did i tell you about my date last night?

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did i tell you about my date last night?

BY PALWASHA AZIMI

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN FILM AND ANIMATION

COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

DECEMBER 2019
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ABSTRACT

*did i tell you about my date last night?* is an animated short that illustrates a transformation in two characters who are experiencing their date together in different ways.

This film gives a small taste of a larger story that all women go through, whether or not they know it’s happening.

It is a tale of toxic masculinity, gaslighting, consent and entitlement. These things have been ever-present in history but never contested and brought to light on a scale like this. Recently, these issues have risen to the forefront of social change. Now, because of the internet, the support of allies, and a newer, well-rounded definition of feminism, women are becoming vocal in response to the suffering that has been inflicted on them.

Animation allows for short and concise storytelling. In animation, dialogue, gestures, settings, and even the style can all be used to give information to tell a specific story. With animation, I felt that I could create a film in which the audience could visualize and understand the impact of this toxicity in society. By animating this type of interaction, I could pull from reality and exaggerate to make a clear visual. This story needed to be told and I wanted the audience to learn from it. I wanted to continue this specific discussion of sex education through my art.
INTRODUCTION

The impact of the specific toxicity explored in *did i tell you about my date last night?* has affected every woman, and on multiple fronts. It has not only impacted them as individuals, but has also damaged their relationships, their work environments and society as a whole. With that, women feel pressured to behave themselves, to react kindly in unsafe interactions with men. This has impacted generations. Our society has allowed, and at times encouraged, men like Chad, *did i tell you about my date last night?’s* main antagonist, to think tactics that undermine women’s work. The prevalent mindset that sees the female body as “less than,” is the way to go, and if you disagree, “you’re not a man,” is degrading our entire culture. Society has recently removed this muzzle of silence and has opened the floor with a somewhat safer place for women to speak out.

This idea of pressuring a woman to have sex is an idea that permeates our culture. There are many films throughout film history that depict this idea, especially in the genre of romantic comedies. Many films show that a woman’s reluctance is normal and that wearing her down is how courtship works. According to Pop Culture Detective on YouTube, this happens in a lot of Harrison Ford movies as well as films about teenage love from the 1980s. I bring up Harrison Ford because during the height of his film career, Indiana Jones, Han Solo, and Rick Deckard were protagonists that represented the epitome of the American man. However, paying attention to any romantic scenes in these films, it can be seen that many of them perpetuate the idea that persisting even when a woman verbally and physically does not consent is how to “get the girl.” The Pop Culture Detective goes on to mention that the most romantic scene from *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* includes eight different ways in which Princess Leia rebuffs Han Solo’s advances. Han Solo ignores and disregards her each time. Though the scene may be meant to be
understood that Princess Leia has secretly wanted Han Solo the whole time, therein lies the problem. It implies that when women say “no” they really mean “yes” (Pop Culture Detective 2017). Because of these and many other films, the ideas of masculinity, men, and romance with women have been skewed and thus a reeducation of these ideas have started.

An article on Babe.net came out in 2018 in which a girl named Grace, describes her experience of going on a date with Aziz Ansari, an actor and stand-up comedian. Grace mentions Aziz’s persistence in trying to engage in sexual intercourse, despite her consistent verbal and nonverbal cues of denial (Way 2018). This touches on several subjects that are of importance in our society today, namely, the subject of consent being the most important. I was bothered by the idea that Grace’s verbal and nonverbal cues were brushed off and not acknowledged. Reading about Aziz Ansari’s sleazy behavior, I felt several emotions; Uncomfortable with Grace’s experience, angry at Aziz and guys that act similar to him, and finally, sad because her story is not unique. Women encounter men like Aziz often, and unfortunately the stories of those encounters don’t make an impact.

This became an important theme in my thesis film. I wanted to show nonverbal cues by animating body language to represent disinterest or contempt as well as verbal cues by writing dialogue that was clear and got to the point. Grace took matters into her own hands and texted Aziz after their encounter. She pointed out his inappropriate actions and how they made her feel. She did not expect an apology but rather wanted to inform Aziz so that no other woman would have to go through the terrible experience she did. She also decided to talk about it on Babe.net. Although many people would disagree with this decision, I personally don’t think it’s anyone’s role to tell a survivor what to do in order to find justice in what happened. As Tarana Burke discusses in a #MeToo anniversary article for Teen Vogue magazine, “I can educate about
alternatives and other things, but it is not my position to tell you that this is what justice should look like for you” (Mukhopadhyay 2019). By Grace going to Babe.net, and having them publish this story, I felt it was an important moment in the #MeToo movement and for several women that read the article. This story was not unusual. This story was ordinary. And that is why it should be talked about.

My story deals with themes of consent, aggression, and empowerment. The thought of a date can be terrifying for both parties but there are aspects of a date in which women can find themselves confused and concerned. My film includes Chad, the antagonist, consistently pushing the line with Zaara, the protagonist. Even with nonverbal cues from Zaara, he continues his aggressive behavior. His words and actions become more predatory, and it becomes more apparent as he mutates into a monster. His actions become increasingly aggressive throughout the date until Zaara decides to verbally communicate her discontent towards his behavior, at which point Chad turns his aggression to the maximum. Zaara, with her clever wits, turns the situation around. She utilizes his wants and sends him far away from her. The film ends in a triumph for Zaara because I wanted to give an empowering ending for Zaara, as well as the audience that connects with her.

PREPRODUCTION

STORY DEVELOPMENT

A year before starting my thesis, I took a class that challenged me in the way that I assemble and come up with ideas. Ideation and Series involved different methods of compiling thoughts and expanding on a theme or a concept to later simplify and bring it back into focus. In
this class, I started to develop ideas for my thesis film. I started with analyzing my previous two films and their themes. I wanted to continue down the path of telling my truth and my perspective. With the #MeToo movement being very prominent in the news, I thought I could venture and look at that as a theme.

#MeToo came about because Tarana Burke wanted to affect change in society. As she mentions in an *InStyle* video about badass women, her first encounter with a survivor of sexual violence was challenging; She felt saying “me too” wasn’t enough. She started the MeToo program to create a space for young people that had so much empathy that it created courage. After receiving positive feedback, she went to the internet. One of the messages that #MeToo encourages is that “We’re not going to let this woman be erased.” About the issue of sexual violence, she also mentions, “If you’re not a survivor, you know one, because it’s just that pervasive” (InStyle 2019).

When thinking about how this idea of masculinity and respect is explored by other artists, I found Rebecca Sugar, the creator of *Steven Universe*, to provide useful insight that helped me with my own work. She is a creator that has made a universe in which the men are portrayed as caring and affectionate. Her show is an actively battles the repressive culture of masculinity that has been built by our society for so long by portraying positive ideas about relationships and communications in a children’s cartoon. By showing vulnerability in men and how to mutually support each other in friendships and other relationships, it builds a good foundation for children and teens growing up.
Figure 1.1; Rebecca Sugar, Steven Universe (2013), Steven and his friend, Connie.

