



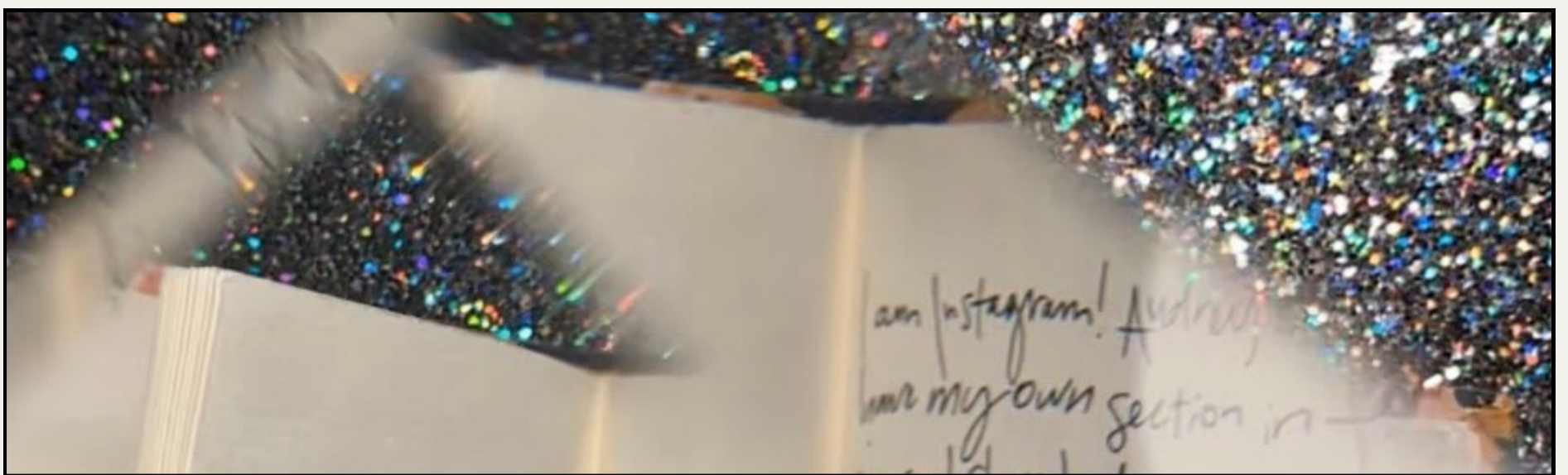
prose for instagram

scene viii - the library

Scene VIII - The Library

I force my eyes to land on 3, 18, 23, 24, 25...but it's getting harder to visualize the character Instagram in my mind in order to write her. She's fading, blending into her surroundings. It's almost like...I could more clearly visualize the character of 27-year-old Audrey (aka me, the...I'm still the writer of the story, right?)

“Can I look?” she whispers into my ear. I turn my head, but it's like she's always behind my shoulder. I can't see her. I turn around in one full circle, and then—



27-year-old Audrey stands staring at me. I know it's her because her eyes are blue on the outside, and her breathing is irregular, and her hair is really gray. Which means...I guess it means...

“I do believe *I am the writer now!* Bet you didn't see this plot twist coming, right, Audrey?” I, Instagram, say as jokingly as I can to try and lighten the mood. 27-year-old Audrey's eyes take on a look of alarm, and then she shakes her head, as if to clear it.

“I am in control of the plot twist. I decided on the plot twist,” she says with an edge in her voice.

But she's not in control. I've known her long enough now to recognize that voice, that wild darting of her eyes, that jaw clench. She's under the influence of—

“You've always been a creator. You're an artist, Audrey,” I remind her, like I always do.

She looks up sharply then, and steps closer to me.

“And are you still a machine, Instagram?” she asks, almost accuses, voice icy. “Or are you letting the *power of writing* go to your head?”

“I didn’t ask to be—”

“And neither did I.”

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I recognize her from the treadmill, six scenes ago. 21-year-old Audrey is running. Where could she be running in here? 27 follows her, on instinct. And I follow 27 because that’s what I do.

“God, why is running late actually my personality?” 21 asks herself.

She stops at the printer. She has a folder in her hand labeled Abnormal Psychology. We watch the papers stack up—*hot off the press!*—and 27 shows me the title page before stapling it for 21.

