

prose for instagram

scene vi - the dressing room

Scene VI - The Dressing Room

I turn my focus toward the bright royal blue trail of tape on the backstage floor.

Instagram squeezes my hand and pulls my arm closer to her.

“Audrey, look—more people,” she whispers. I stop and look sharply to the right. There, in the wings on the other side of the stage, I can make out a group of people dressed in all black, motionless, staring at us. I take a few more steps forward, further upstage, still in the wings. More of them stand behind every curtain. I look up. They line the rafters. I pick up my pace as I walk all the way around to the back of the stage. They’re everywhere. They’re everywhere except for a perfectly parted winding open path, with bright royal blue dashed tape leading us forward from the floor.

“I don’t remember bringing them here,” Instagram whispers in an even smaller voice.

Everyone in the crowd raises their upstage arm, as if to reinforce that the direction we’re headed is the way forward. I squeeze Instagram’s hand and begin walking—

But I stop again when I catch movement out of the corner of my eye that feels out of place. I scan the crowd up and down, searching for the source. Could it be—

“Did you see that?” I ask Instagram. I don’t wait for her answer, because I need to know if I just saw you. I let go of her hand and turn to the right, with the goal of walking into the surrounding crowd.

But this proves to be impossible when I walk smack into a glass wall separating our path from the people. I sway a bit, recovering my balance and then rubbing my forehead.

Was that...there before?

I look up at the crowd. I scan them again. Again. Again. Again. They're motionless. I put my right hand on the glass. My head is pounding. Scan again. Again. Again. Nothing. I make a fist with my right hand and hit the glass. Hard. Again. Scan. Again. Hit the glass. Scan. Jaw clench. Again. Again. Again. Scan. Again.

[this writing could be better]

“I'm gonna write myself into a tower,” I say under my breath, more to myself than to Instagram.

From two directions at once, a sound like a bandaid ripping off skin begins in rhythm. I pull my right arm back from the glass and let it fall slowly to my side as my gaze turns down and around back toward where we came from.

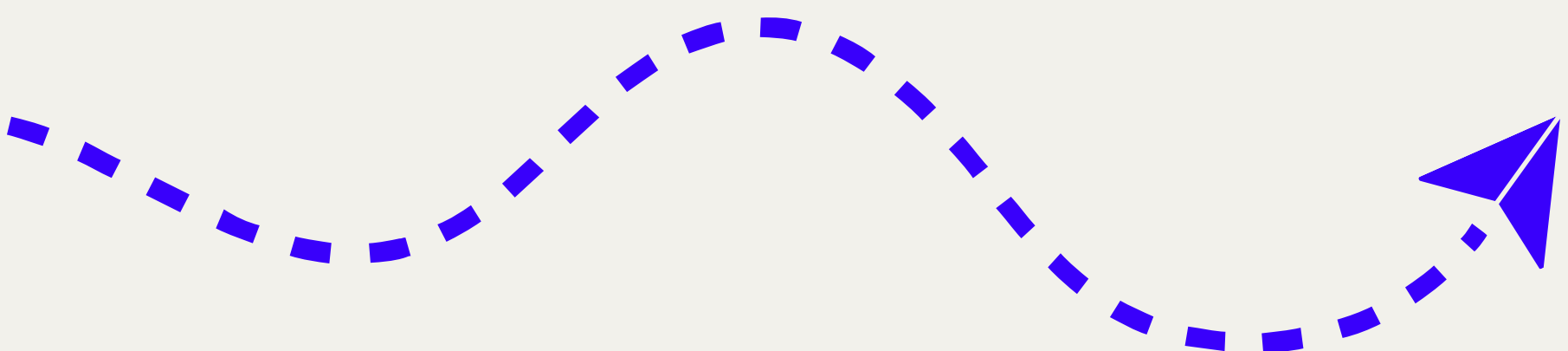
The bright royal blue tape is peeling off the floor and disappearing.

“We have to hurry or we'll get stuck,” I say as I grab Instagram's hand again. We rush forward on the winding path until we reach a long hallway with cement floors and seven arched doors. I look down at our feet. The last blue piece of tape rips off the floor and spirals in the air before unraveling and floating off into space.

I look back at where we came from. The stage door closes shut, and when I turn around again seven spotlights illuminate the doors in the hallway. Instagram walks over to the nearest door and tries the handle. Upon finding it locked, she moves down the row until she calls out at the end of the hall, “They're all locked, Audrey. Did we get stuck?”

