

HONESTY, ANIMAL CRUELTY,  
AND WORKING THE SYSTEM

by

SUZANNA AKINS

A THESIS

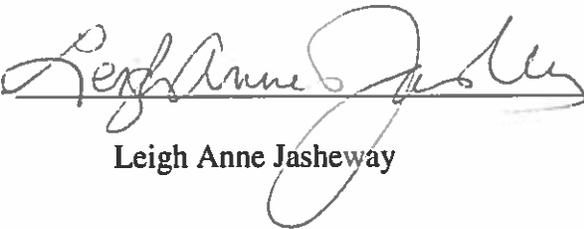
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Title: Honest, Animal Cruelty, and Working the System

Approved  \_\_\_\_\_  
Leigh Anne Jasheway

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## **Introduction**

Hi. My name is Suzanna Akins, and I need to create laughter. I love making people laugh, and I love laughing with people. Why? Because laughing with people is audible social connection and love. Everyone wants love, except maybe sociopaths. Laughter is such a beautiful, healing feeling. When I can make someone else laugh with me, this feeling grows exponentially. However, I usually make people laugh with performance. I am an actor, an improviser, and recently started doing stand-up comedy as well. Making people laugh through writing would be a new challenge. Writing screenplays would help me improve my storytelling skills, both in writing and performance. Knowing how stories work, how to create a beginning, middle, and end with a climax and theme, is one of the most important parts of being a good improviser. By learning how to write stories in an entertaining and clear way, I could become a better performer. I could also improve my relationship with film by studying screenwriting, since the screenplay is the blueprint of a film.

As a Cinema Studies major, writing a comedic screenplay for my thesis seemed the perfect way to deepen my understanding of film's fundamental development. The screenplay reveals much about how a film functions as a storytelling medium. Instead of a feature-length screenplay, I chose to write short films. Since I was brand new to screenwriting, a feature length screenplay seemed overly ambitious for a novice. Writing two short films instead of one feature gave me double the experience and practice exploring story structure and developing narrative and character arcs.

## Methodology

To learn how to write a screenplay, I signed up for Cai Emmon's screenwriting class. In her class, we learned a process for how to write short films. Brainstorming was the first step, and we learned different ways to get ideas. One is simply finding interesting little stories in the back pages of the newspaper and embellishing them. Another is to come up with an intriguing character, and throw this character into different situations until a story is born. The third way is the one I liked the most. Simply think, "What if..." and go from there. I thought, "What if a pastry chef fell in love with a girl who had a gluten allergy?" This seemed like a funny idea, and soon I was imagining the rest of the story, which became my first film, a romantic comedy.

After brainstorming ideas for a story, and settling on my gluten allergy idea, I made character biographies for my two main characters. Since characters are what drive a story, it was vital to create multi-dimensional characters and to know what they would do in any situation. This meant knowing their history, childhood, education, nationality, quirks, passions, and obsessions. Once I knew my characters, I made an outline of my short film, which meant putting all my new knowledge of "three-act structure" to use.

*Three-act structure* organizes a story into the *setup* ("act one"), *confrontation* ("act two"), and *resolution* ("act three"). The "setup" is *exposition*: introducing characters, setting, and the world of the story. About halfway through act one, an *inciting incident* occurs, which presents the main character with a problem. At the end

of act one, *plot point one* happens, which is when the character decides to take on the problem, take action. Act two starts, the *rising action*, in which the character tries to solve the problem and is met with more conflicts and often goes through emotional and psychological changes. The *midpoint*, halfway through the second act, marks the lowest point for the character. A *plot point* at the end of the second act turns the plot in a new direction and leads into act three. The *climax* is the point of highest action or tension, the biggest confrontation. After that, final resolutions are made, peace is restored, and the film comes to a close. Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* helped to explicitly explain this structure.

So, in my outline, I developed these plot points, which formed a good framework to fill in with details. Next, I wrote a beat sheet, which outlines every scene in a film, describing what happens and what the “story point” is in that scene. A story point is the *point* of a scene, how that scene moves the story forward. Moving the story forward is a requirement of every single scene. Without a story point, a scene is a waste of screen time, which translates to a big waste of money and time. In the beat sheet, I label Acts I, II, and III to make sure I am putting exposition, plot points, and climax/resolution in the right order. From here, it was easy to turn the beat sheet into screen directions, and fill in dialogue. Voila! Draft one complete.

Once I had a draft, I sent it to as many people as possible to read and give me feedback, so I could edit. I had trouble with figuring out the resolution for my first film, “White Lie,” so I used my improv team. I explained the premise to them, and then had them do a long form improv game called a La Ronde, in which they acted out the story.

This gave me new ideas about why Monica (my character with the gluten allergy) couldn't tell Farouk (the pastry chef) about her gluten allergy, and how to resolve their breakup. Then I did a rewrite and sent the new draft to my siblings, family, friends, and thesis advisor, trying to get as many people as possible to read it, to get more feedback. Since then, I keep making little edits and tweaking dialogue. Every time I read it over, I find something to change or got another idea. It can always get better, and it's never "finished."

Before I began writing, I had some films and television shows whose humor I admire. For comedic inspiration in film, I looked primarily at *Bridesmaids*. I especially admire this film for being hilarious and simultaneously heartwarming. One of the writers, Kristen Wiig, is a big inspiration for me, along with other women who are involved in *The Groundlings* and act in the film. Wiig is an improviser who started out at *The Groundlings*, an improv school in Los Angeles where I plan on taking classes next year. She performs and writes comedy, and I enjoy her sense of humor. I am especially impressed with *Bridesmaids* because this was her first screenplay.

I did a structural analysis of *Bridesmaids* to help me understand three-act structure's function in comedy. The structural analysis revealed how comedy is just the layer on top of the story, not the foundation. At first, many of the scenes' purposes seemed to be simply comedic effect. But as I insisted on finding the story points, I looked deeper at the scenes and understood how they built story, and how the comedy was just a thick blanket on top. Every scene was causal; it led to the next story point. Even as things get worse and worse for the protagonist, Annie, the movie keeps getting funnier. It *uses* obstacles in the second act for comedy through situational humor,

hilarious dialogue, and lovable characters. Even in comedy, I saw how characters' fears are used. In the beginning of the film, Annie fears losing her best friend after said friend gets engaged. And she does lose her, in the second act. Losing Lillian forces her to change other parts of her life *on her own*, and helps her grow up. Annie also fears baking, since her business went under. However, the cop confronts her with this fear, repeatedly insisting that she bake again. Eventually she does, which shows that she is moving on from her past, and taking action to improve her life.

The structural analysis also furthered my understanding of the different terms, the lingo, used in screenwriting. I tend to have trouble recognizing the climax of a film, and I difficulty finding it in *Bridesmaids*. The stakes are highest in the third act when Lillian is missing, which is what makes it the climax. The analysis also showed me how allies are used as the character loses other support, and also how antagonists can be dynamic. Instead of Helen being a constant source of stress and annoyance, seeing her open up at the end and understanding her problems takes a weight off our hearts. When she and Annie reconcile, it's satisfying, not cheesy, and I kept that in mind when creating antagonists in my own screenplays. The subplot with Annie's romantic relationships enriched the film, too, and added to her complications. Taking a deeper look at this film helped me see how plot and relationships can *lead* to comedy, rather than blossoming *from* comedy. First and foremost, before focusing on comedy, I had to focus on fantastic story foundation and structure.

The television show “Broad City” also inspired me, as my favorite show and as a comedy about women, written by women. Ilana Glazer and Abbi Johnson, the creators of the show, started “Broad City” as a web series before Comedy Central picked it up. This shows that with today’s technology *and* competition, it would be prudent to write and produce my own material to act in, instead of waiting around to get cast. My work on these two screenplays and the sketch has helped me further my understanding of how stories work. I have already used this new knowledge in improv, and know that the more I practice and learn about screenwriting and storytelling, the easier it will be to integrate these new skills into performance, until it becomes second-nature.