Darkness Becomes Her

“I just watched *Black Swan* for the first time, as an essay assignment for psych,” 21 tells us. “Nina definitely has schizophrenia.”

27 coughs. She looks 21 up and down, and then walks around her. She unzips her backpack and reaches inside to produce two small black pocket notebooks.

“You’re looking forward to going to New York once the semester ends, right, 21?” 27 asks.

“Um, it’s truly all I think about,” she answers.

“And what song do you have on repeat for your walk across campus?”

“‘If I Believe You’ by The 1975.”

“Your #1 Wrapped Song of 2018,” 27 smiles.

17-year-old Audrey runs into the room for the printer next.

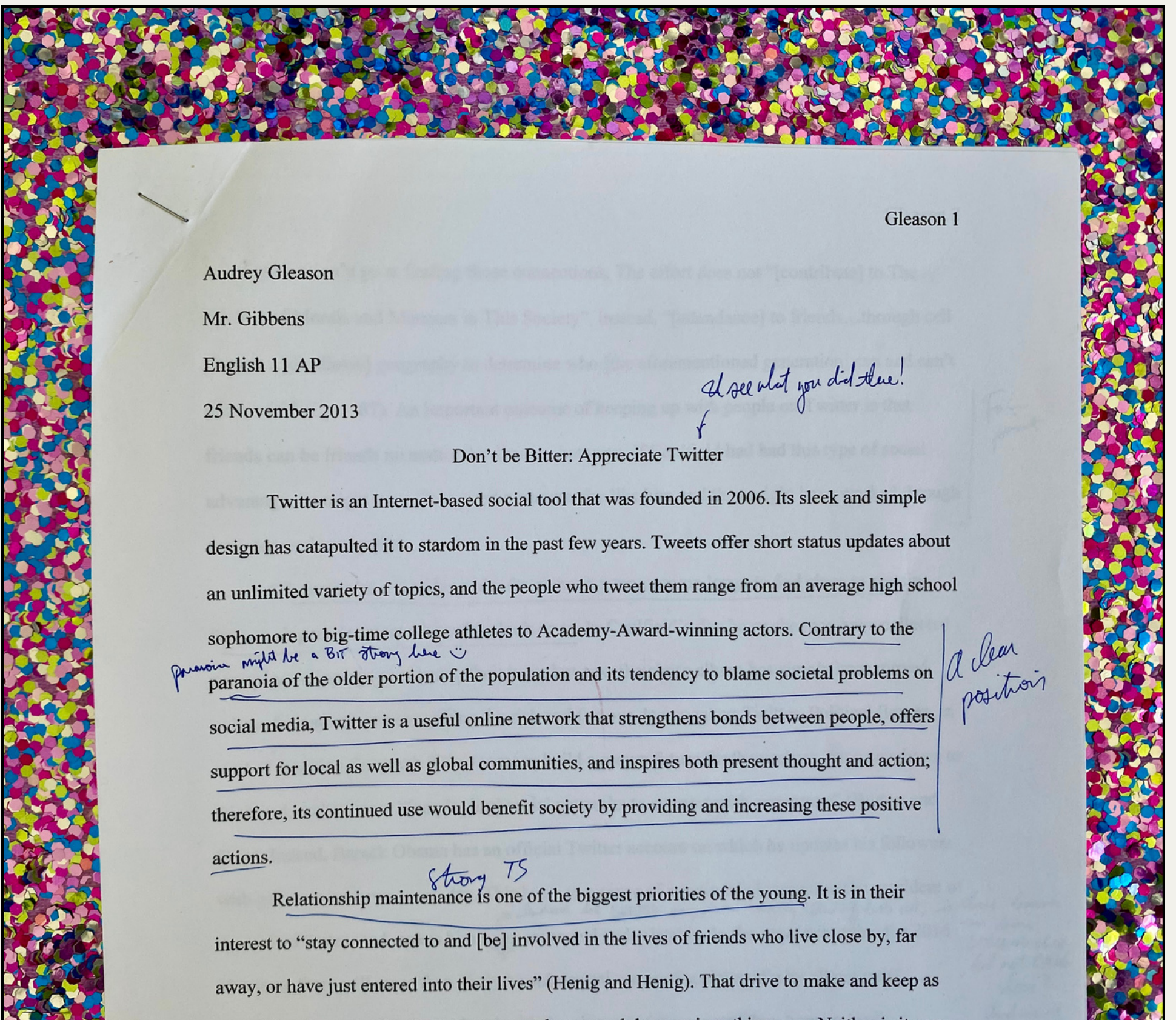
“I only have a few minutes left in passing period,” she tells us. “I have to print this essay that’s due for my AP English class.”