Figure 1.2; Rebecca Sugar, Steven Universe (2013), Steven and his dad
For Thesis Prep Seminar, we were required to create a proposal, assemble a committee along with an advisor, and have them sign off on a thesis film idea. For this class I developed a longer version of the film I ended up with. After sitting down with my thesis proposal committee, I was informed that my proposed film was going to be too long and I was given critique on how to simplify the story down further. Immediate changes after my thesis proposal that were approved included:

- having the entire film take place at the restaurant,
- having the antagonist’s character arc of developing into a monster be exponential and clear to the audience,
- developing the protagonist and making her a bit more proactive so that the audience can really empathize with her,
- making sure that the audience understands the reasoning behind the antagonist’s transformations and that they directly correlate with his actions or dialogue.

In order to reorganize the story changes made, an early version of the beat board was developed to help me move the story along.

**BEAT BOARD**

1. Girl is nervous for her date
2. Therefore, she tries to impress her date (antagonist),
3. But he (antagonist) is secretly a monster
4. Therefore, the date eventually becomes uncomfortable,
5. But the girl thinks it’s in her mind
6. Therefore, she continues the date hoping that it will go away,
7. But she finds out that it’s real
8. Therefore, she attempts to take control and leave the situation,
9. But he (antagonist) makes it difficult for her to leave
10. Therefore, the girl must confront him and tell him how she feels.

At first, the story revolved around the idea that Chad was turning into a monster and Zaara was imagining it. He would appear a monster for a few seconds, and then dissipate back into human form. She would later come to realize that wasn’t all in her head—that he was, in fact, exhibiting monstrous tendencies, and that she was specifically able to see them. The story later would change to Chad accumulating his monster attributes, and Zaara would be able to see them the whole time. It would be recognized that this was a type of normality in their world. With this change, the idea of Chad being a monster was more definite for the audience and not entirely about the uncertainty of Zaara’s thoughts.

Making sure that I developed the characters through their actions, dialogue and their reactions in certain situations was extremely important in order to make sure the film flowed, didn’t feel stale, and seemed realistic.

With certain basic characteristics for each of my characters, I enlisted my youngest sister to create a couple of birth charts for them. This would be something that I could always go back to and reference when I would write dialogue or determine what reactions my characters would have.
**Figure 2.1; What a natal chart means (2019).**
Figure 2.2; Chad’s natal chart (2019).
Chad, the antagonist, was easiest to create and write for. After conferring with my classmates and friends, we could agree that we all knew many Chads and that I had an endless amount of reference for dialogue, actions, and reactions. Chad needed aggressive movements and disinterested poses.

Writing for Zaara, the protagonist, proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. While her character is more shy, subdued, and submissive, I need to make sure that she could still be empathized with. Rather than her being passive through the film, she also needed a
character arc that would build up to her standing up for herself. Subdued Zaara needed subdued movements, more focus on her facial expressions, and slight changes in posture.

I made a list of themes that were important to the film that I needed to come back to throughout the film:

1. Zaara wants a boyfriend to feel worthy, but she needs to feel worthy by herself.
2. Zaara wants to experience a good date, but she needs to understand how to get out of a bad one.
3. Zaara wants to believe that guys can be nice, but she needs to understand that they can also be problematic.
I created thumbnails, shown in Figure 3.1 below, using dialogue and actions of the film from my original proposal story.

*Figure 3.1; Early thumbnails (2018).*

I wrote the story and visual elements that I wanted to include in the film, especially Chad’s transformations. I was piecing together a story with actions and events on notecards all laid out in my living room. I had a lot of blank cards in the beginning.

Here is when I started developing visual language for my film. This was a daunting task. I have never thought of myself as a good storyboard artist, and even with two years behind me in graduate school, I felt very inexperienced. My first two films were more graphic and included no
background details in each shot. This was my first time storyboarding and seeing a film to completion.

Storyboard and animatic were the most time-consuming part of the process. I knew that these would be more of the difficult tasks while making this film. I spent about five months in this phase—much longer than expected. This would be to the detriment for screenings and the final film, because I had trouble creating a storyline that was simple with a well-defined theme and ending, I spent more time on those elements and not enough in production.

I had many ideas that I wanted to show in this film. Things such as the line between sexual assault and awkward sexual experience, how consent works with the guilt of owing men, and how to use your voice without ruining a date. Sifting through those ideas and choosing which ideas made sense was a very arduous process. I discovered that a lot of these issues that women face, have to do with hurting the ego of men. Because my film was a darker type of humor, it was difficult to decide which jokes would not be too jaded, cause extreme offense, or be considered too subjective. I wanted to deliver it in a way that would be easier to consume, and comedy does that very well. A lot of comedians and comedy writers explore difficult subjects in their work.

I needed to make sure that it was understood that Chad was not a good person and that his actions were very uncomfortable. Dialogue needed to be thrown out and more clever visual elements needed to be included. In early renditions, the film took place in and out if the restaurant. The protagonist would be outside the restaurant, followed by a series of events in the restaurant, and it would end with the antagonist being left outside by himself. While this version included several wipe transitions, the protagonist doesn’t make it clear to the antagonist that his actions were not okay and made her uncomfortable. Instead, she slips away to be ‘rescued’ by
her friend in a car at the end of the date. Though this scenario related to my real-life experiences, it offered no clear, triumphant resolution. Most of the time After seeing this animatic in whole, I realized, with the help of my advisor, that I needed it to have a more significant ending, much like how the film, *Get Out*, a has a triumphant conclusion for the main character. *Get Out*, a horror film directed by Jordan Peele, released in 2017, is about a man meeting the parents of his girlfriend. In the film, what seems to start as a typical interracial dating experience, develops into increasingly disturbing nightmare of a weekend.

I was having such a hard time coming up with an ending for my original story that at one point I had the idea of changing the setting, making it take place at a bar, and having the antagonist hug and cover the protagonist in slime. As she becomes enveloped by the slime, she takes her last breath, and kills the antagonist. She then wipes off some of the slime and heads to her car. I presented this story to my advisor as well as one of my committee members. While this story had much more action and a proactive ending from the protagonist, I was told that that the theme could be misconstrued due to the more evident involvement of alcohol. This was not the route I wanted to go, though it certainly matched up with one of the themes that wanted to pursue; the grey area in which all of this takes place within.

I decided to continue to work on my initial story. I presented the animatic with the protagonist leaving/running away from the situation and ending up in her friend’s car. The message that I wanted to say with Zaara ending the night in her friend’s car was more about women helping women and showing that camaraderie. It was suggested during the critique from animatic night that I needed to make it clear when the antagonist was a monster and to slowly build that transformation. It was also mentioned that I needed clearer body language poses for both characters. Their body language needed to have its own arc and help push the story along.
There was also a critique about making sure that the antagonist’s monster form and actions were sleazy and clever, rather than being outright messy. His behavior needed to be simplified rather than having several attributes to make the character more understandable for the audience.

