.)* Don't you ever learn, bitch?

SOFIA. *(Clenches teeth. Defiantly opens her eyes and stares at Chris without blinking in pain)* *(Slowly to self, struggling to keep calm)* 1. 2. 3. *(To Chris, tensely)* My name. *(To self)* 4. 5. 6. *(To Chris)* Is Sofia. *(To self)* 7. 8. *(Chris shifts his hand so his nails are visible. The nails dig into Sofia's skin, leaving small cuts. Blood runs down her wrist and smears his fingertips. He smiles. Sofia closes her eyes and speaks to herself.)* Fingernails like razors, pulling and separating tendons like teeth. *(Opens eyes. Twists arm backwards in a desperate attempt to break free from Chris. Left hand cracks against the nightstand. Close up. Fingers lose feeling and go cold. Zoom out. Chris lifts his leg and pins her body with it.)* *(Laboured, face red)* Waist under leg wraps. I can't *(Pants; kicks legs)* I just want to sleep *(Chris begins raising his body to straddle her. Sharp intake of breath)* *(Panicked)* Maybe if *(reaches for nightstand with free arm and grabs corner. Pulls and rotates hips towards the edge of the bed, surprising Chris and throwing his balance off).* I can keep *(grabs the bottom of the mattress with nightstand hand and pulls body towards the floor. Wiggles hips and kicks feet, trying to free body from under Chris. Torso*

hangs off the edge of the bed. He grips her ankles and pulls. She grabs the nightstand again, kicking feet.) I just want to make it to the ladder (foot kicks, and connects with Chris' jaw). What did I hit? (His head jolts backwards, then he grits his teeth and pulls harder. She begins to slide backwards onto the mattress. Nightstand slides towards the bed as she pulls it. Hand slips from it with sweat. Shirt bunches by chin as torso is pulled onto the bed. Stomach burns against the sheets. As her body is fully lifted onto the mattress, she rolls on her on back and curls knees to chin. Chris forces her legs down with his hands, then straddles her waist with his knees and holds her legs down behind him with his feet. She reaches to hit his chest with her arms. He stops her mid-swing, gripping each arm and holding them on the mattress, above her head. She tries to lift her arms; elbows lift off the mattress a few inches and muscles shake, then collapse). (Panicked, increasingly angry) why did I bother to touch his clock I should have let it to go I'm so dumb I should have known this would happen I'm stupid this is all my fault this is all my fault this is all my fucking fault. (Chris slides his body so that he is mostly laying with his full weight on top of her, but his torso is raised.) Gasp for breath. In. Out. In. Out. No. Way. Out.

CHRIS. (One hand holds both of Sofia's arms; slaps her face with the other. Her face rolls to the side from the impact. Blood rushes to her cheek). Dirty little bitch.

SOFIA. (Squints, swallows, and takes a deep breath). 1. 2. 3. (Chris stares her down. Sofia does not blink. Her eyes begin to water as time passes. Long silence ensues, then she twists her head to look at the wall.)

CHRIS. (Clenches his jaw.) Look at me. Look me in the eyes and smile. (Pauses, then smirks) Tell me you want it hard and rough.

SOFIA. *(To self)* Tears. Blink them away. Harden face. Look into the eyes of the man you love. *(Quietly and dejectedly)*. His pupils. Coal. *(Looks at his chest.)* Fat rolls over Chris' pajama pants. Urine and sweat scuttles from his crotch to her nose. The scent, hard-shelled, rubs her lips with eighteen legs, pricking her lips; beetle wings and pincers hold her nostrils open, and she begins to quickly breathe through her mouth in a panic. Chris leans in. Two coarse nose hairs reach her face, pincers rubbing together in thick anticipation. Sweat runs between his pores, salty trails through Dorito gore and week-long layers of unwashed skin. Sweat glistens and pools with Dorito dust on his upper lip, hanging on the precipice, dangling above her silenced whines. A scabby pimple crusts chin stubble with thick pus. Eyes appraise her, a curled nail scraping her clammy forehead and nose, scratching her lips with a rotten lick, slicing from the curve of her chin to the swell of her throat, carving her collarbone with thirst. Slurping the skin from her chest.

(Sofia narrates the script). CHRIS. Smile. Blonde hair, dark with grease, falls towards her face like a lick; coats her cheeks in oil. A centipede claws up her throat; eats her tongue as her stomach rolls. Its crusty legs wriggle, gnawing her mouth. She swallows and stares at the long shadows cast by the ceiling stucco, endless hills of splintered bones. Ashy dust hangs. Sofia is alone. Pause.

SOFIA. She shapes her mouth into an upward curve. Raises her cheeks. Cracks open her lips to expose her teeth. Fixes her gaze on a point in the wall behind him. "It's" happening. Smoke fills the room, obscuring the loft.

(She remembers)

Last summer, I dropped a chip on the sidewalk. It fell heavy in the thick heat. Ants trekked across the concrete, starving army on a dark quest for food. I sat on the ground;

burned my legs as I watched the horde. Peeled old skin from my knee. Waves swarmed from the crack on their quest, all following the others. This new food was the key. They climbed on the Great Saviour Chip of Glory to carry it home like a trophy. Burned and curled as their shells and insides melted when they touched its salt and vinegar coating. Climbed between the dead bodies of their friends and family, dismembered legs and melted shells pressing against their faces as more waves, more hordes, competed with the dead for Glory.

(Sofia stops narrating. Smoke clears. Chris is on top of Sofia, naked from the waist down. He's covered in sweat and panting. Sofia lays under Chris on the mattress, motionless. Her pajama bottoms are halfway down her legs. Chris stands, pulls up his pants, and goes downstairs; sits on the couch and picks up his controller. He plays a video game. Sofia rolls on her side, pulls the sheets between her legs, and brings her knees to her chest. Everything goes dark. Bodiless, she rhythmically recites). One. Invest in makeup. A perfect girlfriend always looks her best for her man. Two. Always wear a sexy perfume on your neck and wrists. Three. Never complain. Men hate naggers. Four. Love him: do anything to keep him happy and satisfied. Five. Be devoted. He should never feel jealous at all. Six. Like all his friends. If you don't like them, lie. Seven. Be a sex goddess. No man likes a woman who's bad in bed. Eight. Learn to cook. Make delicious dinners when he comes home from work. Nine. Step up your game. Be better than all of his ex's combined. *(Pause)* Ten. Let him lead. Make him feel like a man.

SCENE C:

SCRIPT

Agents say the best scripts don't need to be read.

The day we met, he said the sun and my eyes were golden.

Brown eyes have copper flecks.

There's a face staring at me from the cracked mirror. A toothpaste smudge blurs her eyes.

I look like I'm squinting in a dim, dirty strip bar, struggling with bikini ties. Couldn't make Chris pay me for what he takes if I tried. Wouldn't even pull a dime.

I look like my mother.

On tired days, I always do.

Skin, sand. Unusually tough to the touch. There's nothing hot about a sandpaper chin.

Fortunately, it's easy to stay moisturized – just use fantastic products. For cheeks, heavy bags and puffy eyes. The skin around the eyes ages 36 percent faster – use the best creams. Left cheek is redder than right from slap. Raw, red skin is never sexy. Rub on a green-tinted powder, then a concealer. Forehead, mesas in the dry heat of Mexico. Depressing, right? Check out Julia Roberts's skin. Celebs are proactive with anti-aging cream. Lashes, short. Your eyes are the first thing people notice. Glue a false eye-lash flare onto the outer corner of each eye. Hair, messy. Control your ball of frizz. Apply styling cream.

My toes freeze on these bathroom tiles. The heater should be on, but he hates the bill pile.

This brush rips clumps out of my skull. It's important to find a brush with the right bristles for the right hair. Should just do a ponytail. Wearing my hair down will fail.

"Don't. I like it down." Jesus. That was loud. How long has he been staring at me? There's a sea of beard hair all over the back of the faucet from the last time he shaved. Have to clean that. Don't want him to think I'm on a slob spree.

Winter break, 1998. Mom stands beside the toilet, thin yellow sponge holding her hand. Hair and lint floats to floor after wiping back of the toilet. *This is how you clean a bathroom. The best way. Wipe the back of the bowl and use the brush. Scrub the stains on the bottom of the seat. Don't miss the sticky dust. Remember this, Sofia. You'll teach my granddaughters one day.*

Seven months ago. *Hair tied up with purple scarf like a 50's housewife, sleek bangs swept up like Sandra Dee. Surprisingly, makeup didn't run with the sweat. Had to take the cardigan off and just clean in yoga pants and blue tank top. No bra. Mopped the kitchen floor and organized the cupboards. Put some soup on. Cleaned the back of the fridge. Body presses behind me. Arms wraps around my waist. Just how I like you.*

Put hair elastic on counter. I should dye my hair blonde. I bet Britney has blonde hair. I bet it stays straight all the time and never frizzes. I bet she gets up at six to do her makeup every morning, even when she's busy. I bet she knows how to use a curling iron without burning her ear. I bet -

His rough hand brushes my neck. Curves my hair around my chin. Licks lips. He points at my reddened cheek. "Cover that up. Like you did last week."

Bronzer gently rubs in and highlights skin. Extra blush sweeps across right cheek. Both sides red, matching streaks.

“Do that thing with your eyeliner. It makes them look a different colour. Changes your eye shape.” He pauses. “You look pretty when you wear makeup.”

Just like mother used to say.

Hands wrap around my waist, linger on small paunch that hangs over pajama waistband. “Honestly? You’re getting a little chubby.”

Summer, 1994. *Lying in the back room, practicing my ABC’s. Building Tinkerbell-sized houses with Legos and Popsicle sticks.*

Amma: Your stomach is a little island, sweets. Even when you pull your arms up.

Mother: She spent the cold months sitting on the couch and growing like a bus instead of growing like a pole.

Amma: No more treats for you. You need to go join the other girls outside. Get some sun. She’s like you, Antonella! You were round like the cakes you ate. I had to buy skim milk. Pretend there was mold on the cheese, and hide the sugar. Get some chores in you.

Stare at my eyes in the mirror. Don’t stare at his face. Don’t frown. Smile. Don’t sigh.

I really need to shred my fat.

One. Think about all your friends who are skinnier than you and sigh. Two. Ignore the poutine. The coke. The bread. The milk. The lettuce. The water. The fork. Three. Run a marathon every day. Post your exercise progress on Facebook to stay motivated. Four. Follow fitandhealthy. Follow get-thinspo-today. Follow notanajustfit. Follow DISCLAIMER: This is a healthy blog. Follow goal weight: 100 lbs. Five. how many calories marathon how many calories milkshake how many calories cleaning how many

calories glass of milk how many calories buying groceries how many calories writing how many calories kiss how many yogurt how many calories celery how many calories breathing how many --

Foundation evens skin and hides eye-bags. Powder contours and changes face shape: makes it skinnier; I don't look like an ape.

I really do need to lay off the chips. Had to jump into my jeans yesterday. Need smaller hips. It's my fault I keep eating this food. And my fault that all this happened. I was rude. I touched his clock. I'd promised not to. I said no when I should have said yes.

I need to be a better girlfriend.

Eyes join in mirror. His rough fingers appear, take my chin, turn my mouth toward his. Fuzzy spider claws across my cheek with eight thick legs; forces through my teeth; hair cuts the tip of my tongue, the insides of my cheeks. Scratches my throat as its feet curl underneath.

Mouth lands on mine, cracked. Old Dorito crumb-paste lingers between tongues, floating in warm spit. Hair sits on his bottom lip, caught between flakes of dead skin.

Swallow.

Smile.

"Hey." His hand is in his pocket, reaching, wriggling around. Is that a necklace? An S? It shines with silver glitz on a fine-spun chain. "My Sofia." Twirl. Ask his hands to fasten the exquisite clasp. "You look like a princess. You can wear this when you go to see the girls tonight, babe. Have a good time." That wink was irresistible. Like a strong, seductive prince.

He turns around and is in the living room, two feet away.

Britney's playing that game with him. I just know it.

Grenades and machine gun fire fill the room with every perfume spritz.

June, 2010. *We sat on silver rocks, smoothed by the insistent waves & laps & taps of the cool river's licks. I slipped my sandals from my tan toes and ran them across the sand clinging to the satin stone. The sky's deep orange haze set fire to the evening's rays as I raised my lashes to his eye-light eye-love daze. Softly closed my lids and breathed a forever-wish while his tender hand grazed my face and his lips met mine for that summer's first moonlit kiss.*

Maybe tomorrow his hands and lips will land on mine, soft and quick like a July fish.

Phone goes off. Ashley. *Drinks at 10.*

Climb up to loft.

Scroll through Twitter. Read emails. Check Facebook.

Sorority Pledge Email 'Cannot Stress How Important Spanx Are' | Jezebel

How to Look Beautiful as a Teenage Girl: 14 Steps | WikiHow

The 24 Fashion Essentials you Need in 2015 | Glamour

5 Easy Makeup Tricks to Look 10 Years Younger | Prevention

#1 Anti-Aging Exercise | Women's World

I Don't Fit in With my Skinny Family | Gurl

Welcome to Skinnyville | Tumblr

Need a trendy dress. Wanna look good for the girls. Milena wore a "vintage" pantsuit last month. Arrived in twirls. It was pretty hideous, and we all texted about it under the table. Made for a good laugh. She was oblivious.

Allure says every girl needs to have a little black dress.

If mother was here --

Chris is laughing at something Britney said.

Allure says the LBD (Little Black Dress) is the perfect way to get your man's attention.

Squeeze B boobs into triple push up. Instant large C; one whole cup. Should I use the butt pads?

I have a pretty big ass, but that's no reason not to give it a little love.

Phone dings. Angela. *Where are you?*

Scroll through Twitter. Read emails. Check Facebook.

From: AXO Communications

Date: August 4, 2013

To: AXO Recruitment

1. Spanx. No awkward bumps!
2. Your hair needs to be one normal colour.
3. Your eyebrows need to look neat.
4. Stay away from fried or super sugary foods.
5. Your hair has to be curly or straight. No waves. No frizz.
6. You need to have foundation, concealer, something pinky neutral for lips, blot powder/oil blotters, eyeliner, mascara, neutral eye shadows, bronzer, and blush. If you are not wearing the required makeup, I will stop you....I will stop you.
7. Nails. Neutral pink, French manicure.
8. Glasses/Contacts. Poking your eyes is worth it!

