

**Հայ աղջիկ: Navigating the transitional phase from a teenager to a young adult as a
woman in Armenia**

by
Lilit Galoyan

Presented to the
Department of English and Communications
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia
Yerevan, Armenia
May 18, 2021

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Abstract

Հայ աղջիկ/ Hay aghchik [Armenian girl] aims to shed light on gender issues in Armenia and how they shape women in a pivotal stage of their lives. As the conducted research puts a global as well as local frame around the understanding of gender and gender norms, the script tells a story of an individual. While the theoretical part focuses on the reasons why gender issues exist in our society, the screenplay shows someone trying to navigate life through them and, sometimes, in spite of them. As academic works of philosophers and writers explain how these issues affect people, the script walks the reader through a real and raw experience of someone who is constantly affected by them.

Հայ աղջիկ/ Hay aghchik [Armenian girl] is built on a number of true stories that, although put on paper by one woman, encapsulate the circumstances of many.

Introduction

Gender inequality remains one of the biggest issues Armenian society faces today. Whether the population realizes that or not is the other side of the issue. Some attribute the lack of equality and equity between the sexes to the traditionalist mindset of our society. However, let us not forget, that we are the descendants of a Republic that was one of the first to give women the right to vote and be elected in the Parliament. We are the descendants of a Republic that was first to appoint a woman as an Ambassador in a foreign country (Aslanyan, 2010). We are the descendants of Shahamir Shahamiryan, 18th century writer and philosopher, who wrote, “Each human individual, whether Armenian or of another ethnicity, whether male or female, born in Armenia or moved to Armenia from other countries, will live in equality and will be free in all their occupations” (as cited in Aslanyan, 2010, p. 31). Yet, here we are, in the 21st century, putting women in boxes, limiting their choices, pressuring them to be “perfect” while giving them a million definitions of the word, putting chains on their dreams and aspirations.

Sandra Harding says that “knowledge is always socially situated” (2004, p. 7). Here, she refers to the knowledge the oppressed group has regarding its own situation and the differences found with the situation of the dominant group. Moreover, as Harding explains, it is the dominant group that decides the knowledge the oppressed group will receive and, thus, use to form an understanding of its circumstances. As a result, women, being the oppressed group, are not only told what to do they are also told how to perceive their own circumstances (Harding, 2004). Additionally, once women are controlled this way from a young age, this becomes their only reality, which is much more difficult and intimidating to break out of.

What this research paper and, most importantly, the accompanying script aim to achieve is raising awareness about the pressing gender issues in the country as well as normalizing conversations revolving around the topic. Using research and art as a means to

encourage women to take control of their narratives and disregard the false knowledge they are being fed about their own lives and experiences, is what I have tried to achieve as the writer of this project.

Literature review

Life has different stages and people have no choice but to adapt to each one. The path of adaptation is rocky, full of trials and tribulations, caused both by internal and external factors. Being a young woman myself, who is still swimming through these confusing waters, I speak from experience when I say that the transitional phase from a teenager to a young adult in Armenia is not as black and white as one would imagine. The reason why the script for a feature film I have written has turned into a passion project is simple: I want to show young women that they are not alone. Not in their confusion, not in their self-deprecation, not in their urge to break free from the cage created by gender stereotypes. They are not alone because we are all in this together.

The number of studies done within the framework of gender and gender relations in Armenia are extremely limited, mainly because the word “gender” itself causes a commotion. Additionally, when sexism and feminism are brought up in everyday conversations, the former is glossed over, while the latter is frowned upon. This is one of the reasons research in this area is extremely important, as it is set to educate people on important matters that shape a society. As Hasmik Gevorgyan (2010) puts it “Gender relations play an important role in the regulatory system of the social, political and economic aspects of a society” (p. 50). Therefore, neglecting these concepts and not doing enough research is not only harmful but also merely unexpectable. Although it is too soon to speak about the movie that I hope will be made based on the script Հայ աղջիկ/ Hay aghchik [Armenian girl], I do hope that when the film sees light of day in the future it will serve as a tool to raise awareness on vital issues that have continually affected many people and have, at the same time, been purposefully swept

under the rug. Before exploring gender norms and roles on a local level, it is important to gain a broader understanding of the issue by defining gender as well as looking at the global picture.

What is Gender?

In her book “Undoing Gender” (2004), Judith Butler an American philosopher and author, calls gender a performance. She states:

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical.

On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint.

Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. (p. 1)

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this quote alone. Firstly, gender and demonstrations of femininity and masculinity are acts that people put on for themselves and others. Secondly, the roots of the said performance run so deep that people often perform without being aware that they are putting on an act. Another conclusion is that people are as free within the performance as they are limited. What this means is that people are free to perform within the frame of the expectations society has from their gender, but they are restricted from exiting that frame and performing outside of it. Lastly, Butler (2004) states that everyone is performing and no one is alone in their subconscious need to put on an act that “suits” their gender best.

As it becomes apparent from Butler’s explanation of gender roles, norms and expectations are pushed on people on a global level and the issues that arise with the performance of gender are relevant worldwide.