**SCRIPT**

![Early script notes (2018).](image)

This film needed dialogue because the date includes spoken conversation between two people. There can be non-verbal and verbal cues that can move a date in a certain direction. The dialogue had to create a “cringe” factor that would coincide with the non-verbal cues of the antagonist, Chad, while simultaneously adding to the slow empowerment arc of the protagonist,
Zaara. Writing dialogue was a challenge in the beginning, but I quickly got the hang of it after feedback from my committee members. My first version of dialogue started off as very expository. I got advice on how to manipulate my thoughts for dialogue. I needed to simplify and start conversations in the middle, as if there was a before and after. This helped move the story along and show that more time was passing between the scenes while keeping the dialogue short.

I also had references to help with comedic timing. Comedy is so vast in the way that it can be delivered. I used these references throughout my writing process to help round out my characters, dialogue and story. *The Carmichael Show* was a show that I had watched and looked to for reference in how to write dialogue. The show talked about serious issues in a comedic way. Topics including islamophobia, the second amendment, and Bill Cosby. The delivery of the conflicts and lines were smart and natural.

Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* was also an inspiration as I began to write dialogue for my film. Peele’s script inserted comedy within the film’s horror elements to add punchlines at the end of high stress situations.
Figure 5.1; The Carmichael Show (2015).
After watching several video essays about different styles of dialogue, one stuck out to me the most. The YouTube channel, The Closer Look, has a video called *How To Write Great Dialogue*, that speaks on the difference between dialogue and conversation and that they are two separate things (*How To Write Great Dialogue* 2019). This was an issue I was having. I was writing conversation when I needed to write with more substance, more wit, and more caricatured wordage. A good dialogue exchange needs to be like train tracks, as the narrator in the video explains. It needs to lead somewhere and conclude in some way to further the plot.

After hearing the critiques from animatic night, I knew I had to rewrite my script. I knew of the final conflicts that I wanted to include, so I started to finalize the dialogue as I continued to
work on the animatic. The script was the most important detail of the film. The dialogue needed to feel real and offer an element of cringing to the subtext.

As I was working and listening to stories from other women, ideas for dialogue came flowing. Almost all of my friends and I had an endless supply of inappropriate and suggestive behavior from men that we knew. We talked about things that were said to us in passing, by dates, or just by men that we were friends with at some point. This behavior stemmed from a lack of respect. A Newsweek article from December 2017 discusses a study published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence. The study found that men confuse sexual interest with sexual consent regardless of the situation (Periera 2017). This mode of thinking definitely offers perspective on what women like my friends and I have experienced as well as what we have seen online.

In addition to personal discussion with my peers, I went to the internet to gather more stories. The subreddits, CreepyAsterisks, IncelTears, and NiceGuys were all very funny but also provided extreme versions of men with bad behavior. CreepyAsterisks is a subreddit for posting screenshots of mostly creepy men overusing asterisks in text conversations, thus making the recipient uncomfortable. IncelTears is a subreddit for posting content created by “hateful incels.” The NiceGuys subreddit is for posting content from self-proclaimed “nice guys.” Screenshots of posts from each subreddit are in Figures 7.1, 8.1, and 9.1 below. With these resources, I had enough material. It was just a matter of condensing it and molding it into a story that had an ending.
Figure 7.1; r/CreepyAsterisks (2019).

Figure 8.1; r/IncelTears (2019).

r/MGTOW
Posted by u/22h

BoJack Horseman is bluepilled af

One of my friends suggested me to watch this series and I’m currently on season 4. I’m really concerned about his sanity, since this show is littered with bluepill bullshit.

Unrealistic women, shitting on MRA, praising feminism, telling how manspreading is bad, how female empowerment is great, etc.

I’m really baffled how so many people praise it as such a good show.
I went through several different iterations and endings until I got the final version locked down. In my original proposal, the story concludes at the antagonist’s apartment. I had experimented with other endings that took place in the antagonist’s car, a friend’s car, and finally just stayed within the restaurant. This decision was made to avoid confusing the audience with too many settings, when the story could be simplified by only using one setting.

By December, I had redrawn and timed my animatic to be significantly close to the final version of the film. I was still having issues with an ending visual, so I had gone back and forth

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Figure 9.1; r/NiceGuys (2019).
on include a friend to help Zaara. I came to the conclusion of not having any other additional characters help Zaara with her ending. I wanted to showcase the strength and power that Zaara has within herself. I referred back to references of Chuck Jones’ animations to help me resolve my problem with a sequence in my ending scene. To match the ridiculousness of Chad’s dialogue, Zaara needed to do something just as ridiculous. A slight seduction and whip of her wrist to send the antagonist back to his seat would do just that. I just needed to fill in those words.

In my revisions, I wanted to let the visuals tell the story of how the characters were feeling, rather than the characters explicitly saying their thoughts. In my first version I had Zaara specifically state her interests in order. In later versions I developed that into Zaara bringing up a topic herself as a conversation starter. The dialogue was fairly meaty, and I needed to shorten it down to make it animatable. I simplified a page worth of back and forth down to punchlines and zingers that delivered the same message. Four pages of dialogue were cut altogether. Below, *Figures 10.1 and 10.2* show how I turned something that was more expository into something that was dialogue and visuals to showcase the same feelings I was trying to express.

**CHAD**
Don’t worry, we can start easy. What do you like to do for fun?

**ZAARA**
Let’s see, um I enjoy going to art shows and exhibits, when I have the time of course.

**CHAD**
How do people do that? How do you look at a painting and feel anything? I look at a painting, I see it, but then I move on.

**ZAARA**
Mhmm. Well maybe you just don’t have any personal interest and that’s fi--

CHAD
I don’t understand how people can just spend an hour looking at art.

Figure 10.1; Version 01 of script (2018).

ZAARA
Oh, you know that exhibit? With the big--

CHAD
Oh, you mean at Coquette Gallery?

ZAARA
Yeah, Yes! That one! I just went-- (..there...yesterday..)

CHAD begins to interrupt ZAARA. CHAD’s teeth begin to grow, and his lips become thick.

CHAD
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, haha, looks like a complete waste of time. Once you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all, am I right?

Figure 10.2; Version 04 of script (2019).

AUDIO

Syncing the dialogue and accounting for strong silences in timing were done carefully. I needed dialogue to breathe, to give the audience time to react along with the protagonist.

I recorded scratch dialogue using myself and my friend Sam Horowitz, whom I would later cast as the antagonist. During a meeting with my committee, I was told that Sam’s delivery of these lines had the right nuances of rudeness, and some of the lines I delivered also offered a strong sense of the protagonist’s uncertainty and her development through the film. Based on this
feedback from my advisor and committee members, I was sure to include them in my directing notes when I got to recording with my voice actors.

    I made a status update in the RIT SOFA Facebook group for casting. I had already decided to cast my friend Sam, so I just needed someone for the voice of Zaara and the waiter. I wanted to make sure that my voice actor for Zaara was a person of color, to reflect her character.