9. Don't forget about everything you need to have wardrobe-wise: gold sandals, Tiffany necklace.

Squeeze boobs and butt into LBD.

Stand in the mirror: One. Wish I could see my ribs. Two. That leg gap doesn't look like it's going to happen. Three. Boobs need bronzer and a push up to make them look bigger. Four. Butt cellulite well hidden. Five. Why does Spanx have to be so ugly? Six. Hip bones, where are you?

I really need to lose ten pounds. At least.

There are still bruises on my arms. Something with sleeves? I really want Angela to see this dress, though. She'll be so jealous of me.

If mother was here --

I'll just explain the bruises as rough sex. Which it was. I should have liked it more. What's wrong with me? I'm not supposed to fall out of "we." We're supposed to be meant for each other. He's supposed to be The Choice. My boat in the sea.

Chris is supposed to propose on one knee. I'm supposed to Find the Gown. I'm supposed to twirl around, Say Yes to the Dress. I'm supposed to wear Something Borrowed, Something New, and all the rest. We're supposed to be Property Virgins. We're supposed to go on a House Hunters excursion. We're supposed to have One and Counting. I'm supposed to be a Dance Mom, advising against rebounding.

My thirtieth birthday: Chris brings in the porcelain cake; candles say twenty-nine; it's freshly baked. I chug the last of my sex-on-beach out of a tall glass with the girls. Toast

to our achievements reached. Tease those who can't drink anymore because they're pregnant, waddling around and decorating peach rooms.

Ignore the cobwebs in my womb.

SCENE D:

FORMAT

Scripts have to look a certain way. This cannot be stressed enough.

CHRIS lounges on the living room couch in front of the TV, headset on and Xbox controller in his hands. His legs spread outward, intruding on the empty couch spaces to the left and right of him. He is concentrating on a game, brow furrowed. The TV emits gunshots and grenade explosions that vibrate the room's walls. Frustrated insults of other male players periodically punctuate these sounds; they use phrases such as "get back to the kitchen" and "stop camping me, you gay." A girl laughs. Chris glances in Sofia's direction and plugs his headset in, placing it on his head. The sound is quieted. Two bags of Doritos sit on a coffee table in front of Chris, one open, broken chips littering the table and the floor alongside empty candy wrappers and energy drinks. He reaches for the unopen bag and pulls at its seal, crinkling loudly.

SOFIA. (Climbs down ladder, dressed up for the evening and carrying a black leather purse.) (To self) Ignore stomach knots. Walk towards TV. Squeeze eyes. See dots. Stand beside headset-on and Xbox-hot Chris. (Pause) Does Britney ever sleep? (Waits) Swallow. Straighten dress. Push up cleavage. Seductive twirl. Look fresh.

CHRIS. (Smiles mischievously at the console.) Brit. Yeah drop a grenade right there. Ok babe. Perfect.

(Laughs.) You know I'm actually pretty big.

SOFIA. (Deep breath.) 1. 2. 3. I shouldn't be jealous. It's just a game. No malice. (Pause.) It's probably nothing. (Breathes out.) 1. 2. 3. I don't want to be "that" girlfriend. (Waits). Ignore the tugging. (Closes eyes.) That wrapper under his clock is just

old. (*Pauses*). I'm always forgetting things. (*Breathes in*) 1. 2. 3. It's my fault. Should have done as I was told. (*Opens eyes and stands up tall*).

Look Chris in the eyes. (*Sticks boobs out.*) Push arms together to maximize cleavage. (*Hopeful*) Smile. Don't fall.

CHRIS. (*Glances at Sofia and rolls eyes, then looks back at the TV.*) (*Annoyed*) What? Don't give me that look. It's nothing. It's just a joke.

SOFIA. When we had these "talks" before, I would ask him why he was intentionally flirting with Britney. I would say it makes me uncomfortable that he calls her "hun" and "babe." He would tell me that I'm overreacting, he's just blowing off steam, and besides, he calls all girls babe (he doesn't). He would say I'm supposed to make an effort to look good for him, and I've changed. Men are visual, and, well, I've gained weight. I would storm up to the bedroom and seethe. Google "boyfriend flirts with other girls" and complain on forums with other women. Whine about men. Read all nineteen *Allure* articles on how to be a perfect girlfriend. Take all twenty-seven quizzes. Write nasty texts; avoid hitting send. Carve my complaints into my journal. Stare at myself in the mirror. Pace in circles. Look at his sixteen Facebook friends named Britney and try to figure out which one she is. Eliminate the fat ones and the ones with glasses and hair frizz. Narrow it down to nine possible girls. Analyze their profiles. List the ways I will be better than them. Lay down, curl up in a ball. (*Waits*). Chris would play Xbox and complain about me to Britney. (*Pauses*) No. That was before. Skip it this time. I want more. (*Smiles.*) Reach for Drink of Peace from can on coffee table. (*Picks up an open energy drink and gulps, then closes eyes, noticeably relaxed*). This pop tastes like the back of a pick-up, cool dust landing on my tan

legs on a hot summer's day. (*Opens eyes*). God, it's been so long since I've eaten. (*Panicked*) Chris looked at my stomach. I need to leave. (*Opens purse.*)

CHRIS. (*Offhand*) Remember your diet.

SOFIA. (*Frantically searches through purse.*) (*To self*) My keys must have fallen to the bottom. (*Starts pulling pens, papers, and makeup out of the purse during her search, dumping them on the floor.*) I really need to clean it out, pockets first. (*Looks at the papers she's holding*) But what if I need something that goes in the garbage? (*Replaces items, then pauses.*) Chris is still looking at me. This is strange. Normally the only time he looks up is to yell at me for walking in front of the screen. (*Waits, staring at Chris. He puts his headphone on the table without taking his eyes off Sofia.*) (*To Chris*) What? (*Stands up straighter, confused.*)

CHRIS. (*Commanding*) You're not going out in that.

SOFIA. (*Swallows, then breathes deeply.*) (*To self*). 1. 2. 3. (*Sits purse on the floor. It thuds.*) Damn. Okay, watch the tone. Unclench teeth. (*To Chris*). Why? (*To self*). Tighten abs. (*Clenches muscles*) Close throat. (*Swallows, then breathes in.*) 1. 2. 3. This is not a risk. It's simple. Look at him. (*Breathes out.*) It was just a question. He'll know I'm not angry. Relax mouth. He'll understand. Right?

CHRIS. (*Anger and volume escalating*) You think I want my girl slutting downtown with her friends? You think I want some douchebag checking out her ass?

SOFIA (*To self*). Careful. Be quiet. (*Looks at the ground.*) Look ashamed. Don't look angry. Don't look hurt. Separate and raise eyebrows. Hunch shoulders. Pout. I would never cheat on him. Never have. Dan was pretty hot, so I unfriended him. I don't talk to John anymore, either. Besides. My nails have a yellow tinge. My thighs touch, and I have

a paunch. I nag. And I can't watch my tone. (*Pauses. To Chris*) Chris. No one's going to look at me. (*Sofia narrates*). Pauses. Spare controller whistles past her left ear. Plastic sprinkles the ground with a loud crack behind her. Third one this month. She flinches, a deer. Turn around, slowly. Bone white plaster is dented and bunched. Dust slides to the ground. Sofia turns back to Chris; her eyes look up at him. His eyebrows shadow his face.

Close miss.

SOFIA. (*To self*) I shouldn't have interrupted him I shouldn't have eaten a Dorito I shouldn't have worn this dress I should have worn something with sleeves I need to go to the bank need to get him money need to replace the controller need to - Britney is loud on the other side of the headset. Demanding to know who is important enough to steal his attention from her perfect, beautiful, skinny self.

BRITNEY. Jealous, nagging, overreacting bitch! Full of it! Liar! Freeloading, debt-ridden cunt! STD-rich!

SOFIA. (*To self*) He should leave me.

(*Sofia continues narrating*) CHRIS. You're right. Stands and steps forward. No one's going to look at you, bitch. Because you're nothing but a lazy teasing cunt who deserves to be fucked in each hole, one after one. His fist clenches. You never clean up your shit – You left that box on the table for three fucking weeks – Never do the laundry, so my socks reek - You never want me but wear those short dresses and skirts – stare at your phone texting who knows all day -- Why can't you clean the fucking house? -- Not like serving coffee pays my Visa bill -- or like you'd ever be able to get an office job -- What are you going to do with a useless piece of paper with fancy writing on it? -- Teach?

-- What about your tuition debt? If it wasn't for you, I'd have a Camaro-- I'd have a condo with floor to ceiling windows – Honestly? If it wasn't for you, I'd be happy.

SOFIA. *(To self)* Goosebumps, scalp to toes. Bites lip. Covers face with hand, then exposes face. Speaks. Okay, doesn't speak. Clears throat. Blinks. No, pouts. Pauses. Chris doesn't move. She waits. *Really need to do my nails. Thumbnail is rough. Needs to be filed. And buffed. Maybe if I bite it – now it's worse. Can't see. What if?* Stares at cuticles. Waits. 1. 2. 3. Pauses. *A family of gerbils is renovating the inside of my skull with their teeth. Okay. Think cute. Think fuzzy. Gerbil-sized pajamas and window curtains. Gerbil tea.* Waits. *Need water.* Blinks slowly. *Don't sigh.* Swallows, timid. *(To Chris)* You clearly have some problems with me. Let's talk. I want to fix them.

CHRIS. Sits back down. Puts his headset on. Sorry, Brit. I'm back.

SOFIA. Takes one step forward. She slowly breathes in and out, then speaks, hopeful. Chris -- you're the love of my life – I -- We live together. I want – I wanna fix this. Please. Can we talk about it?

Wait. Chris kills twenty-three zombies.

Britney's laugh rises from his ears and fills the air around him and Sofia.

My hand is so close to his neck. It would be so easy. I could just –

It would be so quick.

Fourteen more zombies.

That bastard can't even bother to say no. Can't even turn his head and tell me we'll talk about it later. Doesn't even give a shit about working it out. Who the hell asks someone to move in with them and doesn't care about the relationship? Who the hell treats someone like shit then looks them in the eyes and tells them they love them every night? Long silence.

I deserve better. I've spent so long on this. But I can't go back. Everyone will say they're right. Everyone will say they told me so. The girls will know. I would be so alone. There's something wrong with me. No one will love me I can't do this just want to fix this want to live happily ever after the person you fall in love with is the person who falls in love with you and you end up with for the rest of your life and you marry them and you have two kids and you live in a pretty house and and and CHRIS! How can you sit there talking to that fucking bitch while I'm standing here sobbing asking --

There's a hole in the wall. A chunk of plaster the size of a baseball is sitting on the carpet. *The coffee table – but it was – now it's - how did he? – how did I – just two inches further – but he would never – why would –*

But –

No. Just –

What?

She tilts her head towards Chris.

Looks up.

Moves fingers.

Breathes.

Moves toes.

He adjusts the headset. Picks up a controller.

Stares at the TV.

“It's your fault.”

SCENE E:
STRUCTURE

Let the ending dictate the beginning.

(*Sofia narrates*) A white '97 Neon crawls up a residential street. Sofia hunches over the wheel, peering into the void ahead. Darkened houses line the pavement in a last salute. A chilling breeze carries cracked, brown leaves across the road. Ominous shadows form beneath trees. Dark instrumental music begins to play. She drives aimlessly around her apartment's residential neighbourhood. The leaves crunch like bones under the worn tires. SOFIA sighs despondently.

This car is a piece of junk.

A rabbit darts across the road in a grey blur.

At least the car is mostly quiet and doesn't clunk. Metal pin is poking my ass. Paint's peeling off the hood, tail light cracked. She frowns, tilts her head. Oil. Engine probably leaks too fast.

The car comes to a stop-sign and halts; Sofia doesn't move it forward again. Shadows cross the stop-sign as the wind rustles gnarled, dead trees.

Okay. Breathe, Sofia. You need to cry. John Cusack movies always say that crying makes you feel better so you don't die.

I'm just.

I can't.

Fluorescent dashboard lights flicker to life. Sofia's face is washed by the green glow.

Chris is right. There's something wrong with me.

Don't deserve to have a boyfriend.

Or friends.

Phone beeps. Sofia glances at it and sighs, then closes her eyes, dropping hands from the wheel.

Supposed to be with the girls. Really don't feel like going out. I'm such a bitch.

I'm supposed to get married. I'm supposed to have kids.

I failed.

If mother was here – there's no one I can ask for advice.

What would a character do?

Didn't Bridget Jones leave Daniel Cleaver?

An apartment without Chris: Unshaved stubble would grate my legs, leaving goose bumps on my skin.

The fridge would hum and whine with the TV din, pizza boxes piled on the table, grease pooling and shining in the flickering light of ABC cable.

I would spend at least 16 days watching *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* marathons and shovelling extra cheese pizza into my mouth, brown, carbonated acid trickling down my chin, plate balancing on grease-smearred napkins beside a mickey of gin.

If mother was here --

Sofia places her hands back on the wheel. The car groans as she lurches it forward, gears crunching.

Clouds look heavy with rain.

God.

I'm this child needs you to adopt her now. Please send money to help my baby with cancer.

Where will I go when I move out? That apartment was my home. Really don't want to move in with that man – dad.

Houses slowly file past the car, a receiving line.

He'd just sit on his couch, as usual, if I were there. Stare at the TV.

I was right, he'd tell me.

The car comes to a midnight fence. It towers over the neighbouring sidewalk as the moon emerges from behind a cloud, drawing a shadowed crosshatch pattern on the concrete. Rows of tombstones rise behind the fence, trapped, gray hands reaching for light.

Can barely afford an apartment and rent. Guess I could stay in this rusty hole.

What if it gets cold? What about laundry? What about mail – my bills? What if someone sees me? How will I eat?

The car loses momentum and slowly rolls to a gravelly halt alongside the cemetery.

Stop here.

Sofia turns the engine off and crosses her arms. Dead leaves skitter across the sidewalk. Air whistles past the car windows. Like *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Land of the Dead*, wind whisks loose soil from the tops of the graves and around dark crypts.

Too cold for cicadas. What is that? It's too dark. Teens? Looks like they're slipping their skinny skeletons into the stone crypt. Left the door open.