Learning a process for screenwriting was especially helpful, since I tend to be disorganized, with my overwhelming ideas overlapping each other. Linda Cowgill’s *Writing Short Films* explained major differences between writing feature and short films, Paul Lucey has useful tips for creating character in suspense in *Story Sense*. I also turned to Viki King’s *How to Write a Movie in 21 Days* to get started on my second screenplay because I was feeling pressed for time. Using books on screenplays written by experienced writers was beneficial and showed me that creativity can be structured. Learning how to create characters, twists, suspense, and tell a story better has made me a better improviser. I also learned how helpful an antagonist could be to create tension. Having Santa as an antagonist in my second film was not enough, so I added Janice. The editing process was perhaps the most conducive to learning about screenwriting. I learned that my writing is never finished; I can always make it better. Through editing,

I also learned how vital it is to use my peers and advisors to get a fresh eye on my work and explain what's confusing or not working. This is one of the biggest things I can take with me: *collaborate*; storytelling is not a one-woman job.

## Conclusion

I was lucky enough to have one of my friends film the sketch, “Thrifty,” and loved how it came out. It was flattering to see my work turn into a moving, talking film. After that, I pitched “White Lie” to Duck TV, which has been getting filmed throughout this spring term. I love hearing people laugh at the screenings. The theme of “White Lie” is honesty. Honestly, honesty is where the best comedy comes from. My favorite stand-up comedians bluntly discuss the things no one talks or thinks about in everyday life. The weird things everyone does, but no one stops to notice how weird they are. So, I appreciate that my first comedic screenplay ended up being about honesty.

For my second short film, “How Deirdre Saved Christmas,” I tried to approach the writing with character instead of story, since my first film focused on plot over character. So, first I came up with Deirdre’s character, a hardworking animal lover, and then presented her with a challenge. She would go to the North Pole to save the reindeer from Santa’s dictatorship. This method did not feel too different from writing my first screenplay because in both cases, I had characters and a plot right off the bat. Regardless of whether story or character came first, both required outlining a story and creating strong characters. This second film’s theme is about animal cruelty, which is an issue I care about.

The third creative piece in my thesis is a sketch called “Thrifty.” I wrote this late at night when I couldn’t sleep. It’s two pages long, and features how expensive toilet paper is and how to get one’s money’s worth from the university that one attends.

I wrote it without thinking about three-act structure or character, but when I went back and analyzed the structure, it had a clear beginning, middle, and end. So, story structure is already starting to become second nature to me, which is exciting and rewarding.

After graduation, I am moving to Los Angeles to pursue a career in performance. Hollywood has a great comedy scene and fantastic improv schools, such as The Groundlings and UCB. In a city where everyone is an actor, having the ability to write and produce my own material will give me a huge leg up. Having two shorts on hand that I am proud of will be a great asset. Short films are less time consuming, and much cheaper to produce than feature films. Having short films that I can get a team together to produce (and that I could act in) on a realistic budget will help me build a physical body of work. With the skills to write short films, I plan on writing many more. Aside from screenwriting, I plan on learning more about sketch comedy writing and TV episodic writing. This project has helped me become a better storyteller and achieve my goal of making people laugh, both through these screenplays, the sketch, Duck TV, and by teaching me how to write future comedies. Now, sit back, relax, and enjoy the stories!

White Lie  
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FADE IN:

EXT. BAKERY - DAY

1

"La Mer" by Chantal Chamberland PLAYS QUIETLY. A quaint bakery called "Sac of Flour" sits between a Starbucks and a nightclub called "The Mercantile Saloon." The front of the bakery is painted white and has an egg yolk yellow door. "Sac of Flour" is written in little kid's handwriting, with a 3D cupcake decoration mounted beside it. Sacramento's capitol building is visible behind the bakery. An OLDER MAN walks out of the bakery contently eating a cream puff as an attractive YOUNG WOMAN walks in.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

2

The FRENCH MUSIC continues, but much louder. Every surface is coated with a light dusting of flour. Big ovens line one wall. Measuring cups, butter, sugar, milk, whisks, bowls, sifters and other baking supplies are scattered about the kitchen. A pair of large, black hands sift flour into a mixing bowl. FAROUK, the owner of the hands, a tall, handsome man in his early thirties, sings along to the music, which blasts out from an old radio while he works. He has a charm about him.

MICHAEL, 16, a frat bro in the making, bursts through the door. He wears a cashier's apron.

MICHAEL

Farouk! Some chick wants to compliment you on one of your cake thingies. She's hella hot.

Farouk gives him a look and continues baking.

MICHAEL

Duuuude.

FAROUK

(with a slight French accent)  
Okay, okay, just one second. Jesus Christ.

Michael exits the kitchen. Farouk adds a couple more ingredients to the mixing bowl, finds a nice stopping place, wipes his hands on his apron, and exits the kitchen through a swinging door.

INT. BAKERY SHOP - DAY

3

The bakery has sunlight flooding through the windows. The walls feature simple paintings of different pastries. Freshly baked goods live in a glass display by the checkout counter, and boxed pastries line shelves on the walls. The "chick" is the young woman seen walking into the shop earlier. She is a pretty, young blonde in a low cut shirt and booty shorts. She is staring intensely at Farouk and subtly pushing her breasts together with her arms. In the background, we can see Michael drooling. When the girl speaks, Michael snaps out of it, flusteredly looking down at his crotch. He grabs an extra apron.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hi.

FAROUK

Bonjour. What can I do for you?

YOUNG WOMAN

Welllll, my grandma looooves your carrot cake. She's your biggest fan. She requests it for her birthday every year. We just celebrated last week. She insisted I bring you this.

She hands Farouk a handwritten thank you note.

FAROUK

Wow, that's so sweet. Tell your grandmother thank you.

YOUNG WOMAN

I will.

FAROUK

And you? How do you find the cake?

YOUNG WOMAN

Ummmm I don't eat carbs.

She stares at Farouk seductively, looking him up and down.

FAROUK

Ah. I uh, I see. Soooo...

YOUNG WOMAN

Maybe you can come over sometime and teach me how to make it for her. I'd love to get my hands dirty with you.

She turns and starts walking away. Farouk just shakes his head a little, rubbing his eyes. As she reaches the door, an attractive STARBUCKS EMPLOYEE, wearing a green apron, opens the door. The blonde girl gives her a quick up-down and flounces out. The woman in the apron smiles flirtatiously at Farouk as she enters. Farouk smiles politely back.

FAROUK

Hi, how are you today?

STARBUCKS EMPLOYEE

Great, just came by to grab one of your delicious macaroons.

FAROUK

Of course, be right back.

Farouk goes to the display to grab a macaroon for her.

STARBUCKS EMPLOYEE

What are you up to this weekend?

FAROUK

Uhh, I'm watching my best friend's dog for him 'cause he's going hiking with his dad for a couple days.

He hands her the macaroon.

FAROUK

Maybe see that new sci-fi movie. You?

The woman pulls her wallet out and hands Farouk two one-dollar bills.

STARBUCKS EMPLOYEE

I'm working Sunday but I have tomorrow off. Let me know if you want company for the movie.

She winks.

FAROUK

Er, okay. Enjoy your macaroon.

STARBUCKS EMPLOYEE

Thanks, hope to see you soon.

She leaves. Michael stares admiringly at the ladies' man, his idol, as he returns to the kitchen, giving Michael a playful slap on the head as he passes.

INT. TRADER JOE'S - NIGHT

4

The grocery store is moderately busy as people shop around for dinner after work. MONICA, an upbeat woman in her early 20s, stares at a selection of thirty different gluten-free cookies. She closes her eyes, points, opens her eyes, and grabs the cookie her finger is pointing at. She smiles and licks her lips. The gluten-free cookie is oatmeal raisin. Gross. JULIA, a woman in her early 20s with a wicked sweet tooth, comes up behind her holding two bottles of Two-Buck Chuck and cookie dough.

JULIA

Oh yum. Great choice. Who doesn't love oatmeal raisin.

Julia makes a gagging sound and pantomimes vomiting. Monica kicks her leg back at Julia without looking at her. Her foot makes contact with Julia's shin.

MONICA

Alright lez goooo.

They head toward a checkout counter. The CHECKOUT CLERK has a permafrown, multiple face piercings, very pale skin, and wears heavy eyeliner. On her wrist is a tattoo that says "I hate ants. Drown in the rain." She picks up Monica's cookie, looking down disdainfully as she scans it.

CHECKOUT CLERK

Gluten-free? Reaaaaally.

MONICA

Um, yeah, I'm allergic.

CHECKOUT CLERK

Isn't that a pseudoscience?

MONICA

No, I wish, I literally get diarrhea for like three days straight if I have gluten. And worse farts than my dog.

The clerk makes an ugly face and a disbelieving humming sound. Monica hands her a five. After Monica receives her change, Julia pays for the wine and cookie dough in awkward silence. The girls exit the grocery store.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

5

They start walking home down a moderately quiet L Street, Sacramento's capitol building lit up in front of them.