Gender Relations in Armenia

According to the report prepared by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) titled “Men and Gender Equality in Armenia” (2016), 86.8% of survey participants believe that gender equality in Armenia has come far enough. Moreover, 89.9% of women who answered that question deemed it accurate. At the same time, 69.7% of participants agreed with the statement that women are too emotional to be political leaders and 55.4% of participants agreed that a man is allowed to hit a woman if she has cheated on him. These are a few, yet extremely vivid and telling examples of not only gender inequality thriving in the country but also people being deluded in their attitude towards it. As a result, although a large portion of the survey participants believes that gender equality has come far enough, the answers they have given to other questions prove the opposite to be true.

As bell hooks (1984) puts it “To be in the margin, is to be a part of the whole but outside of the main body” (p. 156). However, being aware of the fact that one is indeed in a margin is a very important element in the mechanism of changemaking. Unfortunately, as the UNPF survey shows, many Armenian women are unaware that they are often left in the margins. Almost 90% of women thinking gender equality has developed enough, as in, there is no more space for it to move forward, is disheartening. This goes on to show that oppressed groups are often oblivious to the oppression because of the society they live in. As Sandra Harding notes “Women, like members of other oppressed groups, had long been the object of the inquiries of their actual or would-be rulers” (2004, p. 4). In other words, many women simply do not know any better and their circumstances do not allow them to get the education that will lead them to knowing better.

Moreover, as the UNPF report states, 83.3% of men believe that gender equality has come far enough (2016). It is important to point out this statistic because men are clearly the ones who have the upper hand in our society. Just like hooks (1984) said “Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate” (p. 154).

Since men are the ones who dominate, leaving them out of the conversation is not only illogical but also potentially dangerous. Quite frankly, it is not surprising that such a big number of men think that gender equality has reached an acceptable level, because the oppressor usually does not want to lose the established power dynamic with the oppressed, which is what true equality would ensure. Regardless, as mentioned before, including men in the discussions about issues revolving around gender equality is vital, because this is not possible to reach an acceptable result without “addressing the dominator”.

Gender and Identity

A large portion of how people identify in a society comes from gender expression. Expectations are laid on both sexes to act “according to their gender” and shape their lives around the gender they were assigned to at birth. When it comes to women, the expectations usually revolve around softness and femininity (Gevorgyan, 2010). According to the research done by Hasmik Gevorgyan and her team in 2010, modesty is considered a very important quality in women, with 24% importance ranking. In the meantime, it is a quality ranking only at 1% importance in men (2010). These statistics do not strike me as surprising, since I was born a female in this country. Moreover, they also explain why my brother and I were raised differently: my parents were trying to raise me with modesty in mind.

In her article for EVN Report, Gayane Ghazaryan (2019) touches upon gender stereotyping and gender roles presented in books used at public schools. She states that women are portrayed as housewives or teachers, while men are represented as engineers and doctors. Moreover, as she states, women are portrayed as passive and dependent on someone else, usually a man (Ghazaryan, 2019). These are vivid examples of gender norms being taught, pushed on rather, at a young, impressionable age. This leads to generations of women growing up with the notion that they are weak, that their career choices are extremely narrow and that they have to depend on a man when they are older. Breaking this cycle seems

impossible when the roots are so deep, which is why addressing these roots should be a priority.

Motherhood as identity

Ghazaryan (2019) also notes how women are portrayed as mothers in many illustrations in public school books. This point is also made by Sevan Beukian in her article (2018), where she states that Armenian femininity directly revolves around motherhood, to the point where the two concepts become synonymous. On a societal level, being a mother, taking care of the household and raising children is what being a woman is all about. As Beukian puts it, this perception is also popular among women themselves. In other words, this has been the norm for so long that many women do not dare break away from their traditional role as mothers and accept it, oftentimes without realizing that they can explore other choices.

Research questions

Gender roles in the Armenian society and how they affect women and their perception of themselves are examined in the scope of this research. What expectations are laid on women? How do those expectations shape women, in the transitional phase from teenager to adult in particular?

Methodology

The Screenplay

I have always had a hard time fitting into the idea of an “Armenian woman”, which as discussed above is usually associated with modesty and motherhood. The older I get the less I fit in because I believe that as long as I identify as a female and as long as my roots are Armenian, I am an Armenian woman. The rest – the way I speak, the way I dress, the way I express myself and envision my future, are my choices to make and have nothing to do with my heritage.

The idea of the screenplay came to me more than a year ago, when I realized that I am not facing this struggle alone. Since then, I have had numerous conversations with fellow women who have expressed the same inability to be the “perfect Armenian woman” and fulfill the expectations laid on them. These exchanges, that would start as an outburst of protest against society and end with the realization that change is as necessary as oxygen, made me realize that turning my frustration into art is the best solution. This way, I would not only get to have a creative outlet but also would give a voice to so many women, including myself.

As I began to write the script, I started to incorporate stories from my own life, as well as bits and pieces of conversations I have had with my female friends. Certain phrases, especially the ones uttered by the characters who are supposed to represent the toxicity of the society we live in, have been, at one point or the other, directed at me. Many of those characters are based on real people that I have had encounters with or am related to. This is the reason why those characters do not have neither names nor faces. I wanted to give the reader the freedom to attach an identity to these people based on their own experiences. This way, I believe I have made my work even more universally understandable and relatable. Think of it as a game of “Mad Libs”, where the main story is being told as you complete it using your imagination and circumstances.