    Though I had a completed script by the time I finished the animatic and was ready to record, I was still missing a few lines of dialogue. I went through the part that I was missing with Ericka Hopkins, my voice actor for the protagonist. I gave her a spiel on the feeling I was trying to provoke in the last scene where Zaara seems to seduce Chad with a chance of continuing the date. This collaboration with Ericka resulted in us thinking of a great set of lines that impacted the scene in the way I had envisioned.

    I enlisted the help of Mikaela Kaufman to help with ADR. She was phenomenal, sticking by me for two days in a row, managing all aspects of recording, and even giving creative direction to my actors when I was in need of a decision.

    STYLE DEVELOPMENT

    *This Actually Happens A Lot* is a film by Tom Law, a CalArts student. The film is about two characters at a party. One character, the boy, seems to have trouble talking with people and enjoying the party in general. Every time he would get uncomfortable or awkward, he would cause physical pain to another person or move away and float above someone, close to the ceiling. I admired Tom Law’s line aesthetic in the film and wanted to mimic it. I thought the aesthetic brought a sense of intimacy and approachability. I felt that aesthetic could also work for my film and help connect the audience with the characters and the situation they were in.
I wanted the final look to include boiling and thicker lines to emphasize the boldness and instability of the situation. While I had test shots of the final inking style that I wanted to pursue, they were not put to use. In the end, I spent so much time on the story that I made aesthetic sacrifices in exchange.

CHARACTER DESIGN

I had several artistic references to help guide and articulate how I wanted my story to be portrayed. *It Actually Happens A Lot* is a film that I had been watching on repeat throughout the semester. It’s a great student film by Tom Law that includes dialogue about an anxious situation while also representing it in a visual metaphor (Law 2013). The simplicity of the characters and the way their faces move when they talk were extremely significant sources of inspiration as I hadn’t animated a character before.

*Figure 11.1; Tom Law. This Actually Happens A Lot (2013).*
Figure 11.2; Tom Law, This Actually Happens A Lot (2013).

Figure 11.3; Tom Law, This Actually Happens A Lot (2013).
After watching many films though the semester, one that stuck out to me was *Creep*.

*Creep* is a found footage psychological horror film directed by Patrick Brice, released in 2014, about a serial killer that is super friendly towards his victims before he kills them. Mark Duplass plays a serial killer named Josef. He seems pleasant, albeit a little overbearingly nice. He would slowly say some things that were just a little creepy as the conversation flowed—a sort of testing the limit and revealing small things about himself in a joking manner. In the end, you realize that Josef is a serial killer and therefore he kills again. This influenced the creation of Chad in that he needed to have a disarming look, so that Zaara would feel comfortable interacting with him and it would make the changes in Chad that much more dramatic. Chad’s head shape includes large eyes, a strong jawline and a pointier chin; all to charm, attract, and allude to his rude personality.
As mentioned before, another inspiration for Chad’s actions came from the article detailing the scandal surrounding Aziz Ansari. The actual character design was highly influenced by my friend and voice actor for Chad, Sam Horowitz. I tried to create broad shoulders and a slender body, reflecting Sam’s body type.

I looked at Anna Cattish, a character designer and animator. She had an array of character designs of women. She showed a variety of female characters and forms, and that inspired me to explore different forms for my protagonist. Her character designs highly influenced the style and design for my film.

*Figure 12.1; Early character design for Chad (2019).*
Figure 13.1; Anna Cattish, Winnie (2015), Character poses.
Zaara is mostly based on myself. As the saying goes, “Life imitates art imitates life.” I wanted Zaara to look like no other character I had seen on screen—a character who looked similar to me: my body shape, my skin color, etc.

I experimented with different hairstyles and head shapes as well. Chad’s final look reflects his disarming personality, his tough attitude, and his misleading charm. I finalized the look by giving him a sharper chin, broad shoulders, and a 90’s bad boy haircut.

As I was going through this process of development, I also had to make sure that I was thinking about what this character design meant and what my choices were reflecting. Zaara was rounder with a squared head and rounded hair. Her design reflects her kindness and the confidence she has in herself.
BACKGROUND DESIGN

*This Actually Happens A Lot* and other films by Tom Law were references in how detailed I wanted the backgrounds of my film to be. Shown below in *Figures 14.1 and 14.2*, it can be seen that he uses very minimal amount of lines and objects with a wash of color. I provided these references and my rationale for liking them to my background artist Monica Nguyen.

*Figure 14.1; Early character design for Zaara (2019).*
Figure 15.1; Tom Law, This Actually Happens A Lot (2013).

Figure 15.2; Tom Law, This Actually Happens A Lot (2013).
I wanted the restaurant to feel slightly off. The chairs and tables needed to all be a little different, a little broken; the artwork and the walls needed to be so diverse that they become off-putting.

These were the descriptive guidelines I gave Monica Nguyen-Vo, an animation student at RIT. Monica has experience in background design and illustration. I also offered her a layout of the restaurant, my rough background sketches, and my character designs which can be seen in Figure 16.1. Based on her previous works, I trusted that her style would be appropriate for my film. I gave her significant creative control.
thesis moodboard

it's a french hipster restaurant. everything is just a little off. the chair is a little crooked. the table is a little bruised. the pictures hanging are a little crooked and just a bit wrong and with a funny theme.

the bar
barstools

the bathroom

where the couple is seated

palwasha azimi

chairs

tables
I took on several challenges for this film, including several things in which I had no proficiency. While I overcame some of them, the amount of hard work I put in was not enough to rise up to all of them. My previous two films at RIT were experimental and had no linear
narrative to them. This would not be my first time trying to develop a narrative story in my RIT career, but it would be the first one to go through production. With only one previous semester of learning and practicing character animation, I knew that this would be an extremely difficult task to take on. I struggled with it and in the end, I feel that the final version came up short in terms of desired quality.

This was my first experience using Toon Boom. During the spring term of my second year at RIT, I took a trip to Los Angeles with other animation students, both undergraduates and graduates. After visiting several studios, we came to learn that Toon Boom is an industry standard. It’s mostly used for animating puppets and rigging in 2D, but it also has the capability to drawing frame by frame. I chose to animate with this program to familiarize myself with the software. I definitely came across many significant issues with the bulkiness of the software.

Tom Law’s student films were part of my frame of reference for character animation. His character expressions were strong enough for the audience to understand, but manageable in the way that it was animated. I needed a reference of something that I felt I could handle, as this was a new challenge for me to take on. Animating a character speaking and showing emotion at the same time meant that I needed to move the mouth as well as her head. This required a lot of overacting in order for me to get the posing for my characters.

Eric David Haddad is an animator that creates very stretchy and extreme transformations. In his looped short film called Ritual, he shows off his quick paced animation style. He animates with extreme anticipation and extreme follow through by utilizing exaggeration in the way he showed volume. This can be seen in his other animation tests shown in Figure 17.2 below. He stretches the volume of the characters beard and head from Figure 17.1 to make the
transformation pop when he changes the character’s facial hair to Figure 17.3. This would be useful in attempting to animate the antagonist’s monster transformations.