The kids huddle in a circle, then light joints, fireflies in the dark. The wind carries laughter into the cracks of the car as the kids disappear. Sofia puts her hands on the wheel once again.

Friends are supposed to be there for you. They're supposed to carry me swiftly to their sofa; supposed to buy me stone smooth ice cream treats; supposed to let me sob into their strong shoulders and never mind the snot. Friends are supposed to fill my cracked, crumbling heart with comfort food and rom coms. Supposed to pass the tissues and bury me in a soft pile of fleece blankets and plush pillows until I find rest and peace. Supposed to dress me in sweaters and sweat pants. Tell me I'm just bloated, not obese.

But they're the type of girls I go out with to talk about other girls. Not to talk about myself.

Sofia's car creeps forward. The headlights expose a pile of matted squirrel fur, covered in blood, buried in curb-leaves. Another squirrel sits beside the pile, a hole visible in the leaves where he's dug. Sits on his back legs, dark gleaming fur forming a frown on his face. His gaze is empty as he stares at the pile of leaves, crusted with blood.

The car pulls forward and rolls to a stop across the street from a tall brick apartment building. Manor Hiver is etched into the stone above the door, dark with shadows. Twigs and feathers flutter in the curve of the O, a haze of white smears dripping to the door below. A bare bulb pools on the front walk, flickering above a communal mail box before spilling into the bushes beside the door. Thick basement-bars imprison the pavement with their shadows.

Sofia lowers her hands from the wheel and stares at the building's door in silence. Its bronze knob lurks in the shadows, away from the frigid light.

Wanna get my things, but not 'til Chris leaves.

He'll be up 'til 2:00 AM talking to Britney.

I bet her profile pictures shows her in Victoria Secret and sandals from Jimmy Choo, hands curled around the curve of her smooth, tanned waist; siren red bikini bottoms nestled around hip bones, smiling from the sun and full of popsicles' sugary taste; the sun's warm rays alighting on her ribs and string top; hair shined and sprayed and perfectly smooth-straight, blonde side bangs swept back with a beach-girl face.

Her Instagram has got to be filled with pictures of her tank-top perky boobs, ass in yoga pants as she perches on the balcony of the Hilton beside some spoiled surfer dude.

What kind of bitch steals another girl's man? Especially when that man lives with his girl? I bet she has three other guys on the go.

Whore.

I can be better than Britney. I can be skinnier, stronger, cuter, and tougher. I just need to go to the gym. And learn more make-up tips. And change the way I laugh. And change the way I dress. And change the way I drive. And change the way I eat. And change the way I talk. And change the way I act.

If mother was here --

I can do that. I can be perfect. Learn from *Allure*. Find 25 new ways to please my man. What Men Want. How to Win My Ex Back. One. Go slow. Ask him for a brand-new relationship. Introduce yourself in an improved light. Go on first dates to new places you haven't tried. Wear a new push-up you haven't yet used to lie about your bust size. Two. Make a list of everything you love about him: his laugh, slow and deep when you catch him off guard. His smile, with teeth, when you cuddle up to watch Justin Timberlake on SNL TV. His eyes, when the sun peeks through the bedroom window and he calls you Hun. Ignore his stomach paunch, and the smirk behind his eyes. Three. Be honest: Of course I

want to wake up with him and look into his eyes, and eat Rice Krispies with him, walk by the beach, go on romantic candlelit dates, and hold hands while drinking expensive champagne in Paris, on our honeymoon of course, looking over the city from our rooftop patio in a Vera Wang dress, designed just for my perfect sexy body-type featured on the cover of *Allure*, after thanking my guests, especially Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren.

Four. Face the truth: I can do what he wants I can be chill I can be Cool Girl I can handle an open relationship I can handle friends with benefits I can be Britney I can change me.

Five. That bitch thinks she can win? If I just lose weight, everything will be fixed.

Turn off headlights; sit in car. Door to the building is open. Squint. Who's coming out? Light from inside's too bright.

Chris saunters out of the building, freshly showered and clean, smelling like Gucci cologne. I bet.

Chris doesn't have a blue Fiat. What is he doing? He's wearing that green shirt I bought him for our anniversary last year.

A shadow in the car waves and he charmingly smiles back before hopping in the passenger's side. The car speeds away in a trail of leaves and dust pooling on the asphalt.

Britney is driving the Fiat.

That bitch did win.

Small, fuzzy, orphan chipmunk is chewing through my heart.

He's gone.

It's clear.

Need to get my stuff.

Before he comes back.

(Sofia narrates) Sofia stares at the front door, unmoving. She takes a deep breath and counts.

One. Turn car off. Two. Enter door. Three. Climb narrow stairs.

Sofia climbs to the apartment and slowly creeps down a poorly-lit hall. Dust clings to the walls and shadows curl in the corners. She reaches a scratched black door, paint peeling and falling to the floor. Four. Apartment 307.

This little loft.

Ours.

Now it's his.

Broken controller still on the floor where it fell. Does he ever clean up?

What will he do without me?

Headset still on table. Found that glass-top on sale: Sun was out. Smooth new shirt; sienna ribbons caught his gaze. He kissed me, and I was amazed.

Too fat for that shirt now. Makes me look like breakfast sausages rolled in a puddle of grease.

Britney would probably look great in it.

Man stealing whore.

Sofia grasps the rungs of the loft ladder and heaves herself upwards. At the top, she stands at the edge and sways.

Consider falling backwards. Down, down, down six feet to the living room.

Five. Find and pack bag. Six. Zip duffel. Seven. Return to car. Act nonchalant, in case the neighbours see.

7:42 PM.

Really?

It only took half an hour to collect my life?

I – discarded myself. The muddy 3:00 AM unclasping of a push-up bra.

A brown, crusty, moist sock.

SCENE F:
INTERMISSION

Place at the end of an act.

A once-white clapboard house sits in a dry field, tall dead grass rooted to the dark earth, straining to reach the road with each breeze. A gravel driveway, stones turned and worn, drags and snakes along the soil from the road to the front walkway. A dusty teal door leans at the end, red roof above, sagging, shadowing its face like a furrowed brow. Dirt claws up the paint and strips the wooden frame. An empty bulb socket hangs by one screw to its right. Ripped curtains, yellowed and smoke-brown, hang in two square, hazy window panes. Dull light nudges the fabric from the other side, feebly flickering through small tears, then vanishing with stage fright. SOFIA pulls a ragged duffel from the back seat of her car and hefts it onto her shoulder. She stands nervously at the driveway, then slowly shuffles up the walk, gravel and dead weeds crunching beneath her feet. She reaches the front knob. The door slowly swings open to a cavernous black abyss.

SOFIA. House looks the same as it always did.

A rectangular room, lined with dark wood panels sticky with dust and smoke. A boxy TV is forced into the corner, its coat-hanger antenna and rounded screen straining towards the matted spinach floor. Fuzzy black and grey shadows move back and forth across the TV's white screen. An orange couch fills the space opposite, soiled yellow flowers slick with grease and permanently shaped to - him. (To self) Clothes have never seen a fold.

Mom would disapprove. (Pause).

Mother. That word. It lives in my pores, lingers with dust, full of wellings-up. *I brush it, serifs swirling, bunnies dusting. Touch the letters with my thumb. Rest them in my palms. Whisper to them, calling to them. Sit it back, grasping, gasping for another word. (Pause).*

Isn't he at least going to say hello?

His legs rest on a scratched chestnut table, varnish sticky with heat. Spindly wooden legs bury into the carpet, fibers fusing with the paint at their feet. An angular 'Sofia Costa, 16' is carved into the table top and filled with years of dust.

He's crammed his fat feet into those brown slippers I stopped by to give him for Christmas two years ago.

A new hazy figure appears on TV. Don Cherry spits on his palm tree or flamingo tie as he talks. Dad doesn't remove his eyes from the screen. *Beer?*

(Sofia narrates) Sofia drops her duffel and sinks into a corner of the couch. Dust clouds up as she lays back. Shakes head. *No thanks.*

Cut to a rerun game.

Leafs score.

Grey and dark-grey crowd half-heartedly cheers.

I'm too much like her.

Silence hangs in the air between us with the sour, sweet scent of old and overused furniture, armrest padding spilling like pus.

He knows I know it. And he knows I need him. I have nowhere to go.

Off-white shadow Four skates to the penalty box as a tin crowd cheers.

Secretly, he needs me too. Who else would give him Christmas slippers? Zoom in on number four. Hangs his head, gloves off and towel on.

When mother was here, Christmas was succulent and day-long. She'd fill the house with the greasy scent of a fat roasted turkey and stuffing. Face would light up if it snowed.

She'd always wanted a Christmas like *Miracle on 34th Street*, with reindeer songs.

Four skates back. Crowd groans.

Then they'd argue. Stuffing would burn, turkey would dry out, and the potatoes would boil over. I wouldn't bother to pout. Would go to bed early after eating chocolate. Snuggle worn-out Rover. She would sneak into my room with a stone plate of Santa cookies and my purple snowman mug, full of milk. "I'm sorry, honey," she would say. "At least you don't have to go without."

I cooked a turkey just like mom. Even knitted Chris a scarf. Worked at it for four months, carefully knitting and purling and fixing mistakes. I even bought porcelain knitting needles. Scarf was simple, but I was so, so proud of it. It was the first thing I made. Christmas morning, he took it out of the box and scoffed. Why would he wear a scarf? Scarves were for gays, he'd said. Next he'd be wearing pink and cut-offs.

And that was that.

Commercial. Game fades out. Go to bed, Sofia.

One. Move legs. Two. Carry life past kitchen, gaping jar rank with rotting juice of forgotten fruit, counter strewn with plastic bags.

My bedroom curtains look like they used to be an 80's wedding dress for *Bride of Chucky*. And that princess bedspread looks covered in half-chewed, spit-soaked Pepto

Bismol tablets. I should replace it...but mom gave it to me. And I don't have enough money for a new one.

Three. Perch on mattress.

It sags.

Forgot mom bought me that dress-form lamp. Too bad I didn't study fashion design after all. She'd send me these trendy clothes, and on days when the rain fell and the sky stormed, we'd lay them all out and I'd model: "Just like the runways. Like those magazines. These dresses make you so beautiful."

When we first moved here, I would imagine all kinds of sharp metal monsters clawing their way from the shadows. Their long fingers would gleam in the light from my bedroom door as they crunched across the carpet, my feet curled up in horror. They would steal me and put me in a pink box. Lock me in a closet, surrounded by earth, light swallowed in the belly of silence. I'd fight my way out of the box, but the closet was huge. I'd be lost.

If mom was here, I'd drift from an evening sleep to the smell of sizzling sweets. Chocolate and cinnamon would swish past my sheets with her voice. The door would softly creak as she slipped past its threshold to find me curled, arms around my knees. Wishing I was like those girls. Wishing I could be normal.

Wow. My old journal is here in the nightstand. Pink glitter with princess stickers and Crayola.

Don Cherry, muted, yells his outrage from the living room.

Eyelids. So heavy. Need. Blankets. Wearing. Can't. Wake.

Grade two. The girls stand and talk on the lawn while they wait for their moms to come pick them up. I will not cry. They stop talking and stare at me as I walk past. I will not cry I will try to smile and be their friend I will not cry. Mom is here in the car. *Get in and close the door.* Sarah yells *Poor Hippo Poor Whale Poor Hippo Poor Whale Poor Hippo Poor Whale.* I will not cry. Mom's knuckles look funny because they're kind of white and she says *what did they call you?* and I say it's fine it's just a joke. She smooths my hair against my forehead. *I bet those girls are teasing you because you look different. I think it's time we didn't give them anything to tease you about. Let's go shopping this weekend. I'll get you that Lisa Frank duo tang you've wanted for a while. And you can get your hair cut. You'll look just like a princess. Let's get you a style that fits in.* She looks at my stomach, then brushes my hair with her hand and tips my head up by holding my chin and says *Tonight, I'll make you salad like Amma used to make.*

What time is? Still Don Cherry.

It smells so musty.

A sad, deflated balloon.

Mom.

The day she left, I stood on that vomit-green, linoleum kitchen floor. Froze my feet. Stared at the cold stove. Stared at the door-note. Wouldn't believe.

What is that?

Looks like a ribbon under the nightstand.

Maybe if I just stick my arm out. Stretch to the right. Can barely reach.

It's stuck a little...tug. Harder.

A dusty pile of yellowed papers and envelopes finally tumbles out, bound tight.

Mom's letters. From after she left.

Every single one should still be here.

Don Cherry calls from the living room.

There is a layer of dust pasted onto my hands.

Hm. This looks like the last one. It's not as yellowed.

Why did she stop?

Waited and waited. Hounded Dad. What a douchebag. She never lied to me. Why would he say that? Who tells a preteen girl her mom doesn't love her anymore and is never coming back? He was wrong. Something happened and she just couldn't send any more letters. Maybe he stole them from me. Maybe her letters got lost in the mail. Maybe, wherever she was, they stopped selling stamps.

My little Sofia,

Well, I guess you're not so little anymore, are you. Going to dances and getting crushes on those boys. You're living the life I wanted you to. I wanted you to be happy, and have all of the things I couldn't have when I was growing up. To be a normal girl. To wear these pretty sparkly clothes. To have nice dolls and to go to the mall with your friends, shopping for makeup. I knitted your soft baby blankets with these wishes. Filled them with my dreams and wrapped you in them. I wanted you to go to school; to get good grades; to grow up and raise children in a warm, sunny house. One day, princess, you'll find your prince charming.

When you're older, of course.

The first boy I fell in love with was José. He was so sure of himself. So smooth. We were ten. It was my first dance. I was all prettied up in a brightly coloured dress. I was sure he was the one I was going to spend the rest of my life with.

Of course, it turned out, he was only one of many “suitors,” as your Amma liked to call them.

I’m still looking for my prince charming, Sofia. I know he’s out there. Just as you will one day find yours. You will find your one and only man. He will sweep you off your feet and make you catch your breath.

Sweetie, I understand if you’re upset that I haven’t come back. One day you will understand.

~~*Or maybe it will be best if you don’t.*~~

I hope you like my latest present. Wish I could see your smile light up the room as you pull it out of this box and try it on. Feel the skirt swish around your legs as you dance. This dress is from one of the trendy shops downtown. The pink will bring out your eyes. I took a trip there with a friend. He was so excited to show me a new restaurant. It was beautiful, with lights that looked like fairies. Maybe now is finally my chance.