I knew I wanted to make the story as impactful as possible, which is why I chose to incorporate the element of breaking the fourth wall in the screenplay and have the main character address the audience directly. This decision will be discussed in more detail below.

The Main Character

Navigating through a new phase in life is difficult and confusing, especially when entering adulthood, especially in an Armenian household, where you are already expected to have children of your own as you are still being babied by your mother. People constantly

whisper their definition of “perfect” into your ear to the point where your self-esteem drops to the floor as you realize that you do not fit into those definitions. This is why the reader sees Lara, the main character, in the beginning of the story – lost, unable to love and accept herself.

As it was mentioned above, the story is autobiographical and the journey of the main character is heavily based on mine. The state the reader finds Lara in in the beginning of the story represents a version of me that I have already outgrown. During the past year, I have worked hard to put that self-distractive behavior and mentality behind me, and evolve into a more confident and self-loving person, which is a path Lara walks as well.

The story behind the main character’s name is quite interesting. My parents were thinking of calling me “Larisa”, after my paternal grandmother, when I was born. That name, which is quite popular in Russia, is shortened to “Lara” in every day speech, which is the reason why my father decided against it, since he did not want his mother’s name to be butchered. Since I did not want to use my own name in this story, due to the fact that for the most part I do not identify with the main character anymore, I decided to give her the name I almost got at birth.

The Fourth Wall

The element of breaking the fourth wall is inspired by the comedy series “Fleabag” on BBC. I watched it around the time I started having thoughts about turning mine and other women’s stories into a screenplay.

In this story, the usage of this element serves two purposes. Firstly, it helps the main character establish a relationship with the audience. I envision Lara’s character finding comfort in the fact of directly speaking to the audience and trusting them more than some people in her life. Meanwhile, this technique is also intended to make people who are going

through a similar experience feel like they are not alone and they have someone who completely understands and sympathizes with them. In a way, each individual reading the script gets to befriend Lara.

Secondly, I intend for this element to be the biggest eye-opener to people who do not identify with the main character and her struggles. As she addresses them directly and speaks about important issues, those who are nothing like her will have a better understanding of what millions of women, in the face of Lara, go through every day.

Artist statement

Just “be a lady” they said.

– Camille Rainville

The way society treats women and what it expects of them does not make sense to me, so I turned to science to help me understand where the root of many issues lies. As I did research revolving around gender, I realized that although there may be an explanation, there can never be a justification. Women are still expected to tick so many boxes: boxes, contents of which often contradict each other. We are told what to wear, how to walk, who to love and when to have kids, yet we cannot win even after doing as we are told. Through this work, I hope to raise awareness, open people’s eyes and, most importantly, represent women and their struggles.

The research paper leads the reader through the global as well as the local picture in regards to women, their rights and gender norms in general. Meanwhile, the script tells a story of an individual, whose story encapsulates the collective female experience and will seem all too familiar to many women and young girls, especially those who have grown up in an Armenian household.

I intend for the experience of reading the screenplay to vary for different people. People who will recognize themselves or their experience in the main character – I want them to feel seen, heard and represented. By the end, I want them to feel empowered and inspired to go through a transformation like the heroine does, and adopt the “if she can do it, so can I” mentality. People who will not identify with the main character – I want them to become aware of the toxicity patriarchal society exudes, about its effects and consequences.

I believe in using my voice and artistic vision for a good cause, which is the aim of this project. If it touches even one person, I will consider my mission accomplished.

Reflections on process

Working on this capstone was a challenge and there are three main reasons why.

First of all, it should go without saying that the past year was mentally challenging and exhausting. I often found myself lacking motivation to do any sort of work related to not just the capstone project but every other class that I took this semester. I would often run to my usual coping mechanisms, which would result in procrastination. I found myself choosing between my mental health and doing university work. I chose my mental health more often than not, because I do believe that it is important to take care of it as much as it is important to take care of your physical health.

Secondly, I had a hard time writing the research paper specifically, because for the longest time I saw it as separate from the creative aspect of my capstone. I had to realize that it is not only a big part of my capstone, it is also an important element that fuels the screenplay as well as helps answer many questions from a scientific point of view.

Lastly, during the past year I have grown and changed tremendously and I believe I have moved on from that version of myself, the version that inspired Lara’s character. I do take pride in that transformation, however, when it came to writing the actual story, I was forced to return into that state of mind and, needless to say, it was not a pleasant experience.

Writing scenes, where Lara is talking down to herself, doubting her talent, feeling insecure about her appearance and so on, required an immense amount of strength because I had to immerse myself into a past I never wish to go back to for any other purpose than making it a reference point that shows my growth.

Regardless of the hurdles and the bumps on the road, I am proud of the end result. In a way, working on the script and getting to express myself through Lara, all while telling her story, gave me a sense of relief. It is almost as though I got to voice my concerns and let out my own dissatisfaction in regards to many issues. Like I mentioned before, it was unpleasant to relive some situations, especially those involving Lara's father's character, however, as I try to find the positive side to this, I realize that writing certain lines, the way I wrote them, set me free.