Figure 17.1; Eric David Haddad, (2015).

Figure 17.2; Eric David Haddad, (2015).

Figure 17.3; Eric David Haddad, (2015).
I ended up shooting reference footage for specific scenes that I had a hard time conveying myself. One such scene was the final scene in which Chad grabs Zaara, turns her around, and hugs her in an attempt to alleviate her anger from earlier. In retrospect, I wish I had recorded myself more for each shot. I think I would have been able to move a lot quicker in my animation.

I started with animating very rough. This allowed me to get more movement into my animation. When I had started my rough animation, I was working with simple shapes and lines because I was having trouble with character acting and I wanted to keep my focus on the action and timing. As I performed for myself to help with my animation, I noticed the timidity in my animation. There were no strong poses, and there was a lack of dynamic movement. This was a tough task without reference. I kept acting and reacting continuously as I was animating. At first, my timing was fairly off, and I had very little movement. Heads weren’t moving, shoulders were still, and props weren’t being used.

I was given the advice to exaggerate my movements more, which I took to heart, but it resulted in creating too much movement in my animation. However, this ended up being good, as it was much easier to dial it back down, rather than amplifying more limited action. I often chose to tone some movements down in order to show contrast between the characters’ emotions and the dynamism of their actions. I was balancing between extreme movement and less movement based on the emotional subtext.

There were a lot of details in the animation, and that didn’t come together until after my rough animation. There were instances in which I had to redo a couple of scenes because I had cut a shot or changed the angle.

As I began rough animation, followed by my second pass, I also maintained weekly meetings with my advisor, Peter Murphey. For these meetings, I would show Peter my work in
progress and we would go shot by shot, looking at the animation. This was invaluable to me. I had several shortcomings within the scope of this project and reviewing actual animation techniques, better character actions, and smarter choices in animation to speed up the process were huge learning moments.

My thesis included dialogue, so it was very important to time actions as well as changes in emotion. Making sure that I had my dialogue recorded beforehand and placed correctly was of utmost importance before starting to animate.

After creating tied down keys and timing charts for several scenes, I decided to seek help with inbetweening my shots. I asked Luke Polito, Asher Bozman, and Kimmie King, animation students at RIT. Unfortunately, this didn’t work out due to time conflicts, and as a result, I ended up inbetweening everything myself. I stopped using timing charts and would mostly animate straight ahead as I went pose to pose. I didn’t have time to chart out the whole shot and go back and inbetween, so I charted in my mind and animated straight ahead.

Monica continued to work on background painting as I continued animating. I would check in with her weekly to make sure we were on the right track. She completed them all, even when late changes in shot angles were made.

I was also in desperate need of help coloring. The problem was that there weren’t any students that had a grasp on how to use Toon Boom to color. I even needed a refresher from my advisor on how to do so. So, I had to invest time in teaching my students the basics of how Toon Boom was used for coloring.
POSTPRODUCTION

MUSIC

I hired a composer, Vahid Ghaderi, to help me bring my film together. This was a friend of my roommate, Maliheh Rahrovan, that had previously composed for her last workshop film. I had a very hands-off approach with Vahid. I provided an animatic with recorded dialogue for him to use for composing. I received a rough composition early on and it sounded fairly good. There were a few tweaks in emotions that needed to be portrayed and changes in instruments used. After asking for those changes, Vahid delivered a new version that would be very close to the final version, because as I animated, some of the timings of the shots and angles of the shots started to change. Though we were working in two different time zones—Vahid being in Iran—I did not feel that it affected our working relationship in a negative way.

SOUND

Gabe Gottlieb was another student that I hired to work on my film. Initially, we had discussed the general sound effects that could work based on the script. I also gave Gabe updated animatics through the semester. I am extremely grateful for his sense of creativity and being able to take initiative. I needed a sound for the teeth and lips that grow on Chad and Gabe created something that sounded like skin stretching and bones cracking. There were a lot of sounds and effects that Gabe experimented with, such as the progressive distortion in Chad’s monster voice. It was an additional element that completed the evolution of Chad’s transformation. These creative solutions in sound allowed for the film to be experienced the way I had intended.
SOFTWARE ISSUES

While animating, I ran into computer problems at the 2D lab in the Magic building, especially within the last month and a half. My practice of saving a new version for every day that I worked on a scene may have led to this. It seemed that because Toon Boom saved each project in a folder, every time I saved, the Mac Pros were not able to handle the file size. At first, I would be able to work on a computer and stay logged in for a day without running into any lagging issues. Eventually, after a couple weeks of this, I was only able to stay logged on for half a day before things started to lag. I was then forced to log out and switch computers in order to continue to work at the same pace. This worked until it didn’t. I wouldn’t be able to switch computers as the semester progressed because of how full the lab would be. Once I began coloring, it was a disaster. Coloring created even more data in each file, and it would get to a point where I would only be able to work on one computer for a couple hours before I had to move again. Unfortunately, I had only reported this issue to the help desk once. When I had reported it, in that instance, the problem was my mouse being plugged into the tablet instead of the computer itself. However, the problem did continue and in retrospect, I wish I had reported this problem to resolve. Because I had found the temporary solution of switching computers, I could not be bothered to report.

COMPOSITING

In the eleventh hour, as I was still coloring, what was in essence my second pass of animation, I realized that I was not going to be able to composite by myself. My roommate and my background painter, and Cynthia Chu, a friend of mine, stepped in to help me. This was an incredible gesture and I cannot thank them enough for the help. Maliheh and Monica took over
compositing in After Effects as I was rendering out each scene from Toon Boom Harmony. In order for them to work alongside each other, I created two versions of my final composition. Monica worked from the beginning as Maliheh worked starting at the end. This became an efficient use of everyone’s skill and time. We then sourced Monica’s file in Maliheh’s file and combined all their work into one final film.

While compositing, I realized that I had not animated efficiently. Bringing in the renders into After Effects and importing the background layers revealed a lot of masking that needed to be done. This was something I wish I had done more research on, both through animation tests and by asking my advisor and committee members for help. This created more work in the final compositing phase, and it would have been an easier task for my compositors to complete.

Unfortunately, I didn’t make the deadline for submissions. I wasn’t able to start rendering and compositing until two days before the deadline. I contacted Peter to see what could be done, and I explained to him that I had been having technical issues for the past month and a half. He reached out and said that could be grounds for a late submission. I filled out the late submission form and got a day’s extension. At that point, I was burning out. I decided to go home and recuperate. Thankfully, Maliheh was able to continue helping during this time.

COMPLETION

I had my second pass of animation, and it was not inked the way it needed to be inked. There were still crosshairs in the heads of my characters. Because animation was a challenge, it had taken me longer than predicted. It also needed more time for refinement. This was time that I did not have. I needed more time at another pass at the animation, an actual inking stage before I should have started to color.
I had gone through many stages of anxiety through the making of this film. I realized at some point that it was going to be what it was. I could only try my hardest to complete it. I could only present what I had done. I could not go on another semester due to the realization of how much more student debt that I would accrue. This version of this film to be presented at screenings was the reality.