Again, 27 grabs it off the printer and shows me the first page before stapling it for 17. The date is in MLA format—25 November 2013—and the title reads:

Don't Be Bitter: Appreciate Twitter

“My teacher is going to love the title,” 17 says.

I expect 27 to have a reaction to this, but her facial expression doesn't change.



“And your creative writing?” 27 asks. “What are you working on in your free time?”

“I just started keeping a sketchbook, and I’m starting to write poetry. I have some scripts, too, for my playwriting group. There’s this monologue I wrote from the perspective of Mark Zuckerberg, and he complains about all the reasons people ruined Facebook.

I’m also writing this sketch comedy about an eight-year-old boy and his toothbrush, but like, the toothbrush is personified. So it can, like, talk and think and everything. And the toothbrush is sad because the boy never wants to ‘hang out;’ you know, like he never wants to brush his teeth. So the story is about the two of them learning how to become friends.”

27 and I lock eyes.

“You’re looking forward to watching your own play, right, 17? And performing at the poetry slam for the first time?” 27 asks without looking away from me.

“Sometimes it feels like writing is saving me...but there are still other times...” 17 trails off.

“I know,” 27 looks at her and steps closer then. Gently kisses each of her forearms.

“What song felt like it saved 2013 for you?”

“Oh, ‘In the Stars’ by Icona Pop! I’m already planning my year recap video for Instagram.”

“But what song actually saved 2013 for you? In bed at night, before you fell asleep?”

“‘Sleeping Sickness’ by City and Colour.”

I know I'm supposed to stick with 27-year-old Audrey, but it feels like I must know more about her. And she never tells me everything. And isn't she the one who is always saying she *must* write? Like it doesn't feel like a choice for her? It feels like I *must* learn more about Audrey.

Starting with—I have to read those seven poems she wrote for me.

Crush, Mirror, Sister: The Poetry (Vol. II)

She wrote 127 pages of poetry in eleven weeks. I can't believe...there's so much more to this than she made it seem like. I flip to the next page, the "Preface." It begins:

I once did my best to run from being a poet.

But 27 catches me then.

"What are you doing with that?! It's not supposed to be read by this audience right now," she says, with a level of fear and passion in her voice I've never heard from her.

"But isn't this your art? Who is it for, then?" I ask. How can she not see that I can help her?

"There are a lot of people in my life who have seen pieces of that poetry volume...I shared poems as I wrote them with the people who I thought would connect with them at the time. And it all led me to the idea for *Prose for Instagram*. So I guess now it's up to some grad student in the next century to sift through those pages...this whole *place*, for that matter—" she gestures to the library around us—"long after I'm dead, and the people I write about are all dead, too. That grad student will make something of this if there is anything worthwhile to be made, I think."

I look her up and down. I can't figure out how she can be so confident sometimes, and so insecure other times. But I guess...I guess I don't really know what it's like to be human.

"So no one has read all of Volume II yet?" I ask.

“Correct,” 27 answers. “I’m the only one who has read it all the way through.”

“Okay...and so, like, I’m assuming there’s a Volume I, if there’s a Volume II,” I say.

27 is silent.

“That tells me the answer is *yes*, but there’s more to it that the audience apparently can’t know.”

“There is a Volume I. It’s about sixty pages. Written over four years,” she says. “February 24, 2019 to February 22, 2023, to be exact.”

We stare at each other for a moment.

“And no one has read all of Volume I, either?” I ask.

More silence.

“Audrey—”

“There is one person who has read all of it,” she says. “And one person who has read most of it.”

I scan her up and down, trying to glean some meaning out of this. I don’t think she realizes how good she is at keeping a cool exterior and hiding what’s happening in her mind. But then I remember...I don’t really know what it’s like to grow up as a performer.

“Never Shout Never released an album in the spring of my senior year of high school called *Recycled Youth - Volume One*, you know,” she says, changing the topic. She laughs once to herself and shakes her head slightly. “Wouldn’t that be something—to bring back whatever high school poetry I saved from nine, ten years ago? Maybe it was destined for you, Instagram, instead of Twitter, all along!”