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Creative Piece

Prologue

Here's to strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them.

– Michelle Obama

This script is a love letter: to the person I used to be and to the road I have walked the minute I chose to leave her behind.

With this work, I want to tell her that I forgive her: for not loving her reflection, for not knowing her true value, for letting society define her worth. She gave all the love, support and strength she had to those around her, but never to the woman that stared back at her in the mirror. She fought for the rights of others, but never fought against her inner demons. And I forgive her.

To those who will recognize themselves in Lara – I see you, I feel you and I am sorry. I believe the day will come and you too will feel liberated.

Enjoy the read.

Screenplay

Հայ աղջիկ

written by

Lilit Galoyan

INT. CENTER OF YEREVAN, CAFE. EVENING.

The interior of the café is warm and cozy. It is darkly lit. The yellow lightbulbs, illuminating the room from inside round hanging lamps made of glass, make it look like the room is lit by candles. Plants with large leaves and an artificially green shine are the main design element of the room.

The place is packed with people and is quite noisy. A calm tune is playing from a speaker in the deeper corner of the café. In the middle of the room there is a table for two.

LARA, 20, is sitting in front of a MAN, who looks about her age. Her khaki green dress that is cinched at the waist with a black belt is complemented by the yellow lighting of the room.

The camera does a 360 around the table. The man speaks with enthusiasm but little body language. We don't hear him. Lara nods, takes long sips of her wine and smiles.

LARA

(to the camera)

Do you ever listen to people talk but have no idea what they are actually saying?

LARA

(to the man, with a smile)

Aha!

LARA

(to the camera)

I don't know what I have been nodding to for the last 20 minutes. For all I know, the guy could be talking about how Hitler was misunderstood and I'm over here agreeing with a smile on my face.

LARA'S DATE

So, yeah, dad will help me open a business after I graduate.

LARA

(to the camera, exhales)

Okay, not controversial!

LARA'S DATE

You said you're in college too, right?

LARA

(to him)

Yup. I'm gonna be an English teacher.
Not really what I wanna do, but it's
good enough.

Lara looks down at her plate, picking at her food.

LARA'S DATE

Well, it won't matter once you're
married anyway, so just graduate, get
that piece of paper and you're done.

Lara immediately looks up. She looks disappointed but not
surprised,

LARA

(to the camera)
Uh-oh. Spoke too soon.

LARA

(to him)
Uhh, no, I would still like to work
after I get married.

LARA'S DATE

(chuckles)
Yeah, who's gonna let that happen?

He takes a sip from his wine through a smile, which is clearly
caused by what Lara said.

Lara lets the moment linger for a few seconds. She looks him
up and down, opens her mouth to say something but instead
closes her mouth, reclines in her chair and turns to the
camera.

LARA

(with a smile)
I hope I find love by the end of
this.

EXT. LARA'S BEDROOM. THE NEXT DAY.

Lara and BELLA, 18, her best friend of many years, are sitting
on Lara's bed.

LARA

(frustrated)
And then he went on and on about how
he won't let his future wife work
because a "real man" should be the
one taking care of the finances.

BELLA

Taking care of the finances or
controlling his wife and using money
as a way to trap her in a marriage?

LARA
(loudly)
That's what I thought.

BELLA
(annoyed)
And let me guess, you didn't say
anything.

LARA
(quietly)
No.

BELLA
(rolls her eyes)
Ugh.

LARA
Hey, what are you giving me attitude
for? What was I gonna do? Lecture
him?

BELLA
(cuts her off)
Yes.

LARA
What would that change?
(beat)
Besides, the date wasn't going well
already. The last thing I needed was
a conversation about women's rights
with a clearly conservative dude that
I hope to never see again. En t_l n_l
upō:

BELLA
(nods her head)
Okay. Fair enough.

LARA
And by the way, I blame you for this.

BELLA
(shocked)
For what? The patriarchal structure
of our society?

LARA

(chuckles)
No, stupid, the date. You're the one who set us up, remember? You know I love you but you did me dirty on this one.

(beat)
And to think that me and
(puts on a voice and does
air quotes)
Mr. "Women belong in the kitchen"
could be a good match...
(sarcastically)
I'm disappointed.

BELLA
(apologetically)
I'm sorry, okay?! He seemed like a nice dude the day his family came over to our place. His dad works with mine and they hyped him up pretty well. I'm sorry.
(beat)
And you know what? You still owe me a thank you.

LARA
(confused)
A thank you? For what? Wasting my evening?

BELLA
Uhm, no, for pushing you to have at least some form of a love life.

Lara rolls her eyes.

BELLA
Don't roll your eyes, if it were up to you, you wouldn't even go out on a date. And you can't tell me I'm wrong.

LARA
You're not.
(beat)
(with a change in her tone)
It's hard to go up to the table when you know you don't have anything to bring to it.

BELLA
(confused and a little
angry)

What the hell are you talking about?
Look at you.

LARA
(looking down)
I have.

Bella goes to say something, but Lara's MOTHER opens the bedroom door. Both of the girls turn their heads to the door when she peaks her head in.