Anyways, I think I saw something like it in Allure. Your friends had better be impressed. It cost a lot, but you’re worth it.

I love you, Sofia.

Mama.

That ending. She wouldn’t forget me. She wouldn’t just leave me. Like she left him.

I hope nothing happened to her, and that she’s alright.

He was so sure she had just stopped loving me.

What kind of man doesn't let his ten year old daughter make sure her mother isn't dead?

Have to work at the café tomorrow.

Whatever happened to her?

I should sleep. Need to get up in the morning.

If something did happen to her, and I never found out....

Did I wash my uniform?

I could never forgive myself.

Envelopes. The very last one. It had a sticker on it, in the shape of a heart.

Bottom of the pile. Return address.

Where did I leave my phone? It was just here...oh. Okay. Google maps. Maybe a night in Toronto isn't too expensive. Google, show me gas, hotels, and food.

Yikes.

200.00? I can't afford that right now. Chris could, but there's no way he'd lend it to me. And no way would I ever want to see him again.

I'll have to start saving.

So many shifts at the café. Stuck here forever.

But it's worth it.

Maybe I can find out what happened, or talk to her online. Close flight tab. Bring Google back up.

Anna Costa.

Haven't written that name in so long.

Maybe she has a Facebook?

1.2.3.

Nothing. Antonella Costa, 80, in Ohio. Antonella Costa born in Winnipeg last year.

Page 2...3...

Nothing. Oh! Some local newspaper. She thinks a new bed and breakfast's design looks very sweet. Damn. That's the only mention of her, and it's brief.

Hockey cheers wash softly through the door.

I'll find you, mama.

Home crawls onto the rose bedspread, curls into a ball by my feet, and.

Spices sizzle in a pan. I run across the hot sienna earth, grasping mother's hand.

SCENE G:
ONE-ACT PLAY

A common arrangement.

FADE IN.

(Sofia narrates). *SOFIA's platform heels pound the sidewalk ground as the bass from The Bar pumps hot. Bare legs buckle under step-fall hustle; black dress, black bra ride up. Black skirt, big bow covers Dutch-bare bum from whistles and calls for pets. Bare arms goose bump - cold breeze – not fun, should have pre-gamed with beer. Drunk girls upset, passed out, puke-benched, feet falling off tall heels. Bar door open, bouncer gone smoking; I can see used condoms from here. Breeze past puke-fest, calls for drunk sex, two slop-shows in tears.*

Loud dub step music vibrates every surface. Dim lights illuminate the tops of black bar stools along the left wall. A few guys sit on them, hair gelled back and suited-up, chatting to the bartender as they stir the ice cubes in their drinks. One girl, nineteen, wobbles at the end, staring at the bartender, shoulders hunched and debit card clutched in sweat, knuckles white on the counter. Holds up three fingers. Asks for four drinks, make them blowjob shots; cheeks blush as guys stare. Bartender winks, teases, calls her a wuss. Gives her extra whipped cream. Waits for the tip. Alcohol sloshes on her wet fingers during the slow dipped walk back to her friends at the back of the room.

ANGIE, MILENA, ASHLEY, AND SARAH sit around a wooden table in front of a small stage on the right side of the room. A SINGER stands on it, setting up a sound system for a performance. He's tall with spiky dark hair and piercing blue eyes. His features are chiselled. He winks at Ashley, who wobbles and belches.

SOFIA. Oh God. Last time I was here, Ash kept trying to pull her top down and shout for the singer to hear. Every breath between notes and every breath between songs: *I WANNA HAVE HIS BABIES!* Hanging on Angie's shoulder, asking if we think he'd think she'd think he'd think it was hot if she danced on the table.

She's almost 20.

ASH. (*With duck lips*) Get it guuuurl, get it get it guuuurl! (*Takes a duck-lip selfie*).

SARAH. (*Over the music*) Ashley is planning to ask the singer for his number tonight. She probably won't get his number, but we all know she'll get him. (*Winks*).

SOFIA (*Slides into an empty chair beside Angela. Its heavy wooden feet drag on the floor, the sound eclipsed by yeahhh wubs*). Milena. You're nursing that screwdriver!

ASHLEY (*To Sofia, shrieking*). Guuuuurl where you been? We missed you last week Hun!

SOFIA. (*Winces, forcing lips into a smile*). I've been busy. I've been --

SARAH (*Pushes a shot in front of Ashley, who winks at the singer before downing it.*) (*Gesturing animatedly*) So I told him that I can't believe he would even say that. This is our wedding and I just want it to be perfect so I can show him how much I love him. We have the rest of our lives to pay it off and besides Daddy said he'd buy my dress so there's \$10,000.00 right there he doesn't even have to worry about. I mean I'm basically getting it for free. I literally couldn't control myself and had a heart attack when he said that \$50,000.00 is too expensive for a wedding. All the girls on TV spend at least \$75,000.00! I'm not spending that much. I mean he only thinks a wedding should cost like \$5000.00 at most I don't think he like has any flipping idea how expensive it is just to book the freaking photographer, not to mention all of the food. And *Allure* had an article that said you should

always splurge on the photographer because you never want to forget your memories. \$20,000.00 is literally the cheapest, tackiest wedding I've ever heard of. (*The rest of the girls all nod*).

The singer sits on a stool and pulls out an acoustic guitar. Ashley sticks her lips out and poses for another selfie, contorting her body so her boobs look larger than they actually are. She adjusts her bra and puts her phone away, leaning forward towards the stage so that the singer can look at her cleavage. The guy looks up from the stage and stares right at her boobs, then the wub. wub. wub. stops and he starts playing "We Are Young."

SARAH. (*Downs the Pina colada sitting in front of her and chews on her pineapple*). Girl you don't have a drink yet! That is just not allowed! (*Waves at the waitress, who sashays over in work-out short-shorts and a white t-shirt, sleeves rolled up twice and shirt pinched at the back with a safety pin to show off her small waist*).

SOFIA. (*Timid*) Umm, could I please get a bee—

SARAH. (*Commands*) Get this girl a drink! Ummmmm a GT! No a daiquiri! And start her a tab. (*Plays with her hair for a moment in silence. The girls watch Ashley sway in her chair and sing to the song in a loud, off-key, slurred voice.*) So how's your man? We haven't seen him in a while.

SOFIA. I, um, left him. Told him my, um, ass is too sexy to be waiting around for a damned ring from him. I, uh, have needs, and he wasn't fixing them!

SARAH. Alright girl! We need to get you a new, sexy man!

ANGIE. (*Points at a guy playing pool at the table a few feet away.*) Like that sexy mofo. And he looks fiiiiine!

MILENA. (*Checks him out.*) Ouuu get it, guuurl!

Sofia turns see that the singer has, after all these weeks, come over to talk to Ashley.

ASHLEY. *(Wobbling and clinging to his side, pressing her body against him and using his arm for support.)* I think you should give me. Your *(hiccups)* number, just in case I need. To hire someone *(hiccups)* to sing at a party I'm having. *(Winks)*.

SINGER. *(Flashes a cocky smile and pokes her in the side)*. You'll have to do better than that!

ASHLEY. *(Pouts and flutters eyelashes as she looks up at him.)* After last week, I think you know I can... *(Yanks Milena to her feet, planting a heavy kiss on her lips, face sliding sideways as she loses her balance.)*

SINGER. You'll get your reward later if you bring your friend. *(Winks, then extracts himself from her arms and sits at the table)*.

MILENA. *(Panicked)* How could you I can't do that it would be cheating you know I can't George would –

ASHLEY. You know you love me. *(Winks)* No homo.

SARAH. *(Loudly)* I'm not les or anything, but that was daaaaamn hot!

The waitress brings Sofia's daiquiri and Sofia closes her eyes as cold, strawberry happiness floats to her head. Ashley pretends to fall onto the singer's lap. He wraps his arm around her and flirts with her cleavage. Milena, Sarah and Angela start talking about bouquet plans.

SOFIA. *(Sighs)* (Really don't know anything about flowers except for pretty Pinterest pictures, but I need to help. Bridesmaids are supposed to know these things.) *(Picks up phone and starts scrolling. Fog begins to fill the room.)*

10 Signs He's Your Soul Mate

Should You Call Him?

Is He the One?

Is He Good Boyfriend Material?

How to: The Perfect Makeup for Your Tinder Selfie! Snag that Guy!

15 Things You Should Look for When You First Meet that Guy

10 Things Guys Always Notice the First Time They Meet You

What? Ashley is. Making out with that guy. *(The other girls discuss the differences between rose and pink. Sofia looks around at the rest of the patrons).* I know I'm supposed to hit on that guy who was playing pool. I'm supposed to look him up and down. Wink and check out his butt when he turns around. *(Turns back to phone).*

Articles > Dating > Tips

Single again? Don't worry – here's our step-by-step guide for getting back onto the scene!

How will you find your soul mate?

The bar darkens and the bridal conversation fades out and becomes muffled. Spotlight pools on a girl sitting in a sticky corner booth with a guy who is sitting too far away from her to be her boyfriend. Her eyes are dark in the dim light and her face leaves a heart-shaped shadow on the table. She's nursing a Rickard's, hand on the bottle neck as she talks with the other one. Her face is accessorized by heavy, large brown frames and she is wearing a purple tank top with thick straps that says "Requires level 70."

SOFIA. Oh my god.

It's Tati.

How many – ten?

Fifteen years?

(The spotlight shifts, lighting a lone microphone. Sofia stands before it and recites.)

The last time, we stood in the snow. You were the only star out. Our silence hung like wet laundry, and our breath mingled with flakes. You paced into a streetlight and pulled your hat off. Let the snow rest in your midnight hair. I tucked stray strands into my brim. Cars rushed past. You were waiting for dreams. I rooted my feet to the frozen ground. I rooted my eyes to your trendy shoes. Your sister's van pulled up & idled. I looked at the stars. We said farewell.

(Sofia stumbles back to her seat and stares at Tati.)

She has really great bone structure.

Wish I could get my hair to frame my face like hers.

Is she even wearing make-up?

She looks kind of butch. *(Turns her attention back to the girls and their voices fade back in. Milena explains her dream wedding dress, comparing it to Carrie's in Sex and the City.)* Focus. Pay attention. *(Sofia wobbles on her chair).* Be interested.

You want to learn more about this hot guy. Where do you look?

- a) **Facebook**
- b) Twitter
- c) His friends

He's hanging out with his friends and you bump into him. What do you do?

a) **Blush and leave as soon as possible**

b) Smile and wait for him to come to you

c) Go over and say hi to him

You're talking to this guy. You've had a bad day. You:

a) **Don't say anything about your bad day at all**

b) Text him about it and ask for advice

c) Ask him to come over to watch YouTube videos with you

You picked: **Mostly A's**

Tati's curves really fill out her top. And her skin looks like silk.

I remember creaking away from cranky chaperones; tip-toeing on cool grey stones. Pulling soft coats around our shoulders and shivering on the ground. Lying back and looking at the stars. Inventing stories for Orion and the spoon. Naming a light after you. I watched you twirl curls around your hands, in the safe blanket of night. Spread my fingers in the soft sienna earth. Pushed my shoulders back. Closed my eyes to crickets.

The alcohol is going to my head.

I'm getting tipsy like Ashley.

You are an introverted person who never enjoys meeting new people. You're never good at making conversation or saying hi to others. You will meet your soul mate online! For more help, see our articles *Flirty Text Messages for Him* and *10 Ways to catch that Guy!*

When did the guy she was with leave?

Oh no. She knows I was staring at her.

Focus. Why is Ashley's bra on the table? Okay. Dresses. A big. Poufy skirt. She wants to be a fairy tale princess. Modern, chic, Cinderella...

Oh god. She's standing beside me.

Do I. Look up? Do I. Say hi?

Sarah is first.

SARAH. (*Humorless*) Can I help you?

TATI. (*Flushes*). Guess I was wrong. Sorry. (*Goes back to her table alone. Stares at the foam in her cup. Drinks her beer.*)

SARAH. (*Left hand on table*). Oh my god. Did you see that girl? What was she doing? (*Disdain*) Like, go away, we don't know you...

SOFIA. Table blurry and walls. Spin. How many drinks. Have I had? There are all these all these empty. Shot glasses, but. How did they get here?

ASHLEY (*Stands up and trips. Her guy catches her and wraps his arms around her. She raises her eyebrows*). We're gon.na go. Ok guys? I'll. Shee. You Later.

SARAH. (*Winks*) Get it, girl. Have fun. (*Ashley and the singer leave*).

Sofia stands up and focuses all of her attention on walking straight, staring at the floor tiles as she makes her way to the door, holding onto the edges of tables and the backs of chairs to stay upright. Steps outside in the cold air and breathes in the smoke from a group of guys passing around a joint. They catcall her as she walks by. Hey girl. What's up? I'd totally tap that ass. She wobbles her way to a bar stool and a table on the sidewalk and falls onto the stool, holding the table to keep herself steady.

SOFIA. (*Paws through purse, then panics*) Oh no. I drove.

None of the other girls have a car.

I can't afford a taxi.

How am I going to get home?

Did I even pay my tab? (*Puts her head on the table, contents of her purse strewn across it. Tatiana wanders out.*)

She's holding a cup.

She's walking towards me.

She's sitting down on the stool beside me.

TATI. (*Rubs Sofia on the back, speaking softly*). You don't look so well. Here. I got you some water. (*Sofia takes the glass and gulps, ice cubes falling towards her nose as the water disappears. Sits the cup down with a thud. Girl smiles, and holds out her hand.*)

Hey. Been awhile.

SOFIA. (*Takes her hand and tries to shake it, but almost falls off the stool*). Y.ep. (*Pause, then to self*) She isn't letting go.

She's still holding it and staring at me. (*Lights and background noise fade and spotlight focuses on Tati.*) Her eyes are midnight.

Her hands are really soft.

Like hiding under the bed, holding hands.

I am transfixed by the movement of her lips.

TATI. (*Smile, and licks lips.*) Want a ride? You could come back to my place for a bit. I've got some bread. It'll help sober you up.

FADE OUT.

SCENE H:

MOVIE

Write a play instead.