JULIA

What a bitch. People need to mind their own goddamn business.

MONICA

Eh it's okay I'm used to it. But it is annoying, people can be so judgmental...

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

6

The next morning, Monica wakes up in her apartment on the couch next to Julia, with an empty wine bottle at their feet and the other one half full next to it. The cookie dough is on the table next to them. The timed-out Netflix screen is on the TV. Monica hops up and gets dressed. Julia groans and sticks her whole head in between two couch cushions to drown out all light and noise.

MONICA

(whispering)

Sorry! I'm taking Picasso  
(Terminator impression) I'll be back.

Monica forces PICASSO, a ridiculously obese pug, into one of those terrible dog sweaters. He sounds like he's having a lot of trouble breathing. The sweater has Santa's face on it. She puts him on a leash and leaves.

EXT. DOG PARK - DAY

7

Monica and Picasso enter the dog park. Monica sits at a picnic table, studying chapter 8 of a law book. Picasso sniffs around under the table, too fat to keep up with the other dogs.

Time lapse. Monica is now on chapter 10. Picasso has not moved. Farouk enters the park behind BELLA, a tugging Italian Mastiff. He sets Bella free, and she immediately runs up to Picasso and starts humping him. Bella has a major size advantage, despite Picasso's excessive rolls. Farouk runs over, pulling her off.

FAROUK

Oh my god, I'm so sorry. Not my dog. I think she's about to go into heat, she humped every pillow in my house this morning.

MONICA

Tell her to pick on someone her own size.

FAROUK

Alright boss.

MONICA

So how long you watching her for?

FAROUK

Just the weekend 'til my friend gets back.

MONICA

Ah, what a tease. Well, we're gettin' goin', see ya.

FAROUK

See ya.

Farouk stares after her, intrigued by this woman who does not fall at his feet.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - NIGHT

8

French pop MUSIC PLAYS. Farouk is in a baking frenzy. Bella licks sugar butter off his knee. This tickles him, making him jerk his arm. Flour goes everywhere.

EXT. DOG PARK - DAY

9

Monica sits at the same table, studying while Picasso pathetically tries to act like a real dog. He runs a couple feet after a labrador retriever, but keels over, panting furiously. Farouk enters, carrying a small pastry bag in one hand, holding Bella's leash in the other, and walks over to Monica.

FAROUK

Oh my god hi, I was hoping to run into you again. I brought something for you just in case.

MONICA

What! No way.

He holds out the bag. Monica takes it and peeps inside. She finds herself staring at two Snickerdoodle cookies.

MONICA

Wow. How thoughtful. I don't think anyone I know can cook, what's your deal?

FAROUK

I own a pastry shop on L street. So prepare to eat the. best. Snickerdoodle. of. your. life.

MONICA

These aren't gluten-free by any chance are they?

FAROUK

What's gluten?

MONICA

It's in flour...

FAROUK

What? You can't make pastries without flour, that'd be stupid. Of course they have flour in them. Don't insult me.

MONICA

Ha ha sorry, sorry...

FAROUK

Try theeeem, the anticipation is killing me.

MONICA

Ohhhh...

She makes no move to eat the cookies.

FAROUK

You think I poisoned them, don't you? They're safe.

He reaches into the bag and takes a big bite of a cookie.

FAROUK

See? Oh god. You're in for a treat.

He hands the cookie to her. Monica stands awkwardly holding the cookie, with Farouk waiting expectantly like an excited puppy.

MONICA

I, um...

She takes a deep breath and sighs, defeated. She can't stand wiping that cute look off his face. She brings the cookie to her mouth, takes a bite, and starts to chew. She genuinely enjoys this home baked treat.

MONICA

Mmmmm.

Farouk smiles, pleased. Out of the corner of his eye, he catches Bella aggressively humping a chihuahua. He sprints after her, as Monica stands there laughing at him.

FAROUK

BELLA! Bella, NO!

Monica takes this opportunity to spit out the bite and feed the rest of the cookies to a shih tzu walking by. Farouk walks back, out of breath. Monica feigns a huge, gulping swallow.

FAROUK

My god that dog is horny...where'd the cookies go?

MONICA

Gone.

FAROUK

You already ate them both? Holy shit I'm impressed. You inhaled those.

MONICA

Like a boss.

FAROUK

Most girls I know these days are on some kind of carb-free or no butter diet.

MONICA

Oh yeah, they were too good, I couldn't slow down. I'm an animal.

She makes an oinking sound and pushes her nose up with her index finger.

FAROUK

Wow that's the cutest pig  
impression I've ever seen.

Monica bends over to give Picasso a pat on the head. Farouk  
stares at her for a moment.

FAROUK

Have dinner with me this Friday.

Monica pops up, surprised.

MONICA

(mocking him from the day  
before)

Okay boss.

FAROUK

I'll pick you up. Give me your  
number.

MONICA

Hey hey hey. I haven't said yes.  
Don't be making assumptions.

They stare at each other, Monica trying to act mad but  
eventually a smile peeks through. Monica snatches his phone  
out of his pocket and starts entering her number. Farouk  
leans over her shoulder, brushing her hair back to see what  
her name is as she types it in.

FAROUK

Mooo-nee-aaaa. Nice. I'm Farouk.  
Talk to you soon.

MONICA

Sounds good.

Farouk whistles to Bella to come and leaves the park. As he  
leaves, we see the shih tzu violently puking up the cookies.  
Monica sees and swallows hard, looking guilty.

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

10

Julia is on the couch in sweats, sucking on a lollipop and  
painting her nails a hideous shade of green. Monica is  
putting makeup on in the bathroom. The girls are yelling  
back and forth.

MONICA

I caaaaan't, he'll think I'm one of  
those diet freaks. Plus he actually

(MORE)

MONICA (cont'd)  
kept up with my sense of humor  
which was refreshing. I guess I'm  
just gonna have to wait 'til he  
falls in love with me to break the  
news.

There's a knock on the door. Julia gets up and opens it. Farouk stands there, looking gorgeous and holding a plate of homemade cream puffs. Julia only has eyes for the cream puffs.

FAROUK  
Hey, you Monica's roommate?

Silence as Julia continues to stare hard at the cream puffs. Drool rolls down her chin and her eyes take on a hypnotic quality. Farouk looks amused.

FAROUK  
Would you like one?

Julia silently grabs a cream puff off the tray. She bites into it. She closes her eyes, chewing slowly and deliberately. She lets out a sigh. A tear rolls down her cheek.

JULIA  
I'm home.

Monica walks out from her room in a black dress.

FAROUK  
Hi Monica. I brought you a little  
somethin' somethin'.

JULIA  
They are unreal.

MONICA  
Are you crying?

JULIA  
Maybe. Whatever, I'm not ashamed.

FAROUK  
Try one.

Farouk pushes the tray at Monica. She reluctantly takes a cream puff. Meanwhile, Julia eyes Farouk suspiciously.

JULIA

So tell me. Who do you know in heaven?

FAROUK

(laughing)

I learned to make those at school in Paris.

JULIA

Ohhhh fancyyy. Ya know, I thought that was a French accent. Either that or Mexican.

She is dead serious. Farouk looks confused. Meanwhile, Monica casually chucks the cream puff out the open living room window. It hits a kid biking down the sidewalk in the face. When Farouk looks over at Monica after Julia's strange comment about his accent, seeing if she's ready to go, she pretends to dusts cream puff crumbs from her fingers.

MONICA

Yum. Julia was right.

Julia smirks behind him, raising her eyebrow at Monica.

FAROUK

Ready?

MONICA

Yerp.

Monica grabs her coat and kisses Julia on the cheek.

MONICA

Later skater.

JULIA

Don't expect there to be any cream puffs when you get back. (In a whisper) Not that it fucking matters to you.

Monica slaps her in the stomach and follows Farouk out the door.

EXT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

11

Monica and Farouk reach the bottom of the stairs outside her apartment. Monica sees a crying kid riding a bike toward them, with cream puff covering most of his face, except for two holes where he has wiped it away to see. He looks

miserable. Monica hurriedly points at a bird in the opposite direction with fabricated enthusiasm.

MONICA

Oh my god my favorite bird!

Farouk follows her finger to a black crow disgustingly pecking at a dead bird. Farouk chuckles and grabs her hand. They start walking down the street. Monica glances back at the crying kid riding away.

