HONESTY, ANIMAL CRUELTY,
AND WORKING THE SYSTEM

by

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A THESIS

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Leigh Anne Jaschewy
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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

By

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EXT. BAKERY - DAY

"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

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

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 starring 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.

(CONTINUED)
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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ohhhhh...

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
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

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)

(CONTINUED)
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

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 disgustedly
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

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...yeaah, 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

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 liike hiim...

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

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

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

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... Whyyy?

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.
CONTINUED: 16.

STONE #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

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

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. Lingering shot on Farouk, with puffs of flour coming off his face as he breathes hard out his nose.

EXT. FAROUK’S APARTMENT – NIGHT

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

INT. MONICA’S APARTMENT – NIGHT

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

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

INT. MONICA’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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.
CONTINUED:

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 smotheres it in frosting. In icing, she writes I’m Sorry.

EXT. FAROUK’S APARTMENT - DAY

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

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

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

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

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Monica flirts with a hot guy at the library. He has a gluten allergy, too.
INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. DEIRDRE’S OFFICE - NIGHT

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

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

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

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

INT. CHURCH

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

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

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

DEIRDRE AND ALLIE AND HUNTER

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

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
Deirdre opens the door.

INT. HUMANE SOCIETY OFFICE - DAY
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

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

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

Ooooon 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

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

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

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

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

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

DEIRDR
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
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
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

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

PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT

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

CANDYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!

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.
CONTINUED:

FROSTY
You’re rather...warm...

EXT. ICE TUNNEL - DAY

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

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

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

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.

(CONTINUED)
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

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

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.
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!

(CONTINUED)
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 rel-- 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

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

Santa is nowhere to be seen. Deirdre looks around frantically, then runs from the room.
Deirdre runs down the hallway. Behind her we see Janice slip into Santa’s office.

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...

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.

DEIRDRÉ
Aha! Gotcha!

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 NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO...

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
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
Janice sits in a circle with several people.

JANICE
Hi, I’m Janice, and I’m a workaholic.

WORKAHOLICS
Hiii Janiiice.

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.
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.

Deirdre rides on Rudolph’s back, as the nine reindeer fly through the night sky.
INT. DEIRDRE’S OFFICE – DAY

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

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)
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

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

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

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

Establishing shot of Knight Library.

INT. LIBRARY

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

INT. LIBRARY BATHROOM

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

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

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

   (CONTINUED)
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
Establishing shot.

INT. EMU
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.
Bibliography