(Sofia wakes up in a strange room around 7:00 am. Two large windows rattle with a breeze beside the bed, light blossoming and shifting across a white stucco ceiling and dancing across her feet. A bright blue sky peeks through the curtains, sun outside resting high on pillowed clouds. Wind chimes tinkle and clink outside as cold, blistering air whistles past the panes. Pale blue walls that match the sky wrap around the bed like a warm embrace. Small piles of blankets and clothes lay scattered across the floor like freshly turned earth. A dark antique dresser rests across the room, surface worn and chipped.)

SOFIA. The red sunrise warms my toes as I wiggle them and stretch my legs between soft fleece sheets. *(Raises arms above her head, then curls on her side into a ball, smiles, then takes a deep breath and closes her eyes)*. Last night, the room was too dark to really tell what it looked like. *(Opens eyes, then pauses)* I can see my bra by the doorway, unclasped and tangled from last night's quick fury. Is my underwear in the hall? What underwear did I even wear? It must have been the dark purple pair. I always wear those ones when I go downtown. *(Tati lays beside her, asleep and breathing softly. Her chest rises and falls, a thin sheet covering her. Bare shoulders peek from above a thin sheet. Her chestnut hair lays in a tangled, silky mess across her pillow. Apprehension fills Sofia's face as she stares at the other girl.)* I've never done this before. What am I supposed to say when she wakes up? What do lesbians do the morning after? Something tells me she doesn't really smoke or eat Doritos. *(Pauses, then scrambles for her phone, typing).*

Face/calm rays of sun/a flutter across cheeks/with trees. (*Stares*) Wow. Her eyelashes are so long. What kind of vitamins does she take to look like that?

I wonder if she uses those supplements from the drug store.

No.

She's one of those girls that's beautiful without even trying.

Must have taken all the blankets last night. (*Pulls the comforter, tangled around Sofia, towards Tati and tucks it around her shoulders.*)

I can't really remember anything beyond her car.

What exactly did I do?

I know she gave me bread. I cried. The crumbs fell everywhere.

But after that, what did I do?

What am I supposed to do now?

If mother was here --

(*Sofia closes her eyes and breathes deeply.*) I can figure this out. I'm sure she'll be awake soon. Okay Sofia. Maybe I can sneak out of the bed, put some clothes on, and no one will know what happened. (*Begins to panic*) She'll never see me again. Or I'll never go to the bar again. I'll find a new one with the girls. This never happened. I'm supposed to get married I'm supposed to have kids I'm supposed to have a husband. Oh god What have I done, really? Is this me? What am I? I should know this by now, shouldn't I?

Does that other time at The Bar count?

What about when I was drunk?

They always say that when you're drunk it doesn't count.

When she dragged me out of there, Sarah said she was saving me from a train wreck.

What does that even mean?

I wear pink dresses. I shave my armpits and my legs. I have long hair.

Tati wears purple. Her hair is long. I think I see a dress in a heap on the floor.

But she approached me. She's the guy, right? Is that how this works?

(Tati's breathing is faster and quieter. She moans slightly as her legs stretch and her bare foot grazes Sofia's, who jumps away. The blanket falls into the curves of Tati's side as she leans towards her, looks her in the eyes, and smiles.)

TATI. Good morning, beautiful.

SOFIA. *(Blushes)*. G-Good morning.

I stare at a freckle sitting on the side of her nose. She has two tiny pale hairs growing out of it. There is a bit of dry skin on the edge of her nostril.

TATI. You don't remember last night, do you?

SOFIA. She's laughing at me. Did I do something wrong? Am I supposed to leave? I pull my head into my neck like a turtle.

TATI. Don't worry. We just ended up fooling around. Nothing below the waist. It was fun, but I stopped when I realized you weren't sobering up. Thought you might want a warm place to stay. Maybe we could do this again sometime, when you're sober? You didn't really want to stop. *(Her eyes shift mischievously as she searches Sofia's for an answer, switching back and forth, back and forth between her right pupil and her left. Sofia looks at her bra in the doorway and searches for the pair of panties in the hallway.)* Where did I take them off? Was it before or after the bra? *(Reaches hand down to scratch her hip)*.

I'm wearing them. She's telling the truth. (Examines the pattern of threads in the sheets.)

Thank you.

(Tati's eyebrows draw together in a soft kiss. Her mouth questions.)

TATI. For what?

SOFIA. (Words fall from my mouth before I can catch them and rope them back.)

You treated me like a human.

(Where did that come from?)

I can't believe I just said that.

I wish I could fish for those lines and reel them back into my mouth.

She's going to think I'm the most pathetic excuse of an attention whore ever.)

(Tati's hair hugs her eyebrows as she raises them in surprise.) You are.

Suddenly her lips are moving on mine, soft, questioning, asking if I will kiss back.

My eyes close and I shyly push mine against hers, then pull back. She shuffles closer to me, wraps her arms around me, and surrounds me with the heat of her body. Her neck fills my face, then I turn to lay on my back because it's too warm. Weave my fingers with hers. Graze the skin of her foot with the edge of my little toe.

What am I looking at?

There's a ratty, naked blonde doll sitting atop the dresser, amidst bottles of hairspray and perfume.

(Oh –

Oh my god.)

Is that Barbie?!

(Tati covers her face with the sheet in embarrassment.) Yes. I should have moved that. I never leave it out. Please don't judge me for it. (Her eyes squeeze tight as heat climbs her face.

A slow smile glows like the warm sun across my cheeks.) I think it's cute. Remember Mom bought me those Barbies all the time? I loved them. Those girls at school had the one that figure skated. There was this wedding Barbie, in a bright pink box. She had hot pink shoes, a sparkly white dress, and a matching Ken doll in a tux. I'd wanted it forever. I bugged her for it every chance I got. When it finally came, I was so excited that I ripped part of the box apart while taking off the wrapping paper.

Didn't even read the letter.

(There are shapes in the ceiling as I tell her this: purple paper and shredded cardboard, strewn about the couch as I sat cross-legged, viciously pulling twist ties from plastic legs and arms.)

(Tati turns, a breath from her lips.) I remember those girls in grade three. Recess, in the cootie corner. All six of them crowded around you. *What happened to your dad? Where is he? Why doesn't he ever pick you up?* You told them he was at home. *Not that man*, they said. *Your biological father. Where is he?* Then again, in grade six. *Where's your mom? Do you even have a real family?*

Can't stand to look at her right now, to see that look of pity in her face. Wait. Wait to feel her hand go limp as she says "I'm so sorry" and pulls back.

She's still holding my hand.

Her foot is still grazing the side of mine.

She's still lying beside me.

And she's quiet.

Sofia. Turn your head. Look at her.

She's searching for patterns, meaning, in the ceiling with me. (Her voice escapes.)

Do you ever think of her?

I knew this question was going to come.

But it doesn't sound like she's treading on eggshells, or pulling the lid off a Tupperware bin of rotten food.

(Breathe in). Yeah. (Breathe out). I think something happened. There was no warning, no mention of her coming back. I was worried she died, but Dad wouldn't let me visit her, and I didn't know how to find her. (Fill chest with air and contract with each new word.) I want to find her. Always have. Well, at first I was scared. But I'm ready.

I want to save the money for a flight, but I have to pay Dad's rent and buy groceries. I think I'll just – I'll just send a letter. I want to list all of the things I missed out on: Prom, her doing my hair. Graduation, as she snaps embarrassing photos. Late for curfew after my first date.

Chris.

I was supposed to have all of those.

(Tati continues to look for patterns in the ceiling for awhile. I turn my head to watch the sun hang like a ghost in the sky. Her fingers twitch against mine and tighten, thumb tracing the edge of my nail in thought. Her head shifts on the pillow; I turn my eyes to face hers. Tati's lips shape cherry-flavoured words.) You know, we could always do a road trip. I could drive you. Like the trips we used to dream of

as kids. We'll stop at a corner store and buy all the chips; fill our faces with caffeine and chocolate, then leave this dusty city behind.

(I flip on my side and place my arm beneath my head, tracing the side of her smooth, warm hip with my other hand, then take a breath.) Like we dreamed of hitchhiking across the country, thumbs up. (Tati sighs. I ask.) What's wrong?

(My hand is empty, Tati's pulled from mine. She continues.) My roommate bailed. We were supposed travel across the province together. Well, not really my roommate. She was supposed to be the love of my life. She was supposed to be my one. But I guess I was the only one of us that thought I was a half.

(Her cheeks are round like a fresh, crisp apple beneath a tree. She presses her lips together, then turns her head, staring into my eyes from an inch away, warm toothpaste breath landing on my nose.) Let's do it. I still have the money. I know it's crazy, and I understand if you say no, I mean it's been so long and we've barely talked and how do we even know each other anymore? And it's a lot of money I'd be spending on you, but I feel like we just picked off where we left. I don't want to go alone. It's not like we didn't plan a trip together. All those years ago, you know? Dressing up dolls and dreaming of adventures. We can keep on where we left off. I need someone to come with. And it's something you need to do.

(Breathe in). Barbie.

Dusty letters sitting on my nightstand at home.

(Breathe out). Only if I can pay you back, okay? I promise I will.

(Tati's chirps like a baby bird and her smile rises like the morning sun.) Deal.

So, pretty lady.

You're on an epic quest for legendary loot. Where do you want to start?

(I pull the covers over my head with giggles.)

SCENE I:

DIRECTOR

The author of the play or film.

SOFIA. (Tati and Sofia sit in a black Sunfire at a red light, watching a horde of tourists hunched like question marks waiting to board a bus, all of them rushing to wait. Tati is behind the driver's wheel. Fat drops of rain fall on the windshield. Skyscrapers rise on each curb, steel overpasses snaking through the streets. A breeze lifts a swirl of dry leaves into the air, chaotically blowing each tourist's hair. Sofia pulls down the car's mirror and anxiously examines her face, smiling and rubbing at her teeth with a finger.) I forgot my toothbrush. And I didn't pack a nice dress. When we find her, what will I wear? What if nothing fits right? How do I even know what she'll like? They have to have something like a goodwill here, right? I don't want to spend too much, just in case I get to take mom out for a fancy dinner or something.

(The last time I was on a road trip, we moved to the new city. I remember I sat for at least four hours curled in a ball with my arms crossed, refusing to stare at anything but the fibers of the car seat. Mom tried giving me Swedish Berries, getting me a pop, even offering to stop for a fancy meal. But earlier today, Tati gave me a pack of gum to chew, then kissed my face, beginning with my ears. After a while, I fell asleep and drooled all over the seatbelt. But it's okay, because she said it was cute. Plus, when it was my turn to drive, she fell asleep for a little bit and drooled on me, too.)

Green. Finally. We're going to pull out of this pile of people and cars we've been buried in for so long.

(The hunched question marks filter through the bus doors and the bus groans with exhaust as it pulls away. Our car lurches forward, pushing through the skyscrapers like a lost squirrel surrounded by ancient trees. We weave through the chilly streets, past a school of taxis shuttling tourists and locals past overcast steel. Tati smiles at each new thing we pass: kiss-lips raising with a glimpse of the CN Tower, cutting the sky; eyes blinking brightly as cold sun peeks through a cloud and reflects off a statue entertainer glittering in gold; hands softly pulling a loose thread on her hem as cute girls with H&M sweaters descend to the subway below. The radio chatters, leaving a silence hanging in the air with ill-timed songs from our past. I fill the silence with a smile. Ask Google for the best shop to buy a purple purse. Pull mom's last envelope, purple ink, wrinkled and yellowed, from my crumpled pocket. Smooth it on my lap and hold it up to the light. Fold it into a tiny square, then turn it into a cootie catcher. Pull it flat again. Stare at the return address. Rub at the places it is damp. Put it back. Tati stretches a hand, shyly, across seat. Pulls my fingers to the soft fabric in her lap. Lays them to rest, tapping *Girl* into my knuckles with her thumb.)

(She pulls up to a row of red brick houses. I dig the envelope from a grave, thin slot in my worn-out wallet. She offers to leave the keys, exhaust pouring into the streets, and I nod.

The townhouses run for blocks, icy white window frames climbing up the sooty red brick. Dark curtains block the warm yellow light from pouring into the street like an overfull kettle. I fold and unfold the letter fourteen times, the paper worn and soft like

fabric against my palm. Search for 301A in the crisp leaves guarding the front gate. Tati breathes for me, stepping slowly towards the grey front walk.)

Close eyes. Move right foot towards the door.

Step forward.

(Sofia's hand shakes as it knocks like a whisper on the worn, grey door. It looks like it was once white, years of lost love wrinkling its face as the cold breath of Toronto's streets chipped away at its paint.)

No answer.

(Sofia's neck stings from the disappointing air that weaves itself beneath her sweater's neck. Goosebumps grow, reaching towards baby hairs hiding beneath the locked dark waterfall of hair spilling across her shoulders. A dog barks in a nearby yard, its pleas echoing between the houses on the street. A tree in front of the neighbouring house muffles the sound. Tati squeezes Sofia's hand and releases it, raising hers to pound on the front panel of the door. There is no bell to dress the hollow cough her knuckles raise on the scratched, overcast paint. Sofia presses her toe against the grey stone beneath their feet. A muted door shuts behind Tati's knock. A small voice argues with a stubborn cat, and the knob turns. Sofia stares at it, examining the worn gold handle that has stood against the elements for quite some time. The brass is too bright for her eyes and she blinks, details of the door blurring together with each grain of wood. It pulls open. Tati stands tall and smiles.)

Chin, lift.

Head, raise.

Eyes, look.

Hands, stop fidgets. Be silent.

A small, red haired lady with wrinkles clawing across her cheeks is looking me in the eyes and smiling.

LADY. Hello? Can I help you? I'm not interested in anything you're selling, thanks. *(She starts to close the gap, darkness moving to claim her cheeks. Sofia swallows cold air and shakes her head at Tati. Nudges her with her toe to speak. Wind whistles down the street.)*

TATI. We're not selling anything. *(Pauses)* We're looking for Antonella Costa?

LADY. *(The door opens and light shines on her face.)* Who are you? Who's asking? Tongue, move. Speak.