LARA'S MOTHER
Բալես, արի՛ սեղանը գցի՝ հաց ուտեսք:

LARA
Գալիս եմ:

Her mother leaves the door half open. Lara gets up from the bed and walks towards the door.

BELLA
(getting up from the bed)
Saved by the bell.

She catches up with Lara.

BELLA
(in a low tone)
You're a gem.

Lara doesn't respond. They both walk out. Lara closes the door behind them.

INT. LIVING ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara is setting up the table. She puts plates in front of her FATHER and BROTHER, who are already sitting around the table. Bella puts the fork and the knife in front of them.

LARA'S MOTHER
(to Bella)
Բելլա ջան, դու նստի, Լուսն ամեն ինչ
կանի:

Bella finds Lara's eyes and looks at her.

LARA
Յա, Բել, նստի, okay ա, օգնել պետք չի:

LARA
(to the camera)
It would be nice if she asked her son
to help but nooo...

(rolls her eyes)

Bella takes a sit around the table. Lara continues to set the table.

LARA'S BROTHER

(impatiently)

Մամ, դե բեր ուտենք արդեն, սոված
մեռանք:

Lara looks at the camera, she is annoyed.

LARA'S FATHER

Յա էլի, այ կնի՛կ, ի՞նչ ես անում եղբան
երկար:

(to Lara)

Մորդ փոխելու վախս ա:

He laughs. Lara gives a faint smile.

LARA

(to the camera)

Yes, because the only reason you
married her is to have her bring you
food on the dot.

BELLA

(to Lara's father)

Դե, որ մենք օգնենք ավելի արագ
կստացվի, չե՞:

Bella gets up from where is sitting. Lara's father grabs her arm and gestures her to sit back in her place.

LARA'S FATHER

Բեւիլա ջան, դու ես տան հյուրն ես,
սիրուն չի, որ դու գործ անես: Դե մենք
էլ...

(looks at his son)

Մենք էլ տղամարդ ենք:

LARA

(to the camera)

(shakes her head)

Oh, lord.

LARA'S FATHER

Էս սեղան զցելը կնոջ գործ ա: Մենք ի՞նչ
մեջտեղ ընկնենք: Չե՞ տղես:

LARA'S BROTHER

Բա ոնց:

Bella doesn't say anything and looks down at her plate.

LARA

(to the camera)

(annoyed, sarcastically)

Yup, having a penis does indeed free you from second-rate tasks such as putting food on the dinner table or washing your own damn clothes.

Lara's mother enters the living room from the kitchen with the dinner dish in her hands. Lara sits down next to Bella.

LARA'S FATHER

(annoyed)

Վերջապես: Երրորդ Մասից էի՞ր գալիս:

LARA'S MOTHER

Դե պետք է եկեր թե՞ չէ:

She puts the dish on the table and takes a seat. She looks around and lands her gaze on Bella. She puts her hands out for Bella to give her her plate.

LARA

(to the camera)

If Bel wasn't here, she would have asked for dad's plate first.

(beat)

Don't ask.

Lara's mother continues to put food on everyone's plates. After Bella's she takes Lara's father's, then her brother's, then Lara's and hers in the very end.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

Lara is getting ready in front of the mirror. She puts her hair in a ponytail, turns her head from side to side, trying to see if her hair looks good. She tightens the ponytail. A few bumps pop out on her head. She gets annoyed and tries to fix them with her hand. It doesn't work, so she pulls her hair out of the ponytail and lets her long, brown hair down. She combs through it and puts her hair behind her ear on one side. Then, shakes her head and pulls her hair out from the back of the ear. She looks at her reflection and shakes her head again. She is visibly upset. She goes to put her hair in a ponytail again. When she is done, she keeps looking at her self. She gets closer to the mirror, trying to examine every inch of her face. She picks at a blemish and barely stops herself from making it look bigger and redder than it was to begin with. She turns her head to the side and looks at the

profile of her face. She puts her finger on the slight bump on her nose and goes back and forth on it. Then she stops and abruptly turns her head, looking straight into the mirror again. She takes a step back, looking at herself from head to toe.

LARA
(annoyed, almost disgusted)
Ugh.

Her phone makes a little sound, indicating that she has received a text message. Lara looks at her phone and sees the time.

LARA
Shit.

She takes her bag from the chair next to the mirror and leaves her room.

INT. UNIVERSITY. LECTURE ROOM. DAY.

Students get up from their seats and start moving towards the exit of the lecture room. Lara and Bella are among them.

BELLA
(annoyed)
Another assignment. Great.

LARA
Why does every professor assume their course is the most important?

BELLA
Right?! Ugh, he hasn't even given feedback on the previous one.
(beat)
(looks at her watch)
Oh, shit! I forgot, I have an appointment. My god, if I don't get to discuss the topic of the paper with the professor again, I will lose my mind. She keeps canceling on me.

Lara looks at her annoyed.

BELLA
I know we're supposed to have lunch together. I'm sorry. But I really do have to go.

Bella kisses Lara on the cheek and runs down the hall, fixing her bag on her shoulder and almost falling.

LARA
(screaming after her)
I'll be at our spot.

LARA
(to the camera)
I hate eating alone. It's so awkward.

Lara walks down the hall and up the stairs to the third floor alone.