INT. LUCA'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

12

The ambience in the restaurant is romantic. Monica and Farouk eat at a table for two. Farouk holds a forkful of pasta in front of Monica's mouth, waiting for her to try it. She begrudgingly eats it. He stares at her, waiting. She swallows.

MONICA

Yum. I like the pesto.

FAROUK

What else do you like?

MONICA

Ohhh, I've been getting really into pottery lately...

FAROUK

So you're artistic...

MONICA

No, no, I didn't say I was making good pottery. I mean...yaaaah, I'm totally artistic. This is the best pottery you've ever seen. I'm actually Luca's number one supplier for their soup bowls.

FAROUK

Don't you dare lie to me. I won't stand for it.

Dissolve. The two are eating dessert and laughing. Dissolve. The table is clear of dishes, and the two are drinking wine and exchanging stories. Suddenly, Monica's eyes widen and she stands up.

MONICA

I'll be right back.

She waddles to the bathroom, pulling out her phone. As she goes, Farouk signals to the waiter for the check.

INT. LUCA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

13

Monica crashes into the bathroom.

MONICA

Julia?!

Monica rushes into a bathroom stall, pulling down her pants without shutting the stall door. She looks down. There is poop on her underpants.

MONICA

I sharted at dinner.

We can hear laughter from the other end.

MONICA

It's not funny. I feel like I'm going to cry. He made me try his fucking pasta a couple hours ago. What should I do? I think there's a window in this bathroom. I can escape. But I liiike hiiim...

JULIA

Calm down. Just take your underpants off and throw 'em away and go back out.

MONICA

But....

JULIA

I won't let you give this guy up. His cream puffs are... I can't talk about it. Let's just say, the cream in them is not the only cream in the apar-

MONICA

OKAY OKAY STOP. Sounds like you need to change your underpants too. Oh my god. Oh. Oh no.

Monica's face is sweating and sounds of EXPLOSIVE DIARRHEA.

MONICA

I'm disgusting. I'll see you at home. Thanks.

She hangs up, pulls up her pants, and exits the stall. A tall, beautiful model-esque woman takes her place in the stall. As Monica starts to wash her hands, we hear a SOUND OF DISGUST from the model. She comes out of the stall, gives Monica a dirty look, and goes into a different stall. Monica rinses off her sweaty face and walks back to the table.

INT. LUCA'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

14

Monica sits back down at the table.

FAROUK

I missed you.

MONICA

Oh shut up. I hafta go soon, I gotta get up early to study.

FAROUK

Oh yeah, I saw your book at the park...law, was it?

The waiter brings back the bill.

MONICA

Yeah, law. Oh my god did you already pay? No!

FAROUK

Yeah, of course. You're a starving student. Someone has to feed you.

MONICA

Well at least let me leave the tip.

FAROUK

Whatever makes you happy.

He oinks at her as she pulls cash out and puts it on the table. They get up and walk out, Farouk's hand resting lightly on Monica's lower back.

MONTAGE - MONICA AND FAROUK FALLING IN LOVE

15

A) Sacramento Bike Trail - Monica and Farouk ride bikes in the rain along the American River. Monica flat tires Farouk. They stop to have some water and make out in the rain.

B) Bakery - Farouk gives Monica a tour, introduces her to Michael, and hands her a plate of cupcakes with pigs drawn in pink icing on them.

C) Monica and Farouk wine tasting in Napa Valley.

D) Monica and Farouk camping in Tahoe.

E) Monica and Farouk shopping in San Francisco and sampling pastries in Ghiradelli Square.

F) Library - Monica studying. Farouk walks in and surprises her with flowers and a card that says "Happy Six Month Anniversary"

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

16

Monica is in her apartment. She opens the closet to three bags of pastries jammed onto the top shelf. She takes them down as there's a knock on the door. She walks over and opens it. Michael, eyes bloodshot, stands there with a couple of his STONED FRIENDS. STONER #1 points to a painting on Monica's wall. It's a magician holding a hat with a rabbit in it.

STONER #1

I like your Abe Lincoln photograph.  
(Laughs hysterically.)

Monica looks at him, amused. She turns to Michael and hands him the goody bags.

MONICA

Enjoy.

MICHAEL

Next week same time?

MONICA

Actually...I might tell him this week.

MICHAEL

What?! NOOOOO. Are you serious?  
But, but, Monicaaaaa... Whyyyy?

MONICA

Cuuuz...We just had our 6 month and I'm running out of excuses.

MICHAEL

Fiiine. I'll just have to start swooping more goodies from the shop. Tell Julia hi for me.

He winks.

STONER #2  
Helicopters are like bird  
dinosaurs...

INT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

17

Monica and Farouk cuddling on the couch, watching a movie. Farouk jumps up, goes to the kitchen, and returns with a tray of freshly baked brownies, holding it out to Monica.

FAROUK  
I just tried a new recipe.

MONICA  
I'm too full, I ate right before I  
came, can I try later?

FAROUK  
C'mon, one bite. You're my best  
taste tester.

MONICA  
Fine, but I'm gonna need some milk  
to wash it down.

She grabs a brownie, gets up, and walks to the kitchen.

FAROUK  
C'mon let me get it for ya.

He follows her in.

INT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - NIGHT

18

Her plan to hide it in the kitchen has been thwarted! She rips off a piece of brownie and slips it into her bra.

MONICA  
Mmmm, these are you best brownies  
ever. I'll eat the rest later.

Farouk glances at the brownie, which appears to have a bite out of it. He hands her a glass of milk and she takes a sip.

MONICA  
Let's go finish the movie.

INT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

19

Monica asleep on Farouk's shoulder, and he is crying as the film ends. The credits roll and he wipes away his tears. He turns to Monica, and kisses her to wake her up.

MONICA

Mmm, sorry I fell asleep. Did you like it?

FAROUK

Yeah, you didn't warn me how sad it is. Jerk.

Monica smiles and kisses him. The kiss gets more passionate, and Farouk brushes his fingers across the top of Monica's breasts, and then slips his hand into her bra. He quickly pulls his hand back out, confused. He looks down at his hand, confused at the brownie. Monica looks panicked.

MONICA

I put a little in there for you to lick off.

FAROUK

You're so sexy. I'm getting whipped cream.

Monica looks less than enthused. At he gets up from the couch, she stares after him. Then she follows him into the kitchen.

INT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - NIGHT

20

MONICA

I have to tell you something.

FAROUK

What's up.

MONICA

Um, I, uh, I have... I'm... I'm allergic to gluten.

Farouk reaches into the fridge, looking for whipped cream.

FAROUK

What?

MONICA

Gluten, it's...it's in flour, remember? I'm allergic.

Farouk turns around to face her, whipped cream in his hand.

FAROUK

No you're not. You eat my pastries  
all the time.

MONICA

Exactly. I don't. I, I usually find  
some way around it because I didn't  
want to hurt your fe-

FAROUK

What, so you've been lying to me?

MONICA

I mean, I w-

FAROUK

For *six months*?

Farouk looks long and hard at her.

MONICA

No I just didn't w-

FAROUK

Get out of my apartment.

Monica walks over to him.

MONICA

Farouk.

She reaches for his face.

FAROUK

Don't touch me. Fucking liar.

MONICA

Are you serious? I-

FAROUK

I. HATE. BEING. LIED. TO. You know  
I was cheated on? I never want to  
see you again.

MONICA

I had no idea, just let me exp-

FAROUK

I can't even look at you. Leave.

Farouk starts walking for the door to go back to the living room. A bag of flour sits on the counter, left over from his brownie baking. Monica grabs it and throws it at him. Farouk stops in his tracks. He stands there, covered from head to toe in flour, fuming. Monica turns on her heel and storms out, slamming the door hard. Lingered shot on Farouk, with puffs of flour coming off his face as he breathes hard out his nose.

EXT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

21

Monica stands for a second on the landing, angry tears starting to come out.

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

22

Monica bursts through the door crying. Julia, a good 20 pounds heavier than last time we saw her, sits at the table eating a cake.

JULIA

Oh noooo what's wrong?

MONICA

I told him.

JULIA

Oh my god what happened?

MONICA

He wouldn't even let me explain. I lost my temper and threw flour at him.

Monica starts crying harder. Julie laughs in spite of Monica's pitiful blubbering.

MONICA

It's not funny. He hates me.

Monica slumps into a chair next to Julia, defeated. Julia is still stuffing her face with cake.