SOFIA. My name is Sofia Costa. I'm-I'm a relative of hers. This is the last address I have. *(She smooths the envelope and holds it out.)*

LADY. *(Peers at the crumpled piece of yellowed paper and raises her eyebrows at the pale writing, smudged from the sweat of Sofia's palm.)* You've come a long way. I hope no one died. Well, you might have better luck asking her daughter where she is. I haven't seen her in a long time; not since she met that Daniel lad. He was so handsome, always dressed in a suit, bringing her flowers and making sure to say hi to me when he took her out. All I've heard of her was from last year's Christmas card. *(She studies Sofia's face for a while, eyes moving from nose to wrinkles to hair.)* You really do look like her. You a niece or something?

SOFIA. Tati's eyebrows raise and she places her hand on Sofia's back; Sofia leans into it. Her lips stay closed and her feet become one with the earth, heart gluing them to the soil. She forces her mouth to smile.

Yeah. Something like that.

LADY. Well it's nice to meet some of her family. I'm Julia.

TATI. (Sofia's breath spirals into the chilly air as Tati takes Julia's hand and smiles warmly.) This is Sofia. You'll have to excuse her for being so quiet. She's exhausted. We had a long drive.

JULIA. (Laugh chimes down the street as she nods.) Well give me a minute, and I might be able to dig out that Christmas card. I remember I kept it because the snowman on the front was so cute. She didn't say much in it, just signed her name, but I'm sure I have the envelope with it, too. Do you want to come in? I can put on some tea.

TATI. (Looks at Sofia with a question on her lips. Sofia shakes her head very slightly, and Tati smiles.) Thank you; we really appreciate the invitation. We still have to check into our hotel, though, so I think we'll wait out here for now.

(Julia leaves her door ajar while she goes inside to look through her drawers. The smell of chili wafts towards the girls with warm air from inside. A small black cat pads towards them and rubs towards the door frame, meowing before disappearing into the grey light with its mom. Julia talks to it, or maybe to herself, as drawers open and close inside. Finally, she appears with a faded red envelope bearing a snowman stamp. Inside it sits a snowman card, covered in glittery snowflakes wishing Happy Holidays. Sofia runs her thumb across the ink where her mother signed it.)

SOFIA. A nickname I don't recognize: Ana. (Tati thanks Julia and takes Sofia's cold hand, pulling her back towards the warm car.)

SOFIA. 607 C, sliding from my tongue in a daze. (Catches her breath, and looks over at Tati, who is studying her face with concern in her eyes.)

TATI. I know doing a road trip isn't something I could do alone. I'm enjoying it. I needed to clear some old memories from my head. Thank you.

(Sofia looks outside as the car passes a single father with three children in tow.)
After we check into the hotel, we'll go to this address, okay?

Maybe – you could stay in the car? I think, finally coming face to face with my mom after all these years, is something I need to do alone.

(Sofia stands outside of a large, glossy white door with a bright autumn wreath. Golden leaves and sunflowers rise and set in a circle. It is surrounded by warm brick, patterned by bright rays reflected by a large bay window to the left of the door. A neat lawn frames the front of the house, pointing towards her with each breath of the wind, carefully curved on a cul-de-sac. Sofia tightens her left hand in her pocket, clutching both mangled envelopes.)

Focus. Ignore the boiling acid beneath your rib cage. Ignore the goose bumps on the back of your neck. Stop standing here staring at the front door like a creep.

Raise right hand.

Place knuckles on door.

Knock.

No.

Stop.

(Her phone beeps from inside her left pocket.) I know it's Tati, texting me from around the block. Asking if I'm okay.

I'll be back to the car soon.

Lift right hand. Unclench fist.

Extend index finger. Press doorbell.

(A deep jingle selling familial serenity echoes through the belly of the house. A small dog begins yapping from inside, defending its mom from the stranger at the door. It claws on the other side of the bell.)

DOG. Who are you? We don't like strangers. Go away.

(Several thumps come from behind the door and a high pitched, young voice sings from the other side.) I'll be there in a minute! Zeus! Quiet! You know better than to bark at guests. What's gotten into you?

(The glossy portal opens to a girl who looks like she's ten. Her skin is pale, framed by ropes of braided midnight hair. Her eyes, hot chocolate with thick lashes, laugh as she opens the door. A small grey dog with long ears cowers and shakes in her arms.)

GIRL. Sorry, he's kind of shy and I'm still training him. He's friendly though; I promise. How can I help you?

SOFIA. I picture myself in the mirror at ten: tan, black hair worn long to match Tati's, eyes lit with blue shades. I sent mom pictures, ten or twenty of them: modelling new dresses, in a photo booth with friends, laughing in my tattered room.

I'm wearing ratty jeans, wrinkled from sitting in the car; Tati's purple tank top from the bar, requiring level 70; and a black sweater, buttoned at the bottom.

A grey coat hangs from my shoulders, dusty with a stain.

Okay, Sofia. Open mouth --

Words fill it, sung from behind this strange girl.

WOMAN. Who's there, Hannah?

SOFIA. And suddenly she's there, mirroring my ten-year-old twin, a ghastly face staring at my chin. Her hair is dyed brown, grey, tired roots struggling to show through. Wrinkles carve hidden smiles into her cheeks. She is polished, matching the glossy door and neat lawn: black slippers keep her toes warm beneath crisply pressed dress pants and a shiny silver blouse.

ANA. (Looks to Hannah, puts her hand on her back, bends to kiss her on the head.) How 'bout you and Zeus go join your dad, sweetie. He's watching *Anastasia* with your brother in the back room.

SOFIA. (I smell home, sizzling and boiling in the house's heart, growing from the air, empty with the sound of the small defensive dog skittering on the floor behind my ghost.)

ANA. (Pulls a black cardigan from beside the door, hides herself behind its sleek buttons, steps onto the pavement, pulling the warmth from her eyes, and closes the door behind her. Wraps her arms around her waist and stands.) (Pause). What are you doing here, Sofia?

SOFIA. (I reach for words in the leaves around me. Watch her eyes as they rake across my coat stain, cat hair, lint, the rip near the hem of my worn jeans.) I thought you would look different.

ANA. (Shrugs her shoulders towards the overcast sky, clouds reflected in her eyes.) I thought you would, too. You used to be so pretty, so thin. You used to wear dresses. I hardly recognize this girl in front of me. (Sofia watches an ant crawl along the sidewalk towards her shoe, looking for food in the last days of warmth, searching for a dark hole to

lay its light to rest.) I see you're wearing purple, at least. I know that was one of your favourite colours. You used to say you'd marry your prince charming in that colour.

SOFIA. (Crushes the ant with her shoe. Listens for the crunch of its hard shell beneath her foot. Shivers as a cool breeze runs down her neck.) I still like purple, actually. But this shirt isn't mine. It's – (Pauses). my girlfriend's. She helped me - come here. She's - Maybe - maybe we could all get lunch while she and I are here. (Her words hang between them.) She's always wanted to see the CN Tower.

As if this is some sort of explanation, some sort of reason that I'm here.

ANA. (Lips thin as she presses them tightly together.) I've got a job, and Hannah has a lot of after-school activities that I need to drive her to.

I don't think we can get lunch.

SOFIA. (The bile boiling behind my rib cage raises to my throat. I swallow hard to keep it down, to keep the salty taste down, squinting my eyes against the cold air, fighting to keep them open, to look her through, to blow the ghost. She is so tall, taller than me by a whole foot, and I am dwarfed by the house, three stories towering above me, the tree in the front yard piercing my lungs like the tower's point, I need a shower, need to wash off the dirt from the road, from the hours of my life spent without air, a thick layer of dust laying on my arms and hands as I run my fingers through my stringy hair.) I came here to see you. To find you – (voice cracks) I didn't know where – He wouldn't tell me –

ANA. Of course not. That man never would. But you couldn't have guessed? I knew where you lived. They still sell stamps. We just...faded. It was time to move on. No more staring into the past.

SOFIA. (I look at my purple shirt, clutch the envelope with purple ink in my pocket). I'm not your past. I'm your daughter.

ANA. You're...well, you like girls. And your clothes. I stopped writing the day Hannah was born, you know that? I thought, I want to give her the best chance. I finally felt happy. Her father left for a coffee and I sat in the hospital, holding this tiny person, thinking of all my mistakes. Realizing how broken, how full of holes I was. How he mended me, sewed me, fixed me. I found my prince charming. And I sobbed, gut wrenching, from the bottom of my soul, over this baby. Over her tiny nails and her tiny hands. (Pause) It's her turn. It's my turn. This is what I need.

HANNAH. (The dog barks from inside, muffled by the door, and Hannah laughs, then calls.) Mom! Dinner's ready!

SOFIA. I guess I should let you go.

ANA. (She hugs Sofia, awkward, cold, and quick). Have a good time in Toronto, okay sweetie? I love you. (Turns, then quietly walks towards the house).

SOFIA. (Walks a few steps and stands in the middle of the street, staring at the door where her mother disappeared. The sun lowers and a streetlight illuminates Sofia. A dark string begins to grow from her mother's front door, snaking towards her. She tries to take a step, but the road's asphalt grows around her feet, holding her in place, rooting her to the earth. It pulls her down, knee-deep, and the string reaches her, wraps around her arms, her waist, her neck. It curls and drips, leaving a dark, watery trail wherever it brushes her skin. Sofia looks up and the string is joined by thousands more, curling around every house, every garden, every tree. A car door shuts down the street and Tati walks up the road, standing behind Sofia in the light. Sofia turns, chokes, gasps. Tati is wrapped and tangled

in strings, too; everything is wrapped, a chaotic, knotted ball with no beginning and no end; then suddenly, Sofia blinks, and the strings are invisible, gone. She takes a step, tries again to speak. Tati asks.) Sofie? (Sofia reaches, pulls her close, wraps her arms around Tati's shoulders as a great wail of emptiness pours out.) I want to go home.

FADE OUT.

CRITICAL ESSAY

UNSTABLE SELVES: HOW POETRY AND PROSE UNSETTLE AND REVITALIZE

IDENTITY IN *SELFIE*

The vast discipline of feminism has numerous intersections such as race, class, and sexuality. These intersections both influence and shape each person's conception and performance of self and have led to many differing views concerning what constitutes a woman, resulting in spirited tensions and conflicts within the field. *Selfie* is a creative work that examines the tensions surrounding white, middle-class North American feminists through the lens of the prominent feminist theorist Judith Butler. Women have become preoccupied with 'policing,' as Butler puts it, the right way to be a woman, often willingly and knowingly upholding the heterosexual matrix, what Butler defines in *Gender Trouble* as the constructed, gendered dichotomy between masculine males and feminine females within hegemonic¹ North American culture (194). This policing has resulted in many women invalidating the lived experiences of other women, causing white, ideal, traditional woman identities to take precedence over other conceptions of the womanly self. At times, this invalidation leads to harassment and violence. For example, the social media movement "Women against Feminism" features anonymous Tumblr posts such as "I value being a stay-at-home mom over slaving for a corporation while neglecting my family" and "I don't want my daughter growing up around sluts." Women struggle for power internally, enacting gender violence on each other's bodies through

¹ It should be noted that "hegemony" is being used here as per definition 1 in the Oxford English Dictionary: "Political, economic or military predominance or leadership....having a position of political, economic or military predominance over others."

discrimination and harassment such as slut-shaming and fat-shaming (most often verbally, both within and without social media). In contradistinction, many women who resist this discrimination also enact gender violence against women and their bodies, through skinny-shaming and other means. *Selfie* challenges these conflicts and tensions by using Butler's key theories of gender and sexuality, inherent aspects of one's self that are shaped by, limited by, and performed in society. *Selfie* promotes what Butler believes: that one should have the ability to openly express or perform one's identity, such gender and sexuality, however one wishes without subjection to harassment or violence.

Social theorist Patricia Collins states, "[A]n individual may be an oppressor, [and] a member of an oppressed group, simultaneously oppressor and oppressed" (334). The main character of *Selfie*, Sofia, is complicit in this; she assumes that the character Britney fits the stereotypically white, North American hegemonic ideal of a sexually attractive woman, despite the fact that the two have never met. Furthermore, she derides Britney for it: "Her Instagram has got to be filled with pictures of her tank-top perky boobs, ass in yoga pants as she perches on the balcony of the Hilton....I bet she has three other guys on the go...Whore" (34). Britney, however, reacts similarly, accusing Sofia of being "STD-rich" (26), despite the fact that she has no knowledge of Sofia's sexual history or health. Reacting to this conundrum, blogger Sesapzai aptly notes that "women must acknowledge their own sexism before solely blaming the man" for the persistence of the patriarchy. However, Sofia's sexism is so consuming that her awareness of the patriarchy is eclipsed. When confronted with evidence that Chris has been unfaithful, she blames a strange woman – Britney - despite the fact that Chris alone is responsible for his own actions: "What kind of bitch steals another girl's man?" (34)... "Man stealing whore"

(36). Similarly, those in the “Women against Feminism” movement have Tumblr posts making statements such as “there is no patriarchy” alongside posts stating “I don’t need feminism because I’m not a manipulative idiot playing victim.”

This internal conflict concerning “the right way to be a woman” persists and has a negative effect on each new generation of women. Orenstein shows that since the late 1980’s with Disney’s marketing of Princesses and other gendered toys and popular media, there has been a mass promotion of stereotypical submissive gender roles for women. She states that “the first thing that culture [now] tells girls about being a girl...is that every little girl wants – or should want – to be the fairest of them all” (*Cinderella Ate My Daughter* 2), arguably more so than in previous years. In Judith Elaine Blakemore’s 2005 study, she concluded that stereotypically gendered toys promote hetero-normative gender roles. Today this promotion continues alongside recently gendered Lego and Kinder Egg toys, in popular magazines, and in other mass media forms, much of it created by women, for women. An example is the television show and book series *Gossip Girl* written by the woman author Cecily Von Ziegesar, featuring feminine, thin teenage girls whose main concern is achieving happiness with their male peers. Other examples include the book series *The A-List* written by the woman author Zoey Dean, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by the woman author Madeline Wickham (pen name Sophie Kinsella), and music by the young women K\$sha, Miley Cyrus and Rihanna. Orenstein explains that the American Psychological Association found that consequences of this mass promotion include “depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, [and] risky sexual behaviour” (*Cinderella* 3), among others. While the causes of these effects are complex and multi-faceted in *Selfie*, Sofia struggles with her body image, is on the brink of an eating disorder,

and blames herself for her boyfriend Chris's actions. For example, she is preoccupied with her image to an unhealthy extreme: "One. Think about all your friends who are skinnier than you and sigh...Five. how many calories marathon how many calories milkshake...how many calories celery how many calories breathing" (18-19).