INT. 3RD FLOOR OF THE UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Lara is sitting on the windowsill, with her back to the wall. Her legs are half bent. A sketchbook is placed on her lap as she draws with her pencil, that looks like it was sharpened by a knife.

Lara is wearing headphones. She is listening to "Miss Jackson" by Panic! at the Disco. Every once in a while she stops drawing and taps her pencil against the sketchbook to the beat of the song.

The camera shows her drawing, it is Bella's portrait.

A few people walk by her but the 3rd floor is quiet for the most part. As Lara continues to draw, one of the students from the other department, ARTHUR, walks by. He recognizes Lara and approaches the windowsill. Lara doesn't notice him, and doesn't hear him say hi, so he starts waving at her.

ARTHUR
(louder than necessary,
smiling)
Hi.

Lara jumps a bit as she notices him.

LARA
(taking her headphones off)
Arthur, hi. How long have you been here?

ARTHUR
Like a few seconds. You didn't hear my first hi, so I decided to wave. Sorry if I spooked you.

LARA
Oh, no, it's fine, don't worry about it.

LARA

(to the camera)
I jumped, didn't I? Like very visibly.
(shakes her head)
Can I go at least one second without embarrassing myself?

LARA
(to Arthur)
(with a smile)
So, how are classes?

ARTHUR
They're fine. Yours?

LARA
(unsure)
Okay, I guess.

ARTHUR
Oh, come on. Aren't you top of your English class?

LARA
(awkwardly)
Yeah.
(beat)
How do you know that?

ARTHUR
(talking fast, trying to quickly come up with an answer)
Uhm, uh, I, just, one of my friends takes the course with you and they told me.

Lara suspiciously looks at the camera.

LARA
(awkwardly)
Okay.

Lara looks down at her drawing.

ARTHUR
So, uhm, whatcha doing here alone? Isn't Bella usually here with you?

LARA
She is.

LARA

(to the camera)
How does he know all of this?

LARA
(to Arthur)
But she had an appointment with a
professor, so she ran off.

LARA
(to the camera)
But then again, who doesn't know that
Bel and I are here all the time?

Arthur spots the sketchbook on Lara's lap.

ARTHUR
(points)
What's that?

LARA
Just a little sketch.

Lara takes the sketchbook and flips it around so Arthur can see the drawing.

ARTHUR
(genuinely impressed)
Holy shit! That looks amazing.

LARA
(shyly)
It's alright.

ARTHUR
Are you kidding?

Arthur takes the sketchbook to take a closer look.

ARTHUR
(still looking at the
drawing)
It looks like a photo.

Arthur keeps examining the drawing with round eyes.

LARA
(shyly smiling)
That's very nice of you. Thank you.
(beat)
There's more on other pages, you can
look at those too.

Arthur begins to flip through the sketchbook, looking at a few other of Lara's works.

ARTHUR

(shocked)

Oh my god. You're really talented.
You should be an artist.

LARA

(to the camera)

I fucking wish.

LARA

(to Arthur)

Yeah, I don't know about that.

Arthur keeps looking at her drawings. There are portraits of Lara's mom, her grandma, celebrities like Lady Gaga and Brendon Urie and a few other drawings of different creatures from Lara's imagination.

ARTHUR

(shocked)

Lara this isn't a joke. You have to
at least showcase these somehow.

LARA

(chuckles)

Who cares about my stupid drawings?

ARTHUR

(look straight at her)

They are not stupid.

Lara looks at him, then at the camera with a confused face,
then back at Arthur.

Arthur snaps out of it and continues with a happy tone.

ARTHUR

So, uhm, why did you decide to draw
Bella this time?

LARA

It's a part of my portrait series. I
didn't know who else to ask. Usually
I need people to pose for these
drawings and she did for a while, but
she can't sit still for shit, so I'm
doing it from memory.

(chuckles)

It's a good thing I have known her
for most of my life, otherwise it
wouldn't look like her at all.

Lara's stomach growls. She puts her hand over her belly.

LARA
(to the camera, annoyed)
Oh my god, shoot me.

LARA
(to Arthur, embarrassed)
I'm so sorry.

ARTHUR
(chuckles)
Don't worry about it.
(beat)
Why aren't you in the cafeteria if
you're clearly hungry?

LARA
Bel and I were supposed to go but
like I said she had that thing and I
didn't wanna eat alone.

ARTHUR
I can eat with you.

LARA
Oh, no, it's okay. Bella will be back
soon anyway.

Bella shows up, seemingly out of nowhere.

BELLA
(with a smile)
Sooner than you think.
(to Arthur)
Hi.

ARTHUR
Hey.

BELLA
Thank you for keeping my bestie
company while I was gone.

ARTHUR
My pleasure. Found out some new stuff
about her.

BELLA
Oh, yeah? Like what?

ARTHUR
That she draws like a goddess.

BELLA

(smiling with the corner of
her lips)
She looks like one, too.

LARA
(to the camera)
Shoot me. Take two.

ARTHUR
(smiling, looking at Lara)
I can't argue with that.

Lara jumps down from the windowsill.

LARA
Alright, that's enough. We need to go
eat, right Bella?

Lara gives Bella a look and pushes her towards the stairs,
while grabbing her stuff from the windowsill.