SCREENINGS

RECEPTION

In my artist statement at screenings, I was sure to mention how masculinity has devolved and how these characteristics stem from traditionalist, sexist, and harmful perceptions of gender and relationships. I mentioned how Zaara spoke up towards the end of the date. This cathartic ending is important because letting things slide, ghosting, or maintaining a friendship and never addressing the problem contributes to the problem. I wanted the audience to know that Chad’s reactions were very defensive at times, and he was taking things as an attack rather than being open to criticism. He was offended by others being offended by his own offensive behavior, and that is not okay. It’s important to understand that Chad has to learn about why his actions aren’t appropriate, but also, that it’s not Zaara’s job to be an educator.

I had a mixed bag of critique for my film. Some professors understood the incomplete look of the film; some didn’t. Some professors did not understand that the crosshairs in the faces of my characters was not an aesthetic choice and was merely my second pass at animating colored in. There were, however, professors that understood this incompleteness and responded with disappointment. Although I received negative comments concerning the rendering, there
were other viewers that responded well to the positive aspects of my film, such as the story, dialogue, and sound design.

**REFLECTION**

It was important for me to hear these opinions, as it encouraged me to keep working and to understand that I did have success with this film, somewhere. It wasn’t all for naught. Mistakes were made, but some of the challenges were overcome.

I had a significant amount of support in the audience, even with my film being the last one screened that afternoon. I am extremely grateful for that. I do not know how to take compliments in my work or about myself, so I think it was important that I had support from my advisor and my friends during screenings. I had a significant amount of anxiety during the whole day, and they helped alleviate some of that. I wanted to be somewhat proud of my work. I knew that the quality of rendering and finality of the film was not where I wanted it to be, let alone what other students and professors expected it to be. I had prepared myself for these critiques, as I had already torn apart my film over and over again throughout the semester, including what became of the final product. I did want to make sure that people understood what I wanted to say with this film, what challenges I overcame and didn’t overcome with this film, how much this film meant to me, and what I’d hope it would mean to others.

The jokes landed. There were laughs and groans. Zaara was a strong and relatable character, and the audience bonded with her. They wanted the date to be over just as much as she did. The situation the film portrayed resonated with the audience. It was familiar and disturbing, and they were glad she got out of it and took a bite of that biscuit. The film was successful in telling the story I wanted to tell.
I had some tough challenges that I put in front of myself, and not all of those challenges were met with success. From those failures, I have come to learn how I would improve my process. Knowing that I was taking on so many new things, I was behind schedule during both semesters of thesis.

I have come to find that I enjoy collaborating and writing dialogue. In addition, I have found it is important to recognize that collaboration is an extremely important part of the creative process, especially for me. I think, as animators, especially in the graduate program, we are taught to do things more on our own, but it’s important to understand that that means figuring out what kind of support you need and fulfilling that need. We need to understand that no one is great at every aspect of preproduction, production, and postproduction. If we want to learn, we need resources. Whether that be books, video tutorials, or actual people. We should be strong enough to recognize that time management includes task management. How can we help ourselves? I found that collaborating with other students to write dialogue, create background designs, design a soundscape, and compose music resulted in a positive and successful outcome. They helped me get to my goal of a complete film. Not all ideas are within us; some ideas come from others, and that’s okay.

I have come to acknowledge my ability in animating and what would require more time in finessing than others. As character acting was new to me, I would make sure to set aside a significant amount of time to key, inbetween, and run through a second and third pass. Though I feel that the animation in this film is still a work in progress, I have come out the other side a bit more confident and understanding of my mistakes. I am definitely ready to try again and continue practicing.
Alongside this, I wish I had recorded reference footage. In the back of my mind, I assumed that reference footage could not include the exaggeration I was looking for in my animation, and that I should be able to come up with poses while animating. I think that shooting reference footage is a great resource and could have helped me rough out my animation in a more efficient way. I would have been able to utilize the footage and draw inspiration from the poses I would have recorded. I think being able to review footage of my acting would have been a massive timesaver. This could have possibly saved me in my final cut, quality-wise, as well. I would have been able to grab those key poses from my reference footage and applied them to my animation.

I also have come to recognize that there is a limited amount of time during which we are all productive and tasks should be delegated according to that. Working all day doesn’t mean that you were productive all day. Understanding that there is a limited amount of time in which production occurs, and in the future, I will maintain a strict workday to take advantage of that.

CONCLUSION

This film definitely opens up a dialogue about societal pressures, consent, and masculinity. The audience becomes a witness to these pressures by connecting with Zaara. On her date with Chad, her comfortability decreases as Chad’s aggressive behavior does. Watching Zaara’s actions, the audience comes to understand that consent is not that hard to read. They also begin to doubt and question what masculinity means to them when observing Chad’s behavior. The comedy of this film, the punchlines, allowed for the digestion of the disturbing situation that was revealed. The linework and the aesthetic of the final look gave an atmosphere and insight to
the story that would later unfold. I think utilizing animation with this subject matter amplifies the message and is simple enough for the audience to ingest.

An important aspect of this worldwide dialogue that I wanted to discuss included the grey areas, especially in dating, and navigating it. I wanted others to understand how our behaviors contribute to the problem and how we can come to terms with it and change it about ourselves, together. This film includes topics and themes that many people are afraid to speak up on in avoidance of conflict. Mostly because these themes address masculinity and its potential toxicity. Comedy was the perfect way that these topics could be delivered. Writing a comedic story allowed for the audience to digest what they were seeing and not act on the bias that they may have already.

As a woman, I feel I can speak a bit about the things that we go through and the pressures that we feel. I felt it important to acknowledge both sides of the equation. Zaara is a woman that feels certain pressures—pressure to be kind, even when someone speaks to them in an aggressive manner. As women in our society, we are told that being loud, aggressive, and standing up for ourselves is not appropriate. Even after acknowledging the role that the patriarchy takes in this, we continue to feel these pressures, when we should not. When we need not. When our male counterparts don’t, why should we? I wanted to give a cathartic ending to this film, as opposed to what would be many of our realities, because women deserve it. We need it and we should always be able to have it. If we see it, it gives us more hope and inspiration to take control and act progressively in our own lives. I don’t expect everyone that sees this film to spin a man like the Tasmanian Devil with dust and all, but I do have hopes for the future of women. I have to, because what would be the alternative?
WORKS CITED


“#MeToo Founder Tarana Burke on Keeping the Movement Going Strong | Badass Women | InStyle.” YouTube, YouTube, 8 Nov. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP0_diifA3Y.


APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL THESIS PROPOSAL
i went on a date

(working title)

2D Animation

Palwash Aziimi

Thesis Proposal

For MFA in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

March 28, 2018

Approved for submission by

Peter Murphey,
Thesis Chair
SYNOPSIS
A seemingly harmless interaction between two people takes a turn for the worst.