Moreover, Sofia is told by her mother at a young age that with the right dress she will "look just like a princess...a style that fits in" (42); her mother buys her a princess bedspread and princess stickers, among other things. Later, Chris states, "You look like a princess" (19) and she describes him as a "strong, seductive prince" (19) despite the fact that he has just raped her. She has formed a trauma bond with him, often described as "beauty and the beast syndrome." M de Young and J.A Lowry explain: "[Trauma bonding is] the evolution of emotional dependency between two persons of unequal power...within a relationship characterized by periodic sexual abuse. Feelings of intense attachment, cognitive distortions, and behavioral strategies of both individuals distinguish the nature of this bond that paradoxically strengthen and maintain the bond" (167). Belle of *Beauty and the Beast* loves the Beast despite the fact that he abuses her; he locks her in a cell, threatening starvation and dehydration unless she submits to him. Mass patriarchal media, such as Disney films, and expectations that surround Sofia clearly show a correlation in influencing her psychological state: "*Beauty and the Beast* cultivates...domestic violence. Films like [it] prime young girls...to react to social situations and encounters in a way that mirror the characters' reactions" (Erin Lederer 1). When Sofia's relationship with Chris ends, she blames *herself* for its failure despite his abuse: "Chris is right. There's something wrong with me" (30). She still loves him – she is despondent, and cannot imagine happiness without her abuser: "An apartment without Chris:...I would spend at least 16 days

watching Rich Bride, Poor Bride marathons and shoveling extra cheese pizza into my mouth, brown, carbonated acid trickling down my chin, plate balancing on grease-smearred napkins beside a mickey of gin” (31).

However, Sofia is also significantly influenced by the internet. She reads Facebook articles about Spanx, fashion, makeup, and anti-aging (16) in her quest to achieve the hegemonic ideal of a beautiful, valuable woman. Furthermore, as the digital generation and pioneers of social media, today’s twenty-something women and subsequent generations are more at risk for the resulting aforementioned consequences, such as depression and eating disorders. This is due to the externalization of self through discourse, specifically by way of the internet. For example, in “Too Young for Status Updates,” Orenstein explains that “in a study of college students...UCLA found...that among users of MySpace, identity was becoming increasingly externally driven.” Like most young women today, Sofia has both a Twitter and a Facebook profile (21). She enacts an online routine: “Scroll through Twitter. Read emails. Check Facebook” (21).

Judith Butler notes feminism’s tensions, these aforementioned contributing factors, and the continued prevalence of the heterosexual matrix in *Undoing Gender*. She states that today “feminist theory has no other work than in responding to the places where feminism is under challenge” (178). It should not simply rearticulate terms and ideas, but call them into question, thus revitalizing them. However, as Butler notes, “theory itself is [not] sufficient for social and political transformation” (204). In *Excitable Speech – a Politics of the Performative*, Butler states that “the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, [and] writers...its poise is...in displacing experience” (9). What can aid political transformation or resistance

against the heterosexual matrix is fiction, then, as it has the ability to open up and to imagine new possibilities beyond the reader's present, drawing attention not just to events, but also to discourse. Thus *Selfie*'s format, use of language, and shifting point of view work to resist the heterosexual matrix and to unsettle binary conceptions of what it means to be a woman. It calls conceptions concerning "what makes a woman" into question, thus revitalizing them, presenting negative capability as an alternative – a term described in a letter by the poet John Keats as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (qtd. in Stephen Hebron). It is a comfortable acceptance of uncertainties. In *Undoing Gender* Butler argues against a clear definition of what makes a woman, and instead states, "I mean to suggest that we make no decision...leave that question [of the woman] open, troubling, unresolved, propitious" (192). Doing so is negative capability – accepting the uncertainty of what exactly makes a woman.

Butler also states that socially transformative works must "trace the moments where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged...[there] the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable" (216). Sofia and the other women in her life struggle with a number of the conflicts that many white North American women struggle with as well – but each woman in *Selfie* is different, thus presenting the reader with a variety of conceptions of what it means to be a woman, as opposed to one "true" version. For example, Sofia's mother is traditional, in a married heterosexual relationship raising a family in the suburbs: "She is polished, matching the glossy door and neat lawn: black slippers keep her toes warm beneath crisply pressed dress pants and a shiny silver blouse" (71). However, Sofia is non-traditional; her sexuality is fluid and she is uncertain

of it, making it undetermined. When *Selfie* begins, she is sharing Chris's bed (1); later, she wakes up with Tati after "fooling around" (58) and thinks, "Does that other time at The Bar count? What about when I was drunk? They always say that when you're drunk it doesn't count" (57). Moreover, she presents herself to others differently than her mother: "I'm wearing ratty jeans, wrinkled from sitting in the car; Tati's purple tank top from the bar, requiring level 70; and a black sweater, buttoned at the bottom. A grey coat hangs from my shoulders, dusty with a stain" (70). While these are only two examples of the different types of women present in *Selfie*, they are juxtaposed at the end of the novella. Each type presented is based on actual conceptions of what it means to be a woman. For example, Sofia's mother represented the ideal, successful women that many of the "Women against Feminism" posts uphold, while Sofia's spontaneous sexual freedom is similar to many young millennial women. Even her clothes show she doesn't represent the ideal feminine woman, who would stereotypically be polished and wear contemporary fashion trends. Juxtaposed, a tension between these two women, these two conceptions, is created. The two women focus on each other's physical appearance; Sofia's mother establishes a position of power by criticizing her daughter's conception of self, among other things: "SOFIA. ...I thought you would look different...ANA. ...You used to be so pretty, so thin. You used to wear dresses...(Lips thin as she presses them tightly together)... You're...well, you like girls. And your clothes." (71). However, no single woman-ideal triumphs over another in the narrative. In the end, this tension is left unresolved: "SOFIA. I guess I should let you go. ANA. (She hugs Sofia, awkward, cold, and quick)" (73). Thus no single conception is presented as "correct," troubling them. The only way a reader can resolve

this tension is negative capability - accepting that there are a multitude of conflicting conceptions, each one just as valid as the rest.

Another example in *Selfie* is the tension between both halves of the feminine /masculine binary when she and her friend Tati play as children. They write in “feminine colours,” pink marker and purple Crayola, creatively drawing “hearts and smiles,” (3) a stereotypically feminine activity. However, they also pretend they are strong adventurers, a stereotypically masculine activity: “we used to stomp up stairs... push away branches to disappear behind a cobwebbed...door” (3). Furthermore, they “used to... [sing] fee fi fo fum we’re the *King and Queen*” (3, emphasis added), not “we’re the Princesses” or “we’re the Queens.” Later, Sofia’s mother steps back from the stereotypically feminine, unconditionally loving and nurturing mothering role; while she fulfills it for her daughter Hannah, she rejects Sofia: “I knew where you lived. They still sell stamps...I stopped writing the day Hannah was born, you know that?” (72).

Jeanette Winterson challenges the binary system in a similar manner in her book *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. She presents more than one idea of what it means to be a woman, thus troubling the accepted ideals. The book presents oranges as a metaphor for the predominant conception of the “right” way to be a woman –submissive, modest and God-fearing - expected of Jeanette, the main character. The role and the oranges are foisted upon her: “My mother came to see me quite a lot... When she couldn’t come herself she sent...a couple of oranges. ‘The only fruit,’ she always said. Fruit salad, fruit pie, fruit for fools, fruited punch. Demon fruit, passion fruit, rotten fruit, fruit on Sunday. Oranges are the only fruit” (29). Angel Matos explains: “Oranges become a way of...characterizing Jeanette’s mother, showing how she perceives the world categorically, and showing how

she desires to limit the options that Jeanette can have. Furthermore, since oranges are the only fruit that are validated from the mother's perspective, all of other fruit go on to lack legitimacy". Eventually, her mother's conception of oranges as the only fruit is challenged when Jeanette draws her mother's conception of being a woman into question; Jeanette becomes comfortable with her homosexuality and successfully pursues her own life. Her mother's oranges are eventually joined by pineapples: "...everyone had to eat gammon with pineapple, pineapple upside-down cake, chicken in pineapple sauce, pineapple chunks, pineapple slice. 'After all,' said my mother philosophically, 'oranges are not the only fruit.'" (172). No single woman-identity is resolved as being the only valid one; her mother is forced to live in negative capability.

In both texts, negative capability ultimately draws attention to opportunities for resolution of conflict; it opens up the possibility of additional change. After the idea of fruit begins to include pineapples, the validity of options in other avenues of life expand for her mother, who was previously very set in her ways and changed few things. For example, she replaces her radiogram with a more modern radio, and replaces her piano with an electronic organ. With her mother's expanded horizons, the relationship between Jeanette and her mother becomes stronger. In *Selfie*, when Sofia expands her horizons by embracing her non-traditional relationship with Tati, she is given the opportunity to find her mother and to find answers to questions about her past (61). When the characters in both books accept the validity of conflicting woman identities, they accept uncertainties and are thus in a state of negative capability. This resolves conflicts for them and presents opportunities for transformation. Butler explains that accepting uncertainties is crucial for feminism: "I would argue emphatically that resisting the desire to resolve [feminist] dissension...is

precisely what keeps the movement alive” (*Undoing Gender* 175). She feels that this will stop “set[ting] up the [policing] feminist as the prosecutor” who “mutilate[s and] rejects the lived embodiment of...women” (qtd. in Cristan Williams). Thus, it assists in alleviating feminism’s challenges and tensions - *Selfie* strives to do the same.

However, *Selfie* differs from Winterson’s novel, and other related works of prose such as Ali Smith’s *girl meets boy* or Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, in that it incorporates theatrical conventions. It incorporates these similar to Poets Theater or Gertrude Steins’ plays, which are precursors to Poets Theater. While critics struggle to agree on a clear definition of Poets Theater, it can broadly be described as poetic works that borrow theatrical conventions as a tool but do not strictly fall into the category “plays.” For example, Stein’s work “For the Country Entirely: A Play in Letters” borrows “acts” as a division between “scenes”; however, it does not follow playwriting conventions. “Chapters” are interspersed between the acts, and the characters who are speaking are not labelled: “Since when. Since this evening. I do not understand your objection. It is easy to understand if I explain” (234). Contemporary works of Poets Theater such as those in the *Kenning Anthology* range from “poetic plays” to “dramatic poems.” For example, Lew Welch’s “Abner Won’t be Home for Dinner” fits the format of a play, divided into acts and scenes and including stage directions; however, while the speakers of the dialogue are denoted, what they say is abstract: “ABNER: Computer computer./BERNARD: Miss Computer to you./ABNER: ThumpThump ThumpThump ThumpThump ThumpThump ThumpThump” (242). A work that pushes this abstraction further is Leslie Scalapino’s “Leg: a play.” It provides stage directions at the beginning, but the rest is simply a poem, written in verse: “[*Performed by two women and two men as if the poems were*

music]/limping – a woman who’s/fallen into a hold – off – or/by – cliff –” (491). No other theatrical conventions are used.

While *Selfie* cannot accurately be described as poetry, its prose borrows theatrical conventions in a similar manner – specifically, the written descriptions within a play, including descriptions of scenery, characters, background music, lighting, and other visual aspects. *Selfie* defies expectations as the reader initially expects it to be in the conventional form of prose, given the beginning of the first chapter, ‘Performers’; however, partway through page six *Selfie* begins using stage directions, setting a scene: “*The loft bedroom is in the back of the apartment above a wooden spiral staircase. The bedroom is long and rectangular, with the short end being the loft’s edge. It hangs over the bathroom, darkened with the door slightly ajar...*” (6). Instead of using an object, such as an orange, to unsettle the dominant conception of woman, it uses the written discourse of theater. This is because combining genres – theatre and prose – gives the novella a unique opportunity to manipulate point of view. Through the language she uses to tell her story, both Sofia and her identity become unsettled.

Laura Shultz explains that Stein’s Poets Theater creates the “dissolution or dissolving of the character into the discourse” leading to “the possibility of acting out different social identities and roles” (9) For example, many of Stein’s plays primarily use and maintain a first-person perspective throughout, even her play with a second-person title “If You Had Three Husbands.” In this particular play, there is one single speaker who primarily speaks from a first-person perspective. His or her disorderly dialogue and plays on words make the speaker unreliable, despite the fact that the audience must rely on him or her for an account of what is going on. For example, the speaker says, “There

then./Present ten./ Mother and sister apples, no not apples... Do be quiet and refrain from acceptances. It was a great disappointment to me” (386). The speaker’s train of thought from apples to acceptances to disappointment is unclear; what is the “it” that was a great disappointment? Moreover, language play such as “present ten” brings into question what the speaker really means – ten that are present, ten presents, or present tense? These ambiguities unsettle the speaker; his or her identity is unclear. As a result, the speaker’s identity is dissolved into the language: a variety of meanings, of selves, are probable, in the way that there are multiple potential meanings of “present ten.”

Similarly, while it is not immediately evident to the reader, *Selfie* features a single speaker – the main character and narrator, Sofia. The reader must rely on her for information, but the information the reader receives is unreliable. For example, memories of events in the past are only presented to the reader from her perspective; no other “sides” to the story are given. She gives dialogue to those who cannot actually speak: “DOG. Who are you? We don’t like strangers. Go away” (70). Like Stein’s speaker, the instability of Sofia’s identity is conveyed through the language she uses. However, Sofia’s language shows how her identity is externally driven. For example, when she negatively evaluates her body, she evaluates it within the parameters of the ideal womanly body: “Stand in the mirror: One. Wish I could see my ribs. Two. That leg gap doesn’t look like it’s going to happen. Three. Boobs need bronzer and a push up to make them look bigger. Four. Butt cellulite well hidden...Six. Hip bones, where are you?” (22). As aforementioned, mass media promotes this ideal. Sofia uses its language, such as that of a fashion magazine, drawing attention to this: “...the LBD (Little Black Dress) is the perfect way to get your man’s attention” (21). Consequently, the ‘Sofia’ we are presented appears to be constructed

– and not just by narrator-Sofia herself. This unsettles her conception of what it means to be a woman, and brings into question how the identities of young women are shaped. Her identity dissolves into the discourse² she uses. At her “lowest” moment, Sofia is no longer a person; she is simply a voice for this discourse: “(...*Everything goes dark. Bodiless, she rhythmically recites*). One. Invest in makeup. A perfect girlfriend always looks her best for her man...” (15). “A perfect girlfriend,” for example, reflects the patriarchal discourse that is used in popular media and the magazine articles that she has internalized and is reciting. Its subject matter is pleasing men, and Sofia has just been raped – she has lost control to a man. The discourse is so influential that it has placed her, bodily and mentally, into submission. By drawing attention to this discourse, the patriarchy is no longer invisible to the reader.

