



prose for instagram

prologue // scene i - the coffee shop (intro)

Prologue

Something I have been struggling with lately is the idea that I am actually *never* not writing.

Because even when I'm not at my laptop or on my notes app or with my journal, even when the words in my head aren't screaming at me...even then I am living my life and I might write about this moment after it becomes a memory in my mind at some future date.

I am beginning this prose (epic essay? graphic novel? digital scrapbook? marketing campaign? art project?) on Friday evening, November 3rd, 2023, after spending nearly two hours laying on the floor of my home studio, finally seeing and hearing the character *Instagram* come to life in my mind for the first time.

I find it relevant to emphasize here that the *only* reason I am able to begin writing a personified Instagram character on this day in the fall of 2023 is because I am nearly nine months into my one-year hiatus from my personal Instagram account.

A lot of change has happened in my life this year. I made a lot of decisions I'm not sure I would have made had I remained active on social media.

We'll get into some of that.

But I didn't spend a year away just to come back and share *every little thing* you missed.

Something I have been struggling with lately is the idea that I am actually *never* not writing.

My first post on Instagram is dated Sunday, November 25th, 2012, and the caption reads, “Hello Instagram, what you’re about to see is my life in pictures. Let’s start with one that describes me.”

The image for the post is a picture of Polaroid photographs from my childhood. There are three strings featuring fourteen Polaroids total, all hanging via clothespins: five on the top row, then four in the middle row, then five on the bottom row. I had arranged the Polaroid display on my bedroom door in my parents’ house, where I lived at the time.

Since I was 16 at the time.

I think it made sense to me that if the Polaroids were the introduction to my bedroom, they should also be the introduction to my Instagram profile.

In my experience of existing as a teenage girl in the 2010s, the most common thing to do was to hang out in each other’s bedrooms and talk. About school and dance team drama and boys and music and TV and our families and what we wanted to do next summer and what we wanted to do after graduation and God and pressures and mental health and how does so-and-so manage to do *everything* and—

**“Hello Instagram,
what you’re about
to see is my life in
pictures.**

**Let’s start
with one that
describes me.”**



If I had thought of her as a character at the time, I would have known Instagram was only two years old then.

I used to babysit quite a bit in middle and early high school, you know. I used to walk to this house on the next street over in our suburban subdivision. I started watching them when the boy was maybe five or six or seven and the girl was maybe two or three or four. One time I was playing Candyland with the girl, and she was losing pretty badly.

I had lucked out on drawing the card to skip ahead to Princess Lollipop, but she had drawn cards that forced her to fall back to the beginning. She was getting upset, on the verge of a tantrum. When she wasn't looking, I flipped through the deck of cards until I found Queen Frostine. I slipped it on top and told her it was her turn.

“Ohhhhhhhh!” she cried out, a smile breaking through her tears.
“Look! Look!”

“Wow, you get to skip so far ahead!” I said enthusiastically. “Look, you're even farther than me now! I bet you're going to win the game!” I feigned disappointment at the end. She beamed.

I was getting paid to babysit regardless of who won Candyland.

And babysitting was easier when I didn't have to teach the children painful lessons on how to deal with losing and the general unfairness that is existence. After all, it was just Candyland. And it was just one night. I just wanted to count down the minutes until the kids' bedtime so that I could read in silence on a Friday night.

“Hello Instagram, what you're about to see is my life in pictures. Let's start with one that describes me.”

I could have been Instagram's babysitter, but I didn't think of her that way because I didn't think of her as a person.

I didn't think of Instagram *as a person*, but I thought Instagram made *existing with people*...better.

I didn't spend a year away just to come back and share *every little thing* you missed.

No, see—all I've wanted, all along...is just to make this

into art !



Scene I: The Coffee Shop (Intro)

We had agreed to meet at 2pm, but running late is one of my most consistent personality traits. It's 2:26 when I slide into the crowded coffee shop with windblown hair and a flushed face. She, of course, is already seated at a table by the window, left leg crossed over right, slick straight shiny golden-blonde hair, a face glowing both warm and cold somehow.

My stomach drops a staircase. How is she always so—

She looks up at me then. She doesn't even need to scan the room for me. She looks up once and finds my eyes immediately. Her face is blank for a second before she remembers the human thing to do is to smile. And then her smile reminds me of checking my phone when the lights are off in my bedroom that has no windows. The bright white iMessage landscape light is always jarring, but—

Sometimes it's nice to know I don't live in a dark, dark room all alone.



She smiles, and waves for me to come over. It is satisfying to cross the tile floor in my heels. I know I look good today. Obviously, I made sure I looked good for her today.