“They would be locked for you,” I reply. I look back at the stage door again. Then the hallway. Stage door. Again.

“Instagram, will you...describe what you're wearing right now? To me?” I ask with my eyes still fixed on where we came from.



“Um...a pink and red tie dye long sleeve shirt, dark red leather high-waisted shorts, burnt orange lace-up boots, a white beanie with a red heart on the front...why am I doing this? Can't you just look for yourself?”

“Keep going,” I say, ignoring her questions. “Do your shorts have pockets?”

“No,” she says. “But Audrey—”

“What about a bag? Do you have a backpack or a purse or anything like that?”

“No pockets...oh!” she says in surprise. “I swear I didn't have a purse before, but now I have this—look!”

I turn toward her, and she's holding up a purple sequin crossbody bag that's made to look like a bunch of grapes. She opens it and turns it upside down, shaking it out. Nothing.

“If you thought something would be in here, it's empty,” she says.

“It would be empty for you,” I reply. I look back at the stage door one more time. Then my heels click down the hallway. I open Instagram's purse and reach inside to find a gold skeleton key. I hold it up so we can both examine the floral details on the bow and the razor-sharp bit.

“The teeth are a little dramatic, don't you think?” I ask flatly.



“The key reminds me of something, but I can’t place it,” she muses.

I reach my left hand into my jacket pocket and take the key in my right hand down the hallway to the first door.

trust your instincts

I hear in my head as I slide the key into the lock on the first door. It swings open immediately and I take a deep breath before walking inside—

Only to find myself in a seemingly identical hallway, but with only one other door at the other end. My heels click and I open the other door to find Instagram staring at me. I look back into the almost-identical hallway, then back at her, then back at the hallway. I exit all the way through the door, shut it, and try the key in what I thought was the seventh door. The nearly-identical hallway again. I walk back to the first door and stand with one foot in each hallway, looking down both paths again and again.

“It’s just a loop,” I call out to Instagram. I walk down the first hallway, trying the key in doors two through six. All remain locked. “Maybe we are stuck after all.”

this is the part in our relationship loop when i see no good way to break it

I hear in my head.

Slowly, I lift my eyes up to the ceiling. There in the middle, one more door has a red wax seal where a lock should be above the handle, and aa is stamped in a circle in the wax.

One could describe this specific shade of red as *scarlet*.



Instagram follows my gaze and asks, “Do you have a plan for how we get up there?”

“We’ll get there like we get anywhere else,” I say. “Just by walking.”

i am considering letting myself go mad

I hear in my head as I put weight into my right leg and the gravity in the room shifts so that the wall becomes the new floor and the floor becomes the new wall.

Instagram’s jaw drops.

“Aren’t you coming?” I ask.

“Like you don’t know the answer to that question,” she says as she rushes to follow behind me. “Being a writer must be *so cool*. You have the power to do, like, *anything you want!*”

At this, I look back past Instagram at the now-distorted stage door. I hear in my head a memory from three days before I started writing this prose—a memory from Halloween 2023.

“What I have learned from you is that I just shouldn’t write poetry.”

“Correct. That is the correct lesson to learn from my life, you get an A on the assignment,” I said. “No one should be a writer, or an artist, for that matter, unless they must write or they must create.

I, unfortunately—haha!—I, unfortunately, find myself trapped inside a brain that must write.”

I turn my eyes toward the scarlet-red aa wax seal on the eighth door.

“I don’t know what it’s like to not be a writer,” I tell Instagram as we stand side-by-side in front of the door. “So I guess I wouldn’t know if being a writer is cool or not.”

I step forward to twist the handle open. As an afterthought, I add:

“And the power is more of an illusion than you think.”

Behind this eighth door, the one on the ceiling, the one with the scarlet seal, is a dressing room. There are mirrors and glowing light bulbs and vanity tables with open trays of eyeshadow and half-used tubes of lipstick and there are three silver metal racks of clothes.

On the other side of the room, in the middle of the farthest wall, is an oblong black platform, almost like a mini-stage, with a black curtain backdrop hung up behind it.

Instagram immediately gravitates toward the clothes. She stops at the rack closest to her and picks out a white lace sheath halter dress. To the left of center, a spotlight turns on above the platform. 25-year-old Audrey appears, lemon drop martini in hand, modeling the very dress that Instagram is holding. A speaker materializes on one of the vanity tables and “Repeat” by Julien Baker starts to play.