TREATMENT
A nervous and shy Zaara enters a restaurant and faces an awkward situation, a blind date! Before talking to the host, she looks at her phone. She re-reads her date’s Tinder profile, and it mentions that he likes a certain band. She tucks in her t-shirt of that certain band. She meets her date at the table, Chad, who is handsome and smooth. Zaara has never done this before and doesn’t quite know how to behave. Chad gets up, walks to her chair and pulls it out for her. Zaara walks around the table and sits down at Chad’s chair. Chad becomes confused and mentions that he pulled the chair out for her. Zaara becomes embarrassed. Chad says it is okay and sits down. Even with this awkward setback, she is hopeful that this date will go well. However, throughout dinner Chad talks enthusiastically with a tendency of interrupting her and ‘mansplaining’. When this happens, something changes about Chad but she brushes it off. Zaara is unsure whether she should take offense, or if she should be as excited as he is. So, she responds kindly and lets the conversation continue.

Yet another inappropriate comment is made by Chad, this time about her appearance. Zaara is taken aback and looks up from her plate. She is shocked. The man in front of her is now a terrifying monster. She blinks several times and Chad is there again.

For the moment things seem normal again, but Zaara doesn’t quite trust this anymore. She tries to collect herself and takes a big sip of wine.

She uses the napkin to wipe something off of his lips but overdoes it and doesn’t come out romantic or affectionate at all. She snorts at a joke Chad makes and he comments on her laugh. He continues to comment her on her quirks as if he was complimenting her, but they come off as insults. Zaara continues to notice small changes to her date’s appearance, horns appear, fangs flash when he smiles, reptilian bumps grow on his skin. She denies what she sees and brushes it off.

Chad asks her if she has been on other blind dates. Zaara mentions that she has with a girl. Chad makes a cringe worthy comment about her bisexuality and insinuates something sexualized in the manner of only pleasing for him. When he does this his entire face turns into a monster-like form. She doesn’t take this well. Her face drops and she cannot believe that he made a comment like that. Her face cringes and he responds by saying that he was just joking. Chad becomes slightly annoyed and takes a sip of his drink. She opens her eyes from squinting and is in shock to see the monster before her, again.
Chad turns and notices another conversation happening near him. There is another guy on a
date that is hitting on a waitress. Chad motions to the other guy stating how much he hates
when guys do that. Zaara looks up to notice the other guy. She sees monster-like facial
features and appendages. She proceeds to look across the room and notices that more
monsters and humans are having dinner. She becomes overwhelmed and starts to shrink
down in her seat. She starts to hear every monster’s conversation overlapping, loud, and
echoing throughout the restaurant. She looks back to her date and he seems to be a monster
occupied by his phone, and inattentive to her. She eventually becomes too overwhelmed by
all the noise and dashes to the bathroom, only to run into a monster waiter. As she is about to
enter the women’s restroom, she notices the door to the men’s close as a tail slithers in.

She stares at herself in the mirror and tries to calm herself down. Has she imagined all this?
Has she let her hysteria create an embarrassing and awkward situation? She wonders if this
date is going as bad as she thinks. She isn’t sure if it is her fault or his that brought on those
ludicrous comments of his. She looks back to their texts on her phone. They are very flirty and
therefore confuse her more about his current behavior from this date. She thinks about how
Chad wasn’t as bad as the guy hitting on the waitress while on a date. She obsesses over her
awkward mistakes. She questions whether or not it was the right choice for her to go on this
date. She pulls up the Lyft app and hesitates to order the ride. Chad texts her asking if she’s
ok in there and that they can leave if she feels uncomfortable. She cancels the ride.

Zaara comes back from the restroom and sees that Chad paid for the check and says he’ll
bring her home. On the way out of the restaurant we see a tail peek out underneath Chad’s
coat and another male in the restaurant gives him the knowing “monster look” and we briefly
see horns, scales etc.

Chad takes Zaara to his apartment and invites her in. She is so eager to make this date work,
so continues inside. Chad seems to be acting like a gentleman but then slowly tries to give
her a kiss, she doesn’t protest. Chad takes advantage of this and then starts grabbing her
breast and butt. He now takes on a full monster form and Zaara is fighting for her life. The
fight brings her to verge of being devoured.

Zaara finally figures out that Chad really is a monster. She sees herself and him in a reflection
during the struggle. She is finally able to trust what she sees in front of her and instead of
being passive and polite she is able to take action on her own behalf. She then uses her lip
gloss to jab him in the groin. She gets out from under him and quickly leaves he apartment.
She pulls out her phone and orders a Lyft.

The Lyft driver shows up. Zaara is waiting in front of Chad’s apartment. The Lyft driver gets
the car door for her, and as he does he looks over to the apartment and sees Chad stumble
out onto the walkway. He is holding his crotch and moaning in pain. Zaara gets into the car quickly shaky. The Lyft driver scratches his head with the look of, “That must have been some evening.”

In the car, Zaara gives the driver an address, he responds with something benign. Zaara looks slightly relieved. Then there is a close up of the driver’s face, a serpent’s tongue sticks out and wiggles for a brief second. Cut to credits.

**RATIONALE**

This subject matter is an important topic that doesn’t get enough attention in animation.

Modern romance and dating rules, have made understanding what harassment is unclear. I wanted to bring this topic to light. It is common for victims of harassment to ignore it while on a date. Culture has suggested that because someone is on a date, anything goes. Victims of harassment may be unsure whether or not being uncomfortable with certain types of behavior is acceptable considering the setting in which they receive it.

It is important to me because I am a woman that has seen, heard and dealt with this topic. Most of the time, harassment and assaults are not isolated incidents; they are a part of a woman’s daily culture. And it happens to men too. Because of our culture, many harassed men feel pressured to stay silent, because it’s not supposed to happen to them. There are many untold stories. I hope my story can help give others recognition and understanding in what our society has taught us, and further explain how and why it is wrong, and needs to change.

**VISION**

Animation and its particular film language can illustrate the feeling or the situation through, character design, environment design, and shot composition.

I have made the decision to do 2D hand-drawn animation because I am aware of the type of story, my skill set, and my time constraints. I plan to utilize Toon Boom Harmony, Toon Boom Storyboard Pro, and Photoshop for animation. I want to use Toon Boom to familiarize myself with the software that is industry standard. I plan to create simplistic but appealing character designs. I want to focus on clear acting as well as efficient layouts and compositions to tell this story. Timing will also be a big focus for me because it is very crucial to balance comedy and drama within a film and even one scene. Along with that, I will collaborate with someone who can make the story better through music and sound design.
VISUALS
## BUDGET

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APPENDIX B: SCRIPT

FADE IN:

INT. RESTAURANT - DINNER TABLE

The restaurant is bustling with few couples and a larger group seated in the background. On the walls are street signs hung in front of exposed brick. WAITRESS is standing by the table in which ZAARA and CHAD are already seated across from each other. The WAITRESS is reciting the specials. CHAD’s focus is on the WAITRESS, listening intently and looking down at the menu in his hands. ZAARA looks down to adjust herself, looks at the WAITRESS and smiles, looks down at the menu, and then looks up to smile in CHAD’s direction.