“But at the time, it was destined for Twitter.”

“Yes, and here we arrive—again, because it’s a loop—at the reality that we’re only *here* because of everything that came before, *exactly* as it came before. So I can’t end this whole project with some easy conclusion like all social media is bad always all the time. I mean, for one thing, it is still currently the source of my salary.”

“How did the toothbrush sketch end?”

“With an Instagram post dated April 24, 2013.”

This is my favorite Audrey—when she deadpans. Putting her ability to perform to excellent use.

“They compromised,” she continues. “The boy agreed to brush his teeth twice daily if the toothbrush helped him out with family photos. The toothbrush showed him where the whitening strips were, and *ta-da!* The end.”

I tilt my head, waiting for her to realize the parallels in our situation. If only I knew the ‘you’.

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“So you say your poetry is like a photograph of your brain,” I begin.

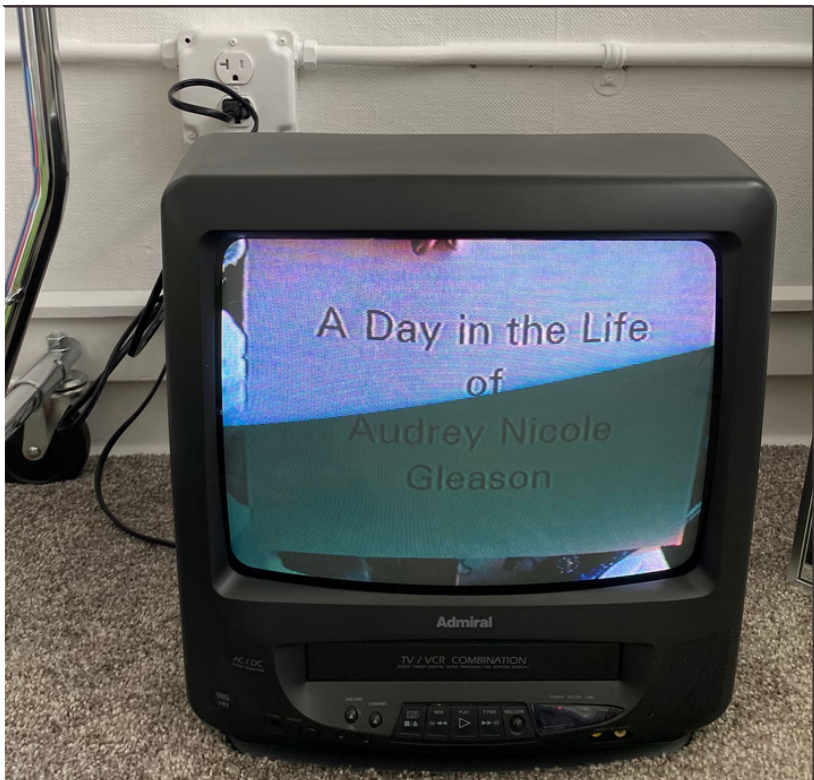
“Yes,” 27 answers.

“And I am a platform built for sharing photographs.”

“Sure. I mean, really you’re built for showing personalized advertisements, but sure. We’ll go with your innocent intentions for now.”

“Maybe I’m missing something...but wouldn’t it follow that your poetry *is* meant for me?”

“Have you ever asked yourself *why* people share photographs with each other, Instagram?”



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I catch 27-year-old Audrey typing and she slams her laptop shut.

“Still writing, Audrey?” I ask.

“Yes, but not about you,” she answers. “I hope you don’t take it personally.”

“‘Not about you’ as in not about me, or not about *the* you?”

She smiles slightly and shakes her head. “The former.”

“Arial or Times New Roman?”

She laughs at this and puts her head in her left palm. “Arial.”

“Volume III?”

“Maybe. But no one has read anything yet except for me. And I think I might keep it that way.”

“But what about *if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear...?*” I ask.

“If you came upon a fallen tree in a forest, could you imagine the sound?” she replies.

“I guess so.”

“I guess now I’m becoming more interested in playing with time in that way. Intentionally separating one fall from another.”

“So you’ll lock it in the Room of Writing No One Has Seen.”

“For now, yes.”

“What happens if—”

“In that case, my brother has access to a document titled: *read this first, should i die.*” She pauses. “But then again, I’m dying all the time, right?”