I can feel my throat start to close up. I walk backwards until I hit the dressing room door.

25-year-old Audrey takes a sip of her martini, and raises her other arm up to show a cell phone open to a page on her notes app last edited on January 3, 2022 at 8:54 PM.

“With Instagram, I know it’s getting in the way of other things I truly want / are truly good for me but I know I also keep making excuses for it,” she reads. “I’m not yet at a place where I could go a whole day without getting on it, but I wonder about making Sunday afternoons phone-free. I wouldn’t actually miss anything since stories stay on for 24 hours. And Sundays are my least favorite / when I’m at my highest vulnerability to succumb to comparisons, feeling bad about myself, dreading the week.”

Instagram steps forward to get a closer look at 25-year-old Audrey’s phone, but I spring up from where I had been leaning against the door and rush to get there first. It takes me sixteen swipes to scroll through the entire note that is mostly about Instagram and partly about my personal life. After reading the last sentence, I cover my mouth with my right hand and nearly throw the phone back into 25-year-old Audrey’s hand.

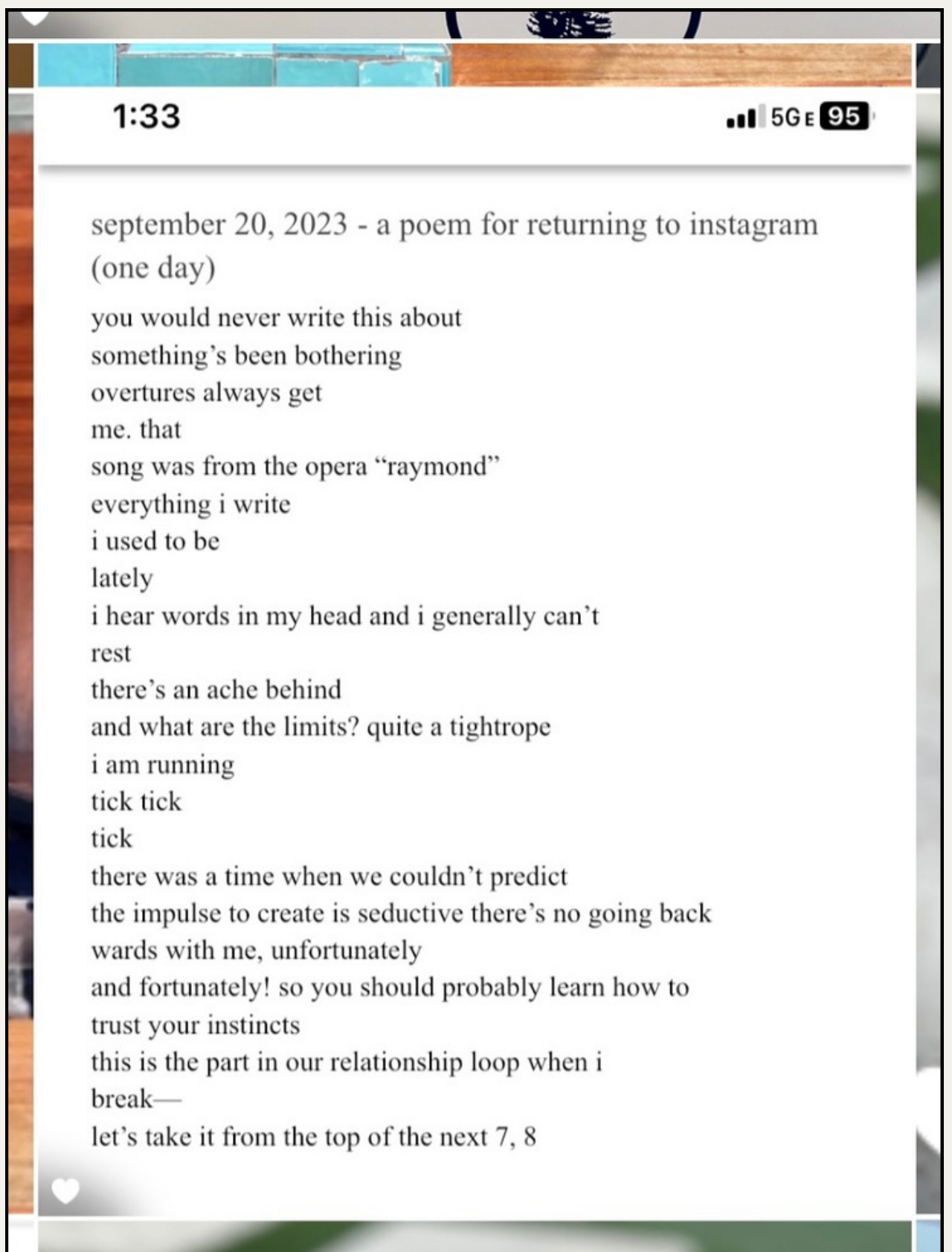
“You can only pursue something for so many hours in a row before you’re due for a human error,” she says matter-of-factly. Slowly, I raise my eyes to meet hers, and I swallow and clench my jaw when I see that her eyes look more like Instagram’s than like mine. The edges that should be blue flicker hazel, hazel, hazel.