JULIA

I know, I know, I'm so sorry babe. He just needs to calm down and he'll realize he's acting like a D-bag. This cake is from him by the way. Michael dropped it off while you were over there, apparently Farouk spent all yesterday making

(MORE)

JULIA (cont'd)  
it... I figured you wouldn't want  
it...

MONICA  
Yeah no shit.

JULIA  
Ow.

Julia spits something into her hand. She stares at it for a second.

JULIA  
Oh my god. Monica! It's a ring. He  
put a ring in the cake!

MONICA  
Let me see that.

Monica looks at it, and sees that it's a diamond ring. Her jaw drops. Julia starts screaming in excitement and jumping up and down.

MONICA  
Ohhhh. SHIT. Shit shit shit. I  
fucked everything up.

Monica pulls out her phone and calls Farouk. It goes straight to voicemail. Julia is dancing around the apartment, doing somersaults, SINGING "My best friend's getting maaaarried, my best friend's getting maaaarried..."

MONICA  
Dammit. I'm going over there. And  
stop singing that god awful song.

EXT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 23

Monica POUNDS on the door. The lights are all off, and no one is answering. She finally leaves.

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 24

Monica walks back in, looking fierce. Julia sits at the table, back at it with the cake, stuffing her face and HUMMING contentedly to the Lion King CD PLAYING on her laptop. She is playing online chess.

MONICA

He didn't answer. Can I use your  
baking stuff?

JULIA

Uhhhh yup. Still trying to lose  
this baby.

She pulls up her shirt, grabs her pudgy stomach, and starts jiggling it around. There is cake all over her face. Monica frantically pulls baking supplies out from the cabinets.

An hour later, Monica pulls a cake out from the oven. She smothers it in frosting. In icing, she writes *I'm Sorry*.

EXT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - DAY 25

Farouk opens the door and sees the cake on his doormat. He swiftly picks it up and closes the door.

INT. FAROUK'S APARTMENT - DAY 26

He marches over to the trashcan and drops the cake into it. On the way back to the couch, he sees a picture of him and Monica on his fridge. He rips it off and throws it into the trash on top of the cake.

INT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 27

Monica distractedly studies a law book. She stops, scrolls through her phone, staring at a string of 5 unanswered texts to Farouk, each from a different day. She types in "How to get through a breakup" on Google.

INT. BAKERY - DAY 28

A girl hits on Farouk. He asks her on a date.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT 29

Monica flirts with a hot guy at the library. He has a gluten allergy, too.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

30

Farouk is making fruit tarts at work. Michael walks in with a couple empty trays and drops them in the sink. He starts walking back out.

FAROUK

Ay ay ay, get your ass back here.  
Wash those.

MICHAEL

Okay jeeze. You could ask nicely  
you know.

Silence.

MICHAEL

Dude. You should call her back.

FAROUK

It's none of your business.

MICHAEL

Dude you've been an asshole since  
you and Monica broke up. And I've  
been getting yelled at for the last  
two weeks so uh yeah it's kinda my  
business.

Farouk slips up on one of the fruit tart decorations. He curses in French under his breath.

MICHAEL

Just call her.

FAROUK

Listen you little shit. I've been  
lied to in a relationship before  
and it's not worth it.

MICHAEL

She lied about a fricking *gluten*  
*allergy*. It's not even a lie, it's  
like, a white lie, a fib, it's  
not...She just did it 'cause she  
liked you and wanted to make you  
happy. You're being stupid.

Michael walks out, leaving Farouk looking sadly down at his fruit tarts. After a minute, he takes off his apron, grabs his coat, and walks out the door.

INT. TRADER JOE'S - DAY

31

Farouk walks down an aisle and grabs a bag of gluten-free flour. He walks up to a checkout counter. The same bitchy checkout clerk stands there looking bored. She scans the bag of flour and rolls her eyes.

CHECKOUT CLERK

Huh. You *allergic*?

FAROUK

Oh no it's my girlfr - Well, my ex-girlfriend - who has the allergy. I'm hoping she'll take me back...

The checkout clerk looks like she wants to rip her piercings out of her own face. Farouk types his PIN number into the card scanner.

CHECKOUT CLERK

Oh god. I'm sorry I asked...

Farouk picks up the bag with the flour and starts walking away.

CHECKOUT CLERK

See ya. Good luck with your girlfriend... (under her breath) Your girlfriend who doesn't deserve to live...can't eat bread..ha...loser....

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

32

Same layout as first scene, with flour everywhere. Only this time, the bag of flour says "gluten free." Farouk decorates a cake. Michael walks in.

MICHAEL

Yo. Hella hot girl out there. Custom order.

FAROUK

K just a sec.

Michael leaves and Farouk follows a second later.

INT. BAKERY SHOP - DAY

33

Farouk walks out to see Monica standing there.

MONICA

I know you don't want to see me  
but-

Farouk has crossed the distance to her and sweeps her up in a kiss.

FAROUK

Follow me, I have something for  
you.

He leads her to the kitchen.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

34

FAROUK

I'm sorry I've been so stubborn. I  
love you.

MONICA

I love you too. Sorry. About lying.  
From now on, you'll know way too  
much about who I really am...

He hands her the cake.

FAROUK

It's gluten free.

Monica makes a snorting pig sound and rubs her whole face in the cake.

MONICA

It's delicious.

FAROUK

I'm gonna need your help with  
something...

EXT. BAKERY - DAY

35

Farouk boosts Monica up so she can reach by the "Sac of Flour" sign, her feet in his hands. Below the sign, she hangs a smaller sign that says, "Now featuring gluten-free options." He lets her down; she turns around, grinning. He licks the frosting off her face.

FADE OUT.

How Deirdre Saved Christmas

By

Suzanna Akins

EXT. HUMANE SOCIETY OFFICE - NIGHT

1

Setting: Norfolk, VA. Humane Society Headquarters. An inch of snow lines the roof and pathway.

INT. DEIRDRE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

2

The clock on the wall reads 8:00. DEIRDRE NAGEV, 24, a passionate, yet spacy woman, works overtime at her desk, sorting through papers and researching ants. MURPHY SANDS, Deirdre's exhausted-looking boss, pokes his head in the door.

MURPHY

Deirdre! What are you still doing here? It's Christmas Eve. Go home.

DEIRDRE

Oh hey Murph. I'm just finishing up some research before I send in the petition to stop kids using magnifying glasses to burn ants. This evil practice will be outlawed once and for all.

MURPHY

Listen. I'm with you. The brats have no right to interfere with the ants' rights to life, liberty, and happiness. But the bill will never pass, even if you get enough signatures on the petition. It's just not on the government's agenda. We have to focus on bigger issues.

DEIRDRE

Bigger issues? Every life matters! Isn't that our job? To protect every life? To validate every creature's existence?

Deirdre is near tears. Murphy looks uncomfortable.

MURPHY

Alright, whatever, just, um...lock up on your way out, ok? Merry Christmas. See you next year.

He laughs hysterically at his own joke, then walks away, leaving Deirdre typing furiously at her computer. After a moment, she grabs her purse and exits the office.

EXT. DEIRDRE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT 3

The house is lined with gold Christmas lights. A car pulls into the driveway. Deirdre gets out, walks to the door, and opens it.

INT. DEIRDRE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT 4

Deirdre enters to find MARINA and JERRY, her dad and step-mother, along with ALLIE (13) and HUNTER (9), her two younger siblings, finishing up dinner.

JERRY

Yay finally! We tried to wait for you hon, but the kids were starving. Want dinner?

DEIRDRE

Yes please, I haven't eaten since noon. I got caught up at the office. How are y'all?

JERRY

Good, how was work?

DEIRDRE

Frustrating. I'm pushing this ant case but my boss is discouraging.

JERRY

I'm so proud of you. Keep trying hon, the Nagevs are not quitters! Everyone was put here for a purpose, and you're lucky enough to know yours.

Marina hands her a plate of green beans, bread, and steak. Deirdre thanks her, puts the steak back, and begins eating the beans.

MARINA

Aah sorry, I always forget. There's no butter on the bread though.

JERRY

Take it in the car, hon, we're already late for church.

Deirdre follows the family out to the garage.

EXT. CHURCH 5

A beautiful church with a sign in the grass that reads  
"Trinity Episcopal Church"

INT. CHURCH 6

Children play out the nativity scene at the alter. Many are dressed as animals, and the animals crowd around the baby Jesus and gently nudge him and welcome him into the world. Deirdre kneels on a pew and cries dearly, moved by the animals' kindness.