“Hi! I’m *so* sorry I’m late,” I say. “Somehow I always think that printing at the library will only take five minutes, but it’s never not a whole situation.” I set my bag down on the floor next to our table, and when I stand upright there she is, arms outstretched.

“Oh, it’s totally fine! I’m just *so* thrilled to see you!” she says in an even higher-pitched tone as she hugs me. Each of her elbows is bent at precisely the same angle, and her spine is cold metal. Her hair brushes my arms and I don’t know how I know her hair is synthetic but I know. I am the one who pulls away first.

“You’re not mad, then? At my choice to spend a year apart?” I ask.

“Audrey, *of course* I’m not mad,” she says. She sits down then, and I follow her lead. “I got you an iced chai with a shot of espresso and almond milk, by the way. A special treat in honor of our reunion.”

I glance down at the plastic cup nervously. *There has to be a catch—*

She locks eyes with me then. Looking into her eyes is eerie. Exactly like mine, but also the opposite, somehow. Golden hazel ring on the outside...spiky blue halo around the pupils.

“I’m not mad,” she repeats, smile wiped, expressionless eyes still locked on mine. “I always knew you would come back to me.”

“Is that so?” I ask flatly, suddenly remembering my heels clicking across the floor. I look good. I don’t have to be scared of her.

“Without a doubt,” she says. “You love me, Audrey.”

“That’s ridiculous,” I say with a laugh-cough. “You’re thirteen years old. My life without you has been so much better than it ever was when we were together every day.”

Her quasi-human smile flips on again then. She looks to the right, and then down, and then at the table, and then brings her eyes back to mine. She tilts her head to the side a bit as she takes a drink of her iced coffee without breaking eye contact. Then she swirls her straw in the ice to drag out the silence just a few beats longer.

“What is it that you were printing at the library?” she asks. I blink a few times. She notices.

“I, um...so I wrote a lot last year,” I answer. “I wrote more than 450 pages of prose and poetry. At first, I thought I was working toward publishing a book, but then I realized that sharing these curated writing excerpts for specific people in my life was an art project all on its own. And at first, I was writing entirely in prose, but then this shift happened in July—”

“I’ve been *dying* to know what you have to say about July.”

My shoulders shrink just a bit, and I exhale as I look down at the table. I take a drink of the chai, and wait a few moments to check if my body has just been poisoned. A faint echo from an August poem runs through my mind:

today could be that day for either one of us

“The only thing *you* need to know is that my prose is very different from my poetry. By mid-October, I found myself with these seven short and sweet ‘Poems for Instagram,’ but no substantial prose. The day I realized I would need to go back to prose for you before writing anymore poems, I sat back in my chair and looked out the window and I felt like I finally found what I didn’t know I was looking for all year.”

“So that’s what you have with you from the library,” she says quietly. I nod and risk my life on another drink. I don’t care anymore if it has poison or not. I’ll drink it anyway.

And now it is my turn to bring my eyes to hers as I lean across the table.

“I’ve titled it, *Prose for Instagram*,” I say with an edge in my voice. Her shoulders shift. I notice. I look to the left, and then down, and then at the table, and then bring my eyes back. I cross my right leg over my left without breaking eye contact. “You’re not scared to read it, are you?”

“Of course not,” she says as her eyes dart around the room before inevitably finding their way back to mine again. “I’m just *so* glad you didn’t cut me off completely. You know, like you did with Twitter in 2015.”

I laugh once.

“Oh, Instagram! I wouldn’t dream of it,” I say. “*Don’t you know I love you?*”

Her face goes blank again, and I reach into my bag for the envelope. I slide it across the table. She touches the edge with her right index finger, then her middle finger, ring finger, pinky. She inhales sharply, then grabs the envelope with her thumb and opens it quickly. I watch her flip through the first few pages and then fan out all the blank ones behind them.

“I don’t understand,” she says. “Why are there only three pages with words?”

“Look at the fourth,” I say.

She looks at the page. Then she looks at me. And then she looks back at the page. She watches the words appear one by one before her eyes. And then she looks back at me.

“You can scream now,” I say.

“That’s ridiculous,” she says. “What is this, some kind of joke?”

“*I am the writer of this story, Instagram*,” I say slowly. “And this is only the opening scene.”

I feel her eyes on me as I reach for my bag and stand up to leave.

“What fun this will be!” I say. “And thanks for the coffee. Next round is on me, I promise. I won’t be late.”

As I walk out the glass door back onto the street, I catch a glimpse of my reflection—the winter afternoon sunlight falls on my graying hair and my eyes are bright and my jaw isn’t tight anymore.

I really do look good today.