WAITRESS
Our chef tonight has a few specials, if you are interested. We have a chicory salade that includes frisée, celeriac and radish. It is glazed with a lemon creme dressing and topped freshly toasted seeds. We are offering a gnocchi à la parisienne. Stuffed inside are mushrooms from a local farm, and it is topped with a mornay sauce as well as gruyère cheese. And lastly, we have steak frites, a medium rare 10oz flat iron, topped with maître d’ hôtel butter, served with a serving of caramelized shallots.

ZAARA
Oh, it all sounds so good. I don’t know which to pick.

CHAD
Well, I know what I’m having. I can order for you, if you can’t decide.

ZAARA
Um... well, I think I like the--

CHAD
I know what you’d like. She’ll have the chicory salade, and I’ll take the steak frites.
ZAARA

Oh, um, ok, if you think that’s good...

CHAD

Yeah, yeah, it’ll be great.

CUT TO: Wine being poured into glasses by the WAITRESS.

CUT TO: ZAARA at the table.

ZAARA is twirling her wine glass. She is thinking about possible conversation starters.

ZAARA

Oh, you know that exhibit? With the big--

CHAD

Oh, you mean at Coquette Gallery?

ZAARA

Yeah, Yes! That one! I just went-- (..there...yesterday..)

CHAD begins to interrupt ZAARA. CHAD’s teeth begin to grow, and his lips become thick.

CHAD

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, haha, looks like a complete waste of time. Once you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all, am I right?

ZAARA takes a large gulp of her wine, looks down at her glass and exhales. ZAARA begins to speak but slows down, slightly discouraged by CHAD’s lack of interest.

ZAARA

Right, well, have you... seen any good films... lately?

CHAD is too distracted to hear. He has on arm behind his chair and twirling his wine glass with his other hand. His legs are spread, and his gaze is focused on what’s happening to his left.

ZAARA
Oh me? I think the most recent one I saw was... I can’t remember the name, but it was about this girl...

CHAD scoots in and leans closer to ZAARA. ZAARA leans in as well.

CHAD
I think...

ZAARA
that... was... stuck...in this..

CHAD
I need to go use the bathroom.

CHAD stands up and leaves for the restroom. ZAARA is left alone at the table, in a daze. She opens her eyes and snaps out of it. She looks back at the bathroom. She looks around bored with pursed lips. She drinks her last drop of wine and checks her makeup in her pocket mirror while she waits for him to come back. CHAD comes back from the bathroom and tries to surprise ZAARA from behind. His arm morphs into a tentacle and he places it on ZAARA’s shoulder.

CHAD
Did ya miss me?

ZAARA
AH!

Upon screaming and hopping a bit out of her seat, ZAARA drops her mirror. ZAARA looks up to CHAD and laughs nervously. She reaches down to grab her pocket mirror. CHAD’s hand, on ZAARA’s shoulder, unsuctions and hits him back in the chest.

CUT TO: Salad being tossed at the table.

CUT TO: ZAARA at the table.

ZAARA, hungry, smiles at her food and begins to take a few bites of her salad very quickly. She attempts to take a bite out of a biscuit when she gets interrupted by CHAD.

CHAD
You eat a lot for a girl.
CHAD takes a bite of his steak. ZAARA blushes and starts to choke and cough. CHAD continues to cut his steak.

CHAD
No, I mean, that’s good. You’ll need that energy for later.

CHAD snorts and his nose morphs into a pig’s snout. ZAARA inhales and gives side eye. CHAD notices this and becomes angry.

CHAD
(defensively)
No need to be so sensitive, it was just a joke.

ZAARA
Uh no, I wasn’t... it was just--

CHAD
It’s fine, It’s fine. I should have known not to joke in front of a prude.

ZAARA becomes extremely upset. She opens her mouth to speak but she closes it again to think about what to say.

ZAARA
Are you seri--

The WAITRESS arrives at the table and interrupts ZAARA to ask the couple if they are interested in dessert.

WAITRESS
Are you two ready for dessert? Our specials--

ZAARA
NO! I mean... just separate checks, please.

ZAARA begins to fumble through her purse to find her credit card. As she is about to present it to the WAITRESS, CHAD interrupts.

CHAD
(at ZAARA)
Don’t worry about it. I got this.
CHAD
(at the WAITRESS)
Thanks, but we’re planning on dessert at my place.

CHAD hands the WAITRESS his credit card. The WAITRESS smiles awkwardly and walks away with CHAD’s credit card. ZAARA, livid, stands up and slides her purse strap over her shoulder. She looks sternly at CHAD.

ZAARA
That. None of what you said was funny. Not at all.

ZAARA heads towards the door to leave the restaurant. CHAD gets up to stop her from leaving. CHAD, using his tentacle arm, pulls ZAARA back and turns her around to face him. CHAD then proceeds to hug her. ZAARA looks angry and now uncomfortable.

CHAD
Wait, I’m sorry. I just lost myself there, you’re just so beautiful.

ZAARA squints and rolls his eyes at his ‘beautiful’ comment. CHAD, with his tentacle arm still around ZAARA’s waist, tries to guide her towards the door, to follow him.

CHAD
C’mon, let me drive you home.

ZAARA looks worried and scared. She tries to take control and grabs above his elbow and pulls hard. CHAD stumbles backwards, but ZAARA pulls him forward again. ZAARA puts her hand on his shoulder and lightly runs one of her fingers up and down his other shoulder. They are close enough to embrace, and ZAARA leans in and tiptoes up to whisper in CHAD’s ear.

ZAARA
(suggestively)
Wait, um.. I have a much better idea...

CHAD
(aroused)
Mhmm...
CHAD turns his ear towards her. ZAARA continues to whisper in CHAD’s ear.

ZAARA
(softly)
It’s still early and...since the waitress still has your card...

CHAD closes his eyes and smiles. ZAARA smiles as well.

CHAD
(softly)
I’m listening...

ZAARA moves her hand to cover her mouth near CHAD’s ear.

ZAARA
(softly)
You should...

CHAD begins to melt a bit. ZAARA begins to whisper ‘sweet nothings.’

ZAARA
(softly)
...order another glass of wine..some dessert..and think about how the night could’ve gone.

At the same time, she begins to use CHAD’s monster arms and tail against him. While she is speaking she wraps his tentacle around his torso and other arm. She grabs his tail and wraps it around his legs as well. ZAARA whips his tail and sends CHAD spinning towards their table. CHAD lands in her seat, completely human. ZAARA looks back at CHAD to see the WAITRESS dropping off the receipt for the bill. CHAD looks confused.

ZAARA
(aside)
...pfft, ‘cause I’m not gonna be a part of it.

CHAD opens his mouth as if to say something. ZAARA chuckles looks to the table on the left, grabs a roll, bites into it and walks forward.

FADE OUT: TO BLACK
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