INT. DEIRDRE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT 7

Deirdre, her parents, and her siblings enter the house, Hunter running ahead.

HUNTER

Deirdre! Read us "The Night Before Christmas"!

DEIRDRE

Okie dokie. Go get it Hunt.

Hunter disappears into another room and returns with the book. Deirdre, Hunter, and Allie cuddle up on the couch. Deirdre reads aloud...

DEIRDRE

'Twas the night before Christmas,  
when all through the...

DEIRDRE AND ALLIE AND HUNTER

HOUSE!

DEIRDRE

Not a creature was stirring, not  
even a...

DEIRDRE AND ALLIE AND HUNTER

MOUSE!

DEIRDRE

The stockings were hung...

Dissolve, time lapse.

DEIRDRE

When, what to my wondering eyes  
should...

DEIRDRE AND ALLIE AND HUNTER  
APPEAR!

DEIRDRE  
But a miniature sleigh, and eight  
tiny...

DEIRDRE AND ALLIE AND HUNTER  
REINDEER!

Allie and Hunter continue finishing the rhymes with Deirdre.

DEIRDRE  
With a little old driver, so lively  
and quick, I knew in a moment it  
must be St. Nick. More rapid than  
eagles his coursers they came, and  
he whistled, and shouted, and  
called them by name. Now, Dasher!  
Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer and  
Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On,  
Donder and Blitzen! To the top of  
the porch! To the top of the wall!  
Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away  
all!

Throughout this bit, Deirdre becomes less enthusiastic with every word, her brow creasing. She turns the page, finding an illustration of St. Nick, whip in hand, and the reindeer tied to a heavy sleigh. Zoom on the whip. Zoom on St. Nick's jolly face delighting in the abuse of the reindeer.

Deirdre breaks down, rises from the couch, and runs from the room.

INT.DEN

8

Jerry enters to find Deirdre reading on the couch, eyes puffy. He sits down by her.

JERRY  
What happened? The kids said you  
ran out in the middle of the story.

DEIRDRE  
It's a stupid story. Santa is a  
fraud. He's an animal abuser,  
working those reindeer over 12  
hours without a break or food or  
water, whipping them...it's against  
labor laws. It's an injustice.  
He's, he's...he's doing it *right*  
*now*.

JERRY

Well, you know what you need to do.  
Maybe this can be your new project.

DERIDRE

I'll be waiting for him when he  
gets back from his trip around the  
world...

Deirdre looks determined.

EXT. HUMANE SOCIETY OFFICE - DAY

9

Deirdre opens the door.

INT. HUMANE SOCIETY OFFICE - DAY

10

Deirdre marches through the building, into Murphy's office.  
She slams books and folders onto his desk. He looks up,  
startled.

MURPHY

And Happy New Year to you...

DEIRDRE

Yeah yeah, Happy New Year, ok, so  
maybe you were right, maybe the ant  
bill is too unrealistic. But I'm  
saving these reindeer.

Murphy closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. When he  
opens his eyes, he looks up at Deirdre. He opens his mouth,  
but then sees the look on her face. He shuts it and opens it  
again a moment later.

MURPHY

Deirdre. You'd have to get a  
subsidy from the financial  
department. We can't fund this.

DEIRDRE

Then I guess I'll just have to do  
this on my own.

She marches out of his office, head held high.

INT. DEIRDRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 11

Deirdre throws winter clothes and rain gear into a duffel bag. She also packs handcuffs, pepper spray, and carrots. She digs out her passport from the bottom drawer of her desk. Expired 3 months prior.

DEIRDRE

No.

She opens her laptop and frantically looks up how long it takes to get a passport renewed. Even expedited says 2-3 weeks.

DEIRDRE

(near hysteria)

TWO TO THREE WEEKS?! These reindeer can't afford two to three weeks more abuse from that evil man!

INT. NORTH POLE NURSERY - DAY 12

SANTA CLAUS, a sweet old man with kind eyes, sings to new elf babies in the nursery. JANICE, an elf with jet black hair and a focused energy, rushes in.

SANTA

Oooooon the treetops, when the wind blows, the cr-

JANICE

Santa, come quick! I just saw something on the globe that I think you'll want to know about.

SANTA

Right away, miss! To be continued, little babies!

He tickles their tummies and follows Janice out to...

INT. NORTH POLE NEWS ROOM - DAY 13

Santa and Janice enter a circular room with all glass walls and snow falling lightly, as if they are inside a snow globe. In the distance, we can see Deirdre approaching the pier at Pike's Place.

EXT. PIKE'S PLACE - DAY

14

Rain dumps down in Seattle. It's hard to see more than a few feet ahead. Deirdre waddles up to MERL, a man in his 60s with very few teeth, wearing a tie-dye poncho, standing by a little boat. Deirdre makes it about ten feet from Merl before collapsing under the weight of her bags. Merl runs over, surprisingly speedy.

MERL

Let me help ya there lil' darlin'.

DEIRDRE

Aaah thank you, you must be Merl.

MERL

Yes ma'am, that's my name. Don't wear it out. Pleased to make your acquaintance.

Deirdre sticks out her hand.

DEIRDRE

Deirdre. Thanks for meeting me so last minute.

MERL

That's my job! When the government fails you, Merl to the rescue!

DEIRDRE

Thank God for Craigslist...

Deirdre hops in the boat, and Merl starts paddling.

MERL

We should hit Alaska by January 3rd. I'm quite the paddler.

DEIRDRE

Excellent.

INT. NORTH POLE NEWS ROOM - DAY

15

Santa looks delighted.

SANTA

What a pleasant young woman. The young adults of today really need to travel more. I didn't take advantage of the freedom of my youth and now I only get to travel once a year!

Janice rolls her eyes.

JANICE

Nick, she's paying us a little visit.

SANTA

You don't say! How wonderful. Tell the kitchen to make some fresh sugar cookies will you kindly?

JANICE

She's coming t- you know what, sure. I'll tell the kitchen to make this sweet girl sugar cookies. What a great idea, Santa.

Santa beams, pats Janice on the shoulder, and strolls out of the room whistling Jingle Bells. Janice suppresses a scream of frustration.

JANICE

Guess I'll have to deal with the little wench on my own. That incompetent hobbit needs to be REPLACED! Once I protect the North Pole from this foreigner, everyone will realize I should be the one in charge around here.

PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT

16

Huge waves almost capsize the little boat. Both Deirdre and Merl are soaking, lying across the bottom of boat, rolled in tarps like little burritos. Fade out.

PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

17

Fade in. The ocean is calm and the sun is out. Merl teaches Deirdre how to fish.

DEIRDRE

No Merl! I refuse to kill another living creature.

MERL

Deirdre. All of your granola bars are soaked through.

DEIRDRE

I don't care. I'd rather starve.

MERL

Suit yourself.

Merl reels in a beautiful Alaskan salmon and rips into it, sushi style. Deirdre dry heaves over the side of the boat.

EXT. NORTH POLE - DAY

18

Janice supervises as a team of five elves builds a gigantic candy blockade.

JANICE

Faster you FOOLS! Soon I'll be the hero who saved Christmas and they'll have to promote me and kick Santa out. MUA HA HA HA HA

PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

19

Deirdre's stomach growls. She opens a mushy granola bar and licks it pathetically. Merl hums contentedly, eyes closed, face to the sun. A shadow falls slowly over his face. Deirdre looks up at what causes the shadow, to find a 100 foot tall wall of candy.

DEIRDRE

Oh my...

Merl opens his eyes, grabs a paddle, and steers them away just in time to avoid colliding with the candy wall.

DEIRDRE

What're we gonna do?! I have to save the reindeer!

MERL

We'll just have to go around, little darlin'!

DEIRDRE

But that could take days!

MERL

We have no other options.

INT. NORTH POLE NEWS ROOM - DAY 20

Janice paces in the giant snow globe, admiring her candy work.

PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT 21

Deirdre and Merl look strung out.

DEIRDRE

It's been two days, what if this wall never ends! We can't afford to let the reindeer be taken advantage of any longer. I'm climbing over. I took rock climbing 101 in college. I'm practically Alex Honnold.

MERL

But you haven't eaten in five days. You're gonna need some fuel.

DEIRDRE

CANDYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!

She reaches forward and plucks a Reese's from the candy wall. This essential part of the architecture dislodges, and the entire wall begins to come crumbling down.