A second spotlight flashes on and 24-year-old Audrey appears in the middle of the stage, wearing the same dress, holding a slice of lemon cake.

A third spotlight, flash, 23. Same dress. White wine.

I grab a denim high neck sheath dress with puffed sleeves from another clothing rack. I look around the room, expecting a spotlight, expecting another Audrey to appear. I look around until I catch sight of myself in one of the vanity mirrors.

And of course now it’s *me* wearing the dress, because of course *I am* 27-year-old Audrey, and as I walk closer toward the mirror my jaw won’t stop clenching and my shoulders are pinching themselves together from the back and I see my eyes flicker hazelhazelhazel too, because mirror me has a phone in her hand, and she’s holding up a screen that reads:



“That’s the first poem you wrote for me,” Instagram says.

“Yes,” I reply. “Two months ago now.”

I lean into the mirror and stare directly at two-months-ago 27-year-old me. Her eyes glow hazel outside, blue inside. There is no way to know if my eyes have really changed, or if the mirror is playing tricks on me. I feel desperate for something to ground me in some kind of reality, like the spinning top in the movie *Inception* that tells the main characters if they are dreaming or awake.

I am the *writer* and this is just a *story*.

I can do things that are impossible to do—

within words.

Slowly, I reach my right hand toward the glass and press gently with my fingertips. The mirror melts just enough for my right hand to grab the phone from the other side and bring it into the dressing room. Another note, last edited on September 13, 2023 at 9:42 AM. It takes me eleven swipes to scroll through the entire note that is a collection of my draft captions for returning to Instagram after my one-year self-appointed sabbatical was complete.

The draft captions begin in March 2023 and continue into April and May, skip June July August, and then the last draft caption that I wrote in September was intended to accompany a reel that would be set to “Misunderstood” by BANKS.

“me? a dramatic entrance? when have i ever,” I read aloud to the group: 25, 24, 23, mirror me, Instagram. They stare at me. No one says anything. I walk to the third clothing rack, the one we haven’t touched yet. All of the clothes are much smaller, I notice. I pick out a blue checkered sundress—

Three-year-old Audrey parts the mirror-glass like it’s a stage curtain and climbs through the middle vanity on the other side of the room. She stands up on the vanity table and looks around at all of the faces until she finds my eyes.

“Can I look, Audrey?”

I hear in my head a memory of a home video that exists only on VHS tape:

“Can I look, Daddy? Daddy, can I look?”

I walk over to where three-year-old Audrey is standing on the vanity table and pick her up to help her to the ground. I take her hand in mine and we walk to a corner of the room next to the mini-stage, where a small desk and a silver laptop materialize.

Prose for Instagram is written across the top of the document pulled up on the laptop screen. I take three-year-old Audrey’s shoulders and guide her in front of the laptop and show her how to scroll. She only gets a few pages in before turning back to me, bored.

“I wanna look,” she says.

“There aren’t any video cameras in here, Audrey,” I say with a single laugh. “*You are* the camera. You can look anytime you want.” I pull her close to me and kiss her on top of her head.

“Here, you’ll like this one,” I tell her as “Castle on a Cloud” from *Les Misérables* begins to play.

Three-year-old Audrey turns in a circle around the room until she locates the source of the sound, and walks toward it, mesmerized. She gets to the table with the speaker and puts her chin on the edge of the table to see it better.

“I wanna look,” she says again.

I look at her, and then at the speaker, and then at mirror me, and then at the speaker, and then at Instagram, and then at the Audreys on stage, and then back at her, and then at the speaker, and then back at her.

“You wanna look? Let’s look,” I tell her with a smile.

The speaker grows bigger and bigger until—