LARA
It was nice talking to you, Arthur.

Lara keeps walking away and pushing Bella with her.

LARA
Have a nice day.

ARTHUR
Uh, yeah, you too.
(beat)
I'll see you around.

Lara turns around and gives him an awkward smile. Then she
turns around and walks down the stairs.

INT. STRAIRCASE. MOMENTS LATER.

BELLA
(excited)
He likes you.

LARA
No, he doesn't.

BELLA
He so does.
(doing air quotes)
"Can't argue with that". Didn't you
hear him say that as a response to me
calling you a goddess?

LARA

I did. I don't know why he would say that.

BELLA

(nearing yelling)
Because he likes you.

LARA

(while looking around)
Will you stop screaming?

BELLA

(still speaking loudly)
I will once you admit that Arthur likes you.

LARA

Oh my god, you're so annoying.

Lara walks faster and goes ahead of Bella.

BELLA

Hey!
(trying to catch up)
You're annoying. Why can't you just admit it?

Lara turns around.

LARA

Because it's not true, Bel. Ի՞նչու պէտք է հավանի:

BELLA

Oh, fuck off. Not this "I don't bring anything to the table" bullshit again. He literally called you a goddess.

(louder)

Because you are one.

Lara stares at Bella, her face not giving away her state of mind.

LARA

(calmly)
Let's go eat. I'm starving.

Lara turns around and walks towards the cafeteria. Bella stands in her place, then lets out an "ugh" and fast walks towards Lara.

INT. LARA'S GRANDMOTHER'S KITCHEN. AFTERNOON.

Lara is standing in front of the stove, stirring up coffee.

LARA

(to the camera)

Ah, yes, the good old Armenian tradition of having coffee with your neighbor, where the youngest female of the house turns into a coffee machine and your grandma into gossip girl.

Lara looks outside of the kitchen window at her grandma and another woman sitting around the table on the patio.

LARA

(to the camera)

I'm not sure what they are talking about, but it's probably somebody's daughter wearing a skirt that's too short or somebody's new bride not being obedient enough to the mother of the groom. Either way, none of anyone's business.

The coffee starts to rise and Lara, panicking, takes it off the stove.

EXT. LARA'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE PATIO. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara's GRANDMA and her NEIGHBOR are sitting in front of each, around a table on the patio. There are some sweets on the table, homemade cake and some fresh fruit. Lara comes out of the house to the patio, with two cups of coffee in her hands. She puts one cup in front of the neighbor and the other in front of her grandma and takes a seat on an empty chair next to her.

NEIGHBOR

(with a smile)

Ապրես, աղջիկ ջան:

LARA

Անուշ արե՛ք:

LARA'S GRANDMA

Լսռայիս դրած կոֆեն ուրիշ ա: Խմի՛ կտեսնես:

The neighbor takes a sip of the coffee.

LARA'S GRANDMA

Քաղցրով խմի՛, իմ թխածն ա:

Lara's grandma picks the biggest piece of the cake and puts it on the neighbor's plate.

NEIGHBOR

Գիտես՝ քո թխածը շատ եմ սիրում:

She takes the piece of the cake with her hands and bites it, then takes a sip of her coffee. Lara takes the box of tissues from the further corner of the table and puts it in front of the neighbor, who ignores the tissues and licks her fingers instead.

LARA

(to the camera)

Great table manners.

NEIGHBOR

(still chewing)

Յա, ի՞նչ էի ասում, էն Արուսենց հարսին տեսե՞լ ես: Դրա հագածը, դրա պահվածքը, անցնում ա ըսկի բարն չի տալիս:

LARA'S GRANDMA

Ոչի՛չ, թագա հարս ա, հեսա Արուսը կղաստիարակի:

LARA

(to the camera)

Wow, two for two. I'm getting really good at this.

Lara looks at the women then back at the camera.

LARA

(to the camera)

Either that or these roundtable gossip sessions are extremely predictable.

LARA'S GRANDMA

(with a big smile)

Այ Լառաս ուրիշ ա: Շնորքով, բոյը տեղը, խեղքը տեղը:

Lara's grandma caresses Lara's face, while pulling her hair away from it.

NEIGHBOR

Յա, իրոք, շատ լավ երեխա ա:

Lara smiles.

LARA
 (to the camera)
 (without a smile)
 I'm literally 20.

NEIGHBOR
 (to Lara)
 Լալ ես չե՞ր սովորում:

LARA
 (to the neighbor)
 (with a smile)
 Յա:
 (to the camera)
 (without a smile)
 She is going to ask if I have a
 boyfriend in 3,2,1...

NEIGHBOR
 Բա ընկեր չունե՞ս:

LARA
 (to the camera)
 Like we say in Armenian, մենակ
 մեռնելու օրը չգիտեմ:
 (to the neighbor)
 Չէ:

NEIGHBOR
 (concerned)
 Վայ, քա տեղ ո՞նց կլիկի: Մեծ աղջիկ ես
 արդեն:

LARA
 (to the camera)
 She literally called me a child a
 minute ago.
 (to the neighbor)
 Ինչի՞ր անսպասան ա ընկեր ունենալը:

NEIGHBOR
 (laughing)
 Բա հո՞ր տունը չես մտալու, այ Լառա ջան:

LARA
 (to the camera)
 (sarcastically)
 Wow... The speed at which she got
 from point A to point B... Usain Bolt
 is jealous.
 (to the neighbor)
 Դե հիմա մենակ ուսմանս մասին եմ
 մտածում:

NEIGHBOR

Յա, լավ ես անում, բայց դե անձնականի մասին էլ ա պետք մտածել, որ հանկարծ չուշացնես:

LARA

(to the camera)

(frustrated)

I'm literally 20.