DEIRDRE AND MERL

AAAAHHHH!

Merl paddles as fast as his frail little arms can go. They narrowly miss the avalanche of candy.

DERIDRE

Well sweet. Guess I'll have to practice rock climbing some other time.

MERL

Wow.

They pull up to a snow bank, the entrance to the North Pole.

MERL

This is where I leave you. Just email me when you're ready to come back.

DEIRDRE

I hear they have great internet service at the North Pole. Thanks Merl. It's been a pleasure.

She waves after him and he paddles away among heaps of floating candy pollution, the sun beginning to rise on the ocean. Deirdre turns back around to face the North Pole. A beautiful golden gate stands tall, with Frosty the Snowman dressed in a security vest. Deirdre approaches him and sticks out her hand, shaking his wooden arm.

DEIRDRE

Pleasure to meet you, Frosty! I'm here to see Santa.

FROSTY

Not so fast little lady. I have strict orders from HR. You're here to ruin Christmas, and we can't have that now, can we?

DEIRDRE

Ruin Christmas? That's crazier than eggnog without rum! I just want to speak with Santa about his treatment of the reindeer. It's against animal rights to control them with a whip.

FROSTY

A WHIP?! Dios mio! I had no idea. Those poor babiessss.

DEIRDRE

Please let me at least speak with Santa.

FROSTY

Ugh. I can't stand to hear about violence. If someone whipped me I'd fall right to pieces! You didn't hear it from me, but to get to the reindeer, go through this gate, straight ahead for a mile, right at the avalanche, through the ice tunnel, and then I think you'll know what to do from there. Just page me if you get stuck.

He tosses her a cookie phone with gumdrop buttons.

DERIDRE

Oh thank you Frosty!

She gives him a big hug. After a moment, Frosty pulls away uncomfortably.

FROSTY  
You're rather...warm...

EXT. ICE TUNNEL - DAY 22

Deirdre wanders through a tunnel with smooth, glistening ice walls. The walls are enchanted to play fairy tales like little films. Deirdre, captivated, stops to watch a little girl walk to school with a lamb on a leash. A sharp shiver runs through Deirdre. She pulls out a huge parka from her backpack, puts it on, and walks out of the end of the tunnel...

EXT. NORTH POLE NEWS ROOM - DAY 23

Janice watches Deirdre walking through the ice tunnel.

JANICE  
Dangit! The little wench made it in! Now how am I supposed to get rid of Santa?

Janice gets an evil look in her eye, grabs a fat key ring from the depths of her pea coat, and scurries off.

EXT. RESORT - DAY 24

Deirdre jolts to a stop, looking up at a tall building covered in pink fur. Gold sparkly letters above the entrance say, "North Pole Resort and Spa."

DEIRDRE  
Gee wholly fishmongers!

She marches up to the door and yanks it open.

INT. RESORT - DAY 25

Inside the resort are diamond chandeliers and elves walking about with trays of caviar and champagne. One ELF CATERER approaches Deirdre, tray thrust toward her.

ELF CATERER  
Care for some caviar, madam?

Deirdre gets a whiff of the fish egg smell and gags.

DEIRDRE

No thanks, I don't eat...babies...

She approaches the front desk, where JONO, a tiny elf man, sits perched on a Christmas tree.

JONO

Welcome guest. What can we do for you today?

DEIRDRE

I could really use a massage, it's been a stressful last few days.

Jono nods sharply and starts furiously typing.

JONO

This way please.

He leads her through the front hall, to a floating cotton candy ball.

JONO

Sit.

Deirdre awkwardly mounts the cotton candy, getting her balance. Jono waves his arm and the cotton candy whooshes Deirdre up to the second floor, into the spa. Deirdre looks around to find eight reindeer lazing around. PRANCER, DANCER, and DASHER are getting massaged. COMET, DONDER, and CUPID are getting their hooves painted. VIXEN has green cream on her face and cucumbers over her eyes, and BLITZEN is passed out on the floor with an empty champagne bottle.

DEIRDRE

Perfect! I found you guys!

She pulls out a carrot and approaches Vixen. Deirdre pushes the carrot against Vixen's front teeth. Vixen jolts up, removing the cucumbers from her eyes, revealing beautiful long eyelashes.

VIXEN

Oh gross. Do I look like a rabbit? Who are you?

DEIRDRE

I'm Deirdre! I'm here to save you from the horrible work conditions Santa has you under. Long hours without pay! Harsh lashings, endless -

DASHER

(muffled, face smushed into  
the massage hole)

Huh? Honey, that's sweet, but we  
work ONE DAY A YEAR. And, "harsh  
lashings"? Are you referring to the  
filthy propaganda in that dumb  
Christmas Eve book?

CUPID

The media these days, I tell ya. We  
have the best life ever. Great  
food, bottomless champagne, elves  
at our disposal...

Deirdre looks out the window, taking all this in. Suddenly,  
she sees RUDOLPH, a reindeer with a glowing red nose, come  
flying down the mountain on wooden skis.

DEIRDRE

Whoa! Was that Rudolph?

COMET

Yeah, he's a bit of a loner. Still  
holds a little grudge from when we  
were in middle school.

Deirdre turns toward Prancer, Dancer, and Dasher, and  
notices the little elf people furiously massaging their  
buttocks. Deirdre rushes out of the spa.

EXT. NORTH POLE - DAY

26

Deirdre approaches huge golden gates, with a brick building  
on the other side. The gates open to her, and she walks  
through, and into the brick building.

INT. NORTH POLE - DAY

27

Elves scramble about, fixing toys, and squeaking orders.  
Deirdre approaches an older ELF MAN. Janice is visible  
behind Deirdre, fixing something in the kitchen.

DEIRDRE

Excuse me, I'm looking for Santa.

ELF MAN

Ah! Right this way.

He speeds off at lightning speed, impressive for his leg  
length. Deirdre sprints after to keep up.

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY

28

Deirdre and the elf arrive in a room full of bean bags. A pair of chubby legs and barefoot feet poke out of a red bean bag.

ELF MAN

Santa?

Silence. The elf calls "Santa" a few more times, finally approaches the bean bag cautiously and plunging his forefinger into the fat of Santa's belly. A muffled grunt comes from the red bean bag. The elf struggles, yanking on the legs, until Santa finally emerges from the bean bag.

SANTA

Gumbo! Sorry, I was just taking a nap, got a little stuck... thank you! Ah! I recognize you as the young woman travelling the world! Welcome to the North Pole. How was your journey?

Gumbo bows out. Janice slips through right before the door closes and hides behind a sofa.

DEIRDRE

I, uh, oh, it w- it was fine, thank you. I'm actually here to talk to you about your employee treatment. So. You can drop the "nice guy" facade now.

SANTA

Huh?

DEIRDRE

The elves are working far too many hours. Do they ever get a vacation?

SANTA

Trust me, I've tried to get them to take it easy for years. They love to work. Refuse to stop for a second. They take it as an insult when I try to suggest a massage at the spa or a day on the slopes.

DEIRDRE

Uh huh, uh huh, sure. No one likes to work constantly, or hours on end, without a break. No one wants to work around the clock, especially during the holidays!

SANTA

Don't you have to work during the holidays? I saw you travelling just after New Year's.

DEIRDRE

Yes but I chose to because I'm passionate about what I do. No one forced me to come up here.

SANTA

Yes but don't you see, dear, no one is forcing the elves either.

DEIRDRE

But maybe they just don't know themselves what they need! That they'd enjoy a vacation if they only took a second to relax and try it.

SANTA

Well I can certainly suggest something, but I can't force them to do anything dear. While we're on the subject, can I suggest you take a couple days to relax? Mi casa es tu casa. Spend a day with the reindeer at the spa.

DEIRDRE

I don't need a couple days to relax. You know what, that could actually be nice. And I could get to know the reindeer a bit better. They're awfully bored you know. Maybe they could help me down in Seattle, on my ant project.

SANTA

Hum, yes yes, your ant project, I used to have an Aunt Martha, wonderful lady...

DEIRDRE

Santa...the reindeer?

SANTA

Janice manages the staff.

Janice slips out from behind the sofa.

JANICE  
Did I hear my name?

She smiles warmly and extends her hand to Deirdre.

JANICE  
Janice, head of HR.