One aspect that differentiates *Selfie* from Stein’s play, however, is Sofia’s constantly shifting point of view. As aforementioned, Stein primarily only uses a first-person speaker. When she does use a different perspective such as a second person point of view, it is only briefly. For example, in her play “If You Had Three Husbands,” Stein’s speaker states, “If *you* had three husbands *I* don’t mean that it is a guess or a wish. *I* believe finally in what *I* saw in what *I* see. *I* believe finally in what *I* see, in where *I* satisfy my extreme shadow” (383, emphasis added). The second person point of view does not appear again until three pages later, and only does so very briefly. Instead, in *Selfie* Sofia often shifts point of view from first person to third person to distance herself, or dissociate,

² It should be noted that this term is not being used here as a synonym for language but as per *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*: “the term [discourse] denotes language in actual use within its social and ideological context and in institutionalized representations of the world... [It] arises from dissatisfaction with the rather fixed and abstract term ‘language’... ‘Discourse’ better indicates the specific contexts and relationships involved in historically produced uses of language.”

during moments of stress. At some points, her first person self is completely eclipsed by the third person. When Chris rapes her, she initially has agency, speaking in first person: “SOFIA. Let out a fake snore. Slowly and loudly, so it seems realistic. (*Snores*)” (7). As the sexual abuse becomes more violent and Chris gains power, she disassociates, using the third person: “A centipede crawls up her throat, eats her tongue as her stomach rolls” (14). To once again use the first person, she must completely disassociate from the present, describing a past encounter with ants fighting over a chip instead (14). This leaves her powerless in the present moment. In the end when she is bodiless, she is eclipsed by language, similar to Stein’s speaker. However, the catalyst of this is her shifting point of view instead of simply shifting language, which Stein uses. Nonetheless, while points of view in Stein and *Selfie* differ, both draw attention to the construction of discourse.

When Sofia faces conflicts and struggles with her conception of what it means to be a woman, her point of view shifts very rapidly, creating tension. For example, she faces a crisis at the end of “format.” She struggles between being a powerless, submissive girlfriend for Chris and taking a stand, gaining control over her life. Her point of view shimmers, switching rapidly between first- and third-person, indicating her inner conflict: “Covers face with hand, then exposes face. Speak. Okay, doesn’t speak. ...She waits. Really need to do my nails. Thumbnail is rough...Maybe if I bite it – now it’s worse...Stares at cuticles. Waits. 1. 2. 3. Pauses. A family of gerbils is renovating the inside of my skull with their teeth.” (26). Similar to the way in which the juxtaposition of Sofia and her mother create tension earlier in the narrative, these two levels of agency – and consequently, these two conceptions of being a woman – are juxtaposed. This is a point at which more than one womanly identity is presented to the reader, most importantly within a single character.

The opportunity for transformation is visible as Sofia's conception of how she should act as a woman shimmers and is malleable. Shortly afterwards, instead of pursuing her abusive relationship, she accepts uncertainty and gains a degree of control over her life. She recognizes that "I'm supposed to get married. I'm supposed to have kids" (32) but collects her possessions from their shared apartment. She does this despite wondering things such as "Where will I go?" (34), "How will I eat?" (32) and "What will he do without me?" (38).

This rapid shifting of Sofia's point of view is similar to many conventional works of prose that use free indirect discourse – a work in which the voices of the narrator and the character merge. The character's thoughts are expressed in his or her own voice without quotation marks or other direct indications and without moving into first person. This form of narration has been used by many authors, including Franz Kafka, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, but can be traced back further; for example, it was also used by Goethe and Jane Austen (Gingerich). An example of this type of narration can be seen in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "He kicked open the crazy door for the jakes. *Better be careful not to get these trousers dirty for a funeral.* He went in, bowing his head under the low lintel" (qtd. in Gingerich, emphasis added). The narration's shift to and from the character's thoughts can be seen in the shift to and from the italicized sentence. *Selfie's* narration is similar, for example at the end of "format" during her fight with Chris: "Plastic sprinkles the ground with a loud crack behind her. *Third one this month.* She flinches, a deer. *Turn around, slowly. Cone white plaster is dented and bunched.* Dust slides to the ground" (27, emphasis added). When free indirect speech is used, it creates a blur between the narrator and the character; it's ambiguous as to whose

thoughts are being conveyed. In the example from Joyce, it's unclear whether or not the narrator is warning the character to be careful or the character is thinking to himself that he needs to be careful. In *Selfie*, it's unclear whether the narrator is omniscient and is thus able to state that the controller is the "third one this month" or whether Sofia is thinking it. This ambiguity becomes even more pronounced in her passive observation of the wall; "cone white plaster is dented" could be either the narrator or Sofia speaking. As a result, this unsettles the identities of the speakers; one may ask, who really had the thoughts that are being expressed? However, in this case Sofia is both the narrator and the main character, and extremely close to the narrative; usually this is not the case. For example, Joyce's narrator is detached from the main character; he speaks in a back-shifted tense, using phrases such as "he kicked" and "he went." *Selfie* is homodiegetic in that the narrator is internal to the story. This is in contradistinction to heterodiegetic narratives in which the narrator is external, describing what happens but not an actual part of the narrative. As a narrator, Sofia doesn't use a back-shifted tense as she is so involved in the story. She uses the present tense, as seen in phrases such as "plastic sprinkles" and "dust slides." She is experiencing events first-person and narrating them as they happen, *pretending* to be an omniscient narrator while expressing her experience, taking it on as a role. When free indirect discourse is used in *Selfie*, then, the merging is of two present, different conceptions of Sofia, not a narrator and a character that are separate. Narrator-Sofia and character-Sofia actually share the same thoughts, but conflict in terms of role. As a result, an internal conflict is presented to the reader between two different conceptions of Sofia, two different woman-identities. The uncertainty of who she is heightened.

This conflict especially pronounced as *Selfie* uniquely makes use of theatrical conventions within the narrative. Sofia is not just the narrator; she is also the director, or writer, of her story. This is especially evident when she speaks the stage directions and dialogue for both herself and other characters: “(*Sofia narrates*). CHRIS. Smile. Blonde hair, dark with grease, falls towards her face...SOFIA. She shapes her mouth...Fixes her gaze on a point in the wall behind him. “It’s” happening” (14). As a result, there is a tension between Sofia as a woman narrator who has control over her life and her identity, and Sofia as a submissive, powerless woman character who dissolves into discourse. Thus, the director of her story, Sofia actually dissolves *herself* into discourse; she is willingly using patriarchal discourse against herself. She is the only thing that is actually inhibiting her progress. She needs to realize this to resolve internal her conflict, just as feminism needs to realize the way in which it is “policing itself” before it can move forward.

It is clear that multiple conceptions of being a woman are visible, along with their constructions, within *Selfie*. When the text presents these multiple womanly identities as valid possibilities for the reader, it opens up the closed, limiting woman-identity that is presented by mass media, thus unsettling and resisting it. Differing views are no longer invalid, as no single one triumphs over another in the narrative. This makes *Selfie* a writerly text as opposed to a readerly text, providing its readers with agency. Roland Barthes believes a readerly text is one that “make[s] up the enormous mass of our literature” (*S/Z* 5) and has fixed, certain meanings; it hides and “reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (5). In contradistinction, a writerly text openly presents ambiguities and multiplicities to the reader, who is thus placed in an active role constructing meaning: “we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can

be authoritatively declared to be the main one...it is a question...of asserting the very existence of plurality” (6). Ali Smith’s *girl meets boy* is a writerly novel in that it presents the reader with pluralities, similar to *Selfie*. The main character’s love interest is a woman who is described as “the boy up the ladder” (43) and the novel starts with the line “Let me tell you about when I was a girl, our grandfather says” (3). It celebrates ambiguities. However, *Selfie* doesn’t simply resist the heterosexual matrix in content; its form also resists hegemony as an unconventional mix of theater and prose, destabilizing what the reader expects of a novella, as aforementioned. Even its section titles, a fusion of theater and traditional prose, draw attention to multiple meanings, and in particular the potentials of identity. *Selfie*’s sections are labelled non-conventionally with letters, such as “scene e” followed by “act f” as opposed traditionally numbered Chapters following each other, or conventionally numbered scenes and acts such as “Act 1, Scene 2.” This is similar to many of Gertrude Stein’s Poets Theater works in that Stein labels sections unconventionally as well. However, Stein does this in a different manner. For example, her play “Accents in Alsace: A Reasonable Tragedy” defies typical labels such as “Act 1, Scene 1.” Instead, sections are titled “Alsatia,” “Act II.,” “The Brother,” “Scene,” and “Another Act,” and move from “IV.” to “Act II” to “Act 54.” *girl meets boy* also labels its sections unconventionally; instead of using Chapters, it labels sections “I,” “you,” “them,” and “all together now.” However, its form is not as ambiguous as Poets Theater or *Selfie*; it only uses novelistic conventions. Furthermore, *Selfie*’s acts and scenes have additional names and subtitles that draw attention to the novella’s construction. For example, scene b is also titled with “directions/You must meet audience expectations. If you don’t, prepare to die.” This comes shortly after the novella has stopped meeting the expectations the reader has of

prose, and has instead incorporated theatrical elements. In addition, within this scene b Sofia has an audience of one – Chris – expecting things of her. She is at risk of violence if she doesn't comply. She does what he expects, performing the role of a submissive woman. What she does is an act for him: "CHRIS. (*Clenches his jaw.*) Look at me. Look me in the eyes and smile. (*Pauses, then smirks*) Tell me you want it hard and rough. SOFIA. (*To self*) Tears. Blink them away. Harden face. Look into the eyes of the man you love....She shapes her mouth into an upward curve. Raises her cheeks. Cracks open her lips to expose her teeth" (14). As the section is presented to the reader in the form of a play, the reader becomes an audience alongside Chris, Sofia's one-person audience within *Selfie*.

However, the role she plays for Chris and her identity when she leaves him are only two of many woman identities in *Selfie*; many others are present in the novella. For example, as aforementioned, Sofia's mother fills both the roles of nurturing, stable mother and absent, non-nurturing mother. Sofia's friend Milena is modest, heterosexual and loyal to her fiancé. In contradistinction, Sofia's friend Ashley has engages in sexual acts with both men and women and finds power in her sexuality. Tati, Sofia's childhood friend and girlfriend, is a lesbian, but she troubles the femme/butch binary that exists within hegemonic culture. Sofia observes this, alongside the way in their relationship do not fit the binary either: "What am I?...I wear pink...I have long hair. Tati wears purple. Her hair is long...but she approached me. She's the guy, right?" (58). By illuminating the invisible – the validity of competing conceptions of womanly identity alongside their construction – *Selfie* gives the reader control. The audience is not just passive a passive observer, but part of the performance – a person who receives it and has the opportunity to *react* to the information. The audience can interpret what it means to be a woman in a

plethora of different ways, for both Sofia and for him or herself. As such, readers have more agency and can consciously form their own identity. In an interview with *The TransAdvocate* Butler explains “every person should have the right to determine [their own] legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives...the right to be free to live it out, without discrimination, harassment, [or] injury...and with support.” She feels that this will stop “set[ting] up the feminist as the prosecutor” who “mutilate[s and] rejects the lived embodiment of...women,” thus alleviating feminism’s challenges and tensions. While “writing is to some extent blind, that it cannot know...how it will be read or used” (8), as noted by Butler in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, *Selfie* creates the potential for agency and negative capability concerning womanly ideals. It still “open[s] up a possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines” (i), a necessity of transformation that Butler notes in “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics.”

This remaking occurs for Sofia. While she is “supposed” to “get...laid by a new, sexy man” (49) at the bar, she rejects that dominant expectation and goes home with her old friend Tati instead. She accepts other identities as valid, and gains agency and is able to find her mother. In the end, Sofia becomes conscious of the way in which the lived experiences of women are tangled, knotted, multiple and interconnected, opening up the potential for transformation: “[a] string reaches her, wraps around her...Sofia looks up and the string is joined by thousands more, curling around every house, every garden, every tree...Tati is wrapped and tangled in strings, too; everything is wrapped, a chaotic, knotted ball with no beginning and no end” (73). In *Undoing Gender* Butler notes that “the conditions of my doing, are, in part, the conditions of my existence” (3). The fresh identity

Sofia accepts for herself has been shaped by her original identity, as it is a direct rebellion against expectations she originally faced. As a result, Sofia is tangled in the string she sees in the end. However, it does not mean that the potential for transformation is futile. For example, *Selfie* uses theatrical conventions and rules – but then reshapes them, transforms them, in combining them with prose and accepting this unconventional mix. As Butler states in *Undoing Gender*, “that my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It only means that paradox is the condition of possibility” (3-4).

Feminism’s tensions are not just due to internal dissension, but normative “policing” of what the right or wrong way to be a woman is. Theory needs to serve as a reminder of this challenge, but it cannot do so alone. In a 2011 video titled “Judith Butler: Your Behaviour Creates Your Gender,” Butler states, “There is a real question for me about how...gender norms get established and policed and what the best way is to disrupt them and to overcome the police function.” This does not have to be a defeated time for feminism, but a strong one reminding women of the movement’s potential. Literature provides opportunities for transformation and porous boundaries that theory alone does not. *Selfie* disrupts stereotypical gender binaries and explores the lived experiences of its women characters, the complicated web that forms their identities. It works to direct its reader, its audience, to this web – exposing the way in which identities and roles are constructed, the way in which language performs. Combining elements of both theatre and prose, it defies a stable definition, just as women do. As Mari Mikkola states, “It’s a mistake to attempt to define woman at all.”

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