DEIRDRE  
Hi, I'm Deirdre, nice to meet you.  
I have a few questions for y-

Janice slyly elbows Deirdre aside and makes her way toward Santa with the pudding outstretched. As she leans over to hand him the pudding, Santa breathes in, causing his huge belly to go up, knocking the pudding out of Janice's hand. She contains a shriek of frustration that Santa is oblivious to.

JANICE  
My mistake Santa. I'll be right  
back with another snack.

Deirdre eyes Janice suspiciously.

DEIRDRE  
I need to use the restroom.

SANTA  
Aw yes, just out to your right.

As Deirdre exits Santa's office, Santa disappears back into the bean bag, snoring loudly.

EXT. NORTH POLE KITCHEN - DAY

29

Deirdre sneaks after Janice. Janice slips into the kitchen and Deirdre spies through the crack in the door. Janice prepares another dish of pudding, again pouring a few drops of clear liquid from a little bottle with a skull on it. Deirdre squints, straining her eyes. The bottle says "Rat Poison." Deirdre gasps and runs back to Santa's office.

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY

30

Santa is nowhere to be seen. Deirdre looks around frantically, then runs from the room.

EXT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY 31

Deirdre runs down the hallway. Behind her we see Janice slip into Santa's office.

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY 32

Janice walks over to the bean bag. Santa has sunk so far into it that his snores are muffled. Janice peels it open and looks down at him in disgust.

JANICE

Wake up. It's snack time.

Santa mumbles in his sleep.

SANTA

Mmmm, snacky snacks. Nom nom nom.

He starts drooling all down his chin. A bit of drool drips onto the bean bag.

JANICE

Oh gross.

She sets the pudding down on a little table next to him and sits down to wait. Meanwhile...

INT. NORTH POLE NEWS ROOM - DAY 33

Deirdre has come across the snow globe news room. She watches in wonder at all the things happening around the world. She catches sight of Janice sitting with the pudding, next to a bean bag. A little piece of red fabric is visible in the bean bag.

DEIRDRE

Aha! Gotcha!

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY 34

Janice jiggles her leg impatiently. She snatches the pudding off the table, puts her index finger in it, and wafts it in front of Santa's nose. He stirs slightly.

SANTA

Mmmm, do I smell figgy pudding?

JANICE

Yes you do, I made it myself from scratch.

SANTA

You are just the sweetest. Thank you Janice.

Santa reaches for the spoon and scoops a big spoonful, bringing it toward his mouth. Deirdre bursts into the room. In slow motion, she dives toward the bowl, arms outstretched, yelling.

DEIRDRE

Santa NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO...

Deirdre knocks the pudding from Santa's hand. It goes everywhere. A little bug crawling along the floor licks some, and instantly keels over on its back, curled up, dead. Deirdre and Santa are both mortified.

SANTA

What on earth...

JANICE

Look what you've done! You're a murderer!

DEIRDRE

Oh really Janice? I'm not the one who poisoned the pudding...

Santa looks at Janice, with tears in blue eyes.

SANTA

I always knew you wanted my job, Janice. I didn't blame you, because who wouldn't want the job of making children happy. But you've gone too far. I can't have a killer in my workshop. You are banished from the North Pole.

JANICE

But Santa, I-

SANTA

BANISHED, Janice. You have an hour to pack your bags.

Janice runs from the room.

SANTA

Sorry you had to see that.

Deirdre is transfixed, staring at the dead bug on the floor.

DEIRDRE

We have to bury him or her.

EXT. NORTH POLE GARDEN - NIGHT

35

Deirdre, Santa, the elves, and all the reindeer gather at a candlelight vigil in the garden. Deirdre places the dead bug gently in a tiny hole in the snow, puts snow over him, and sticks the teensiest little tombstone on top. Prancer approaches her slowly, and rests a hoof sweetly on her shoulder.

PRANCER

Deirdre sweetheart, why don't you join us at the spa tomorrow.

DEIRDRE

I guess I could use a day to decompress.

INT. OFFICE IN NORWAY - DAY

36

Janice sits in a circle with several people.

JANICE

Hi, I'm Janice, and I'm a workaholic.

WORKAHOLICS

Hiiii Janiice.

MEETING LEADER

Janice, tell us about your addiction.

JANICE

Well, I was recently fired. I've been going through some serious withdrawals. I find myself waking up at night, hands sewing, as if making clothing for children. I look down, and my hands are...well, they're...they're...they're empty.

INT. RESORT - DAY

37

Deirdre lounges about with the reindeer, sipping a mimosa and giggling.

DEIRDRE

Ah, I guess y'all were right, you do have it pretty easy. Sorry for jumping to conclusions about you.

DASHER

It's alright. Listen, I know you think the elves should take a little break, but you're not much different...

DEIRDRE

I know, I know. I just love my job. I can't stay away for long, not when there are so many animals being taken advantage of. But it really does feel good to relax. I'll be bored in a day though.

DANCER

Imagine how we feel!

DEIRDRE

Well if you guys ever want to help me down in Virginia, you're more than welcome! And come over for dinner anytime.

PRANCER

Thanks, but we're herbivores, so we're kind of a pain to cook for.

DEIRDRE

Oh Prancer. How much we have to learn about each other.

EXT. NORTH POLE - NIGHT

38

Deirdre rides on Rudolph's back, as the nine reindeer fly through the night sky.

INT. DEIRDRE'S OFFICE - DAY

39

Deirdre and nine reindeer, crammed into her tiny office, work busily. Three of the reindeer are wearing spectacles, and one is in a tuxedo. Deirdre glances out the window and sees a couple kids with magnifying glasses get handcuffed by a policeman. Murphy pokes his head in.

MURPHY

Great work on the ant case,  
Deirdre.

Deirdre beams.

DERIDRE

Thanks Murphy. Santa just gave us the good news, he's going to open up the spa for animals around the globe. Every animal deserves a little luxury every once in a while.

MURPHY

Erm. Agreed.

Murphy awkwardly looks down at his feet. His toes have cotton in between them and he wears purple post-pedicure flip flops. He shuffles out slowly.

INT. DEIRDRE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

40

Deirdre, her parents, siblings, the reindeer, and Merl all sit around the dinner table, talking and laughing.

MERL

And that's how I lost my 7th tooth!

JERRY

Prancer, please pick up your poop!  
It's hard to eat with that smell...

COMET

C'mon Prancer. You're better than that.

Prancer blushes. Deirdre giggles and picks the poop up with her bare hands.

DEIRDRE

I got it, don't worry. Just enjoy your vegan pudding.

CONTINUED:

23.

She goes into the kitchen and puts the poop in the trash.  
She leans back on the counter, closes her eyes, and smiles.

Credits.

Thrifty

By

Suzanna Akins

EXT. ZACH'S HOUSE 1

Establishing shot of typical college house, no yard really, beer cans here and there, and something random like a blow up doll or one of those bright pink yard flamingos. Or prayer flags.

INT. ZACH'S BATHROOM 2

ZACH, a college student, sits on the toilet, texting. He reaches for the toilet paper without looking up from his phone. After fishing for a minute, his hand hits cardboard. He's out of toilet paper. Shit.

INT. SAFEWAY 3

Zach stands staring at an entire aisle of toilet paper options. Zoom on the prices. The cheapest one is almost \$10. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath in. He swiftly exits the store.

EXT. LIBRARY 4

Establishing shot of Knight Library.

INT. LIBRARY 5

Zach runs up the stairs to the second floor men's bathroom.

INT. LIBRARY BATHROOM 6

Zach tries to take the toilet paper out of a stall. But the library has outsmarted him. The toilet paper won't come out of the plastic holder. He starts unraveling the roll instead, wrapping it around his hand, until he reaches the end of the roll. Once he has the entire roll wrapped around his hand, he stuffs it into his backpack and starts on the next roll.

INT. ZACH'S HOUSE 7

Zach enters his house. ERIC, his roommate, is making a sandwich.

ZACH  
Yo, just picked up some toilet  
paper, we ran out.

ERIC  
Nice, thanks. We're out of mayo  
too, this sandwich bouta be dry as  
fuck.

ZACH  
I'm on it.

Zach sprints out the door. Eric looks confused.

ERIC  
I mean it's not an emergency,  
Jesus.

EXT. EMU

8

Establishing shot.

INT. EMU

9

Shot of the condiments and milk sitting out by the cafe.  
Zoom on the bowl of mayonnaise packets. Zach's hand comes  
in and grabs a huge fistful. Cut to black.

"THRIFTY" in white on the screen.

Credits.

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