(beat)

And what the hell does the "being late" shit mean? Are we talking about marriage or the last running bus for today?

NEIGHBOR

Յամ էլ սառիղ մեծ կիև ա, բա որ իրան մի բան լինի ու չհասցնի թոռներին տեսի:

LARA'S GRANDMA

Վայ, դու էլ հո չասեցիր: Իմ առողջականի հետ թու, թու, թու ամեն ինչ լավ ա:

Lara's grandma knocks on the wooden table three times.

NEIGHBOR

Փառք Աստծո, բայց դե թոռը չէր խանգարի:

LARA

(to the camera)

(confused and angry)

So, like, the reason I should have a child is not because I am in a stable and happy relationship and am mentally and financially ready for it, it's because it wouldn't hurt to have one. Right..

(to the neighbor)

(calmly)

Թոռան մասին խոսելու համար դեռ շատ շուտ ա:

NEIGHBOR

Դու գիտես, բայց դե էլի եմ սոււմ, նայի չուշացնես:

Lara looks at the camera, makes a gun with her fingers and pretends to shoot herself on the temple. Then, she turns to the neighbor with a fake smile and nods.

NEIGHBOR

Լարա ջան, դե որ ընկեր չունես, արի՛
քեզ իմ տղուց պատմեմ: Քո բախտից ա, որ
հիմա ընկերուիի չունի:

LARA

(to the camera)

(with zero enthusiasm)

Oh, yes, I feel so lucky.

The neighbor's voice fades away as she continues to talk. Lara looks at her with a faint smile, then back at the camera with a straight face that reads "please take me out of here".

EXT. A STREET IN YEREVAN. LATER THAT DAY.

Lara is walking home from her grandmother's house. She is wearing blue jeans, a white top, white sneakers and has a tote bag on her shoulder. Her hair is in a pony tail.

As she walks past a group of men, they start to mumble amongst each other.

LARA

(to the camera)

(nonchalantly)

I'm wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Just
wanted to point that out.

Lara tries to keep her cool and not let her face give away what she is feeling. One of the men whistles at her.

LARA

(to the camera)

(angry)

Do I look like a dog? Fuck did he
whistle at me for?

Lara's face changes, clearly expressing discomfort. Then, one of the men, still addressing his friend, speaks louder, almost like the comment is not meant just for the men around him.

CREEPY GUY

Տես՞ր ինչ լավն էր:

Lara ignores him and keeps walking.

LARA

(to the camera)

They have probably never been touched
by a woman, and if they keep this up
they never will be.

(beat)

I just don't understand what they think is going to happen. I walk past them, they catcall me, I realize a random, creepy ass dude off the side of the street is the man of my dreams and we live happily ever after?

(beat)

By the way, the first time this happened to me, I was 13.

(beat)

Gross.

Lara looks away from the camera and continues walking, face still soaked in discomfort.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Lara is sitting on her bed, with her legs crossed. She is wearing headphones and her laptop is in front of her, playing a Youtube video. Lara is laughing and snacking on chocolate chip cookies.

Her phone, that is next to her laptop, rings, signaling about a notification. Lara flips her phone over. Arthur's name pops up. She takes one of her headphones off and hits pause on the video. Lara takes her phone and unlocks it. The message reads "Hey."

LARA

(text)

Hi.

ARTHUR

(text)

How are you?

(beat)

I hope I'm not bothering you.

LARA

(text)

No. Of course not. I'm okay. You?

ARTHUR

I'm good.

(beat)

Hey, remember you said you didn't have anyone to pose for your drawings?

Lara throws a confused look at the camera and blinks fast.

LARA

(text)
Aha.

ARTHUR
(text)
Well, I volunteer as tribute.

LARA
(to the camera)
Huh?

LARA
(text)
I'm sorry?

ARTHUR
(text)
I meant that I will model for you.

LARA
(text)
Yeah, I got that.
(beat)
Why?

ARTHUR
(text)
'Cause I think it will be fun.
(beat)
And I wanna help you.

LARA
(to the camera)
Okay, but like why?

LARA
(text)
Are you sure? It is a long process.
Like I'm talking hours of sitting and
not talking.

ARTHUR
(text)
Yes, I'm sure.
(beat)
Would I text you first if I wasn't?

LARA
(text)
Okay. Don't say I didn't warn you.
(beat)
Will Saturday work?

ARTHUR

(text)
Saturday sounds perfect.

LARA

(text)
Cool. See you then.
(beat)
Thank you.

ARTHUR

(text)
Don't mention it. See ya!

Lara reads the message, locks her phone and puts it next to her laptop like before. She hits play on the video, then looks at the camera, then quickly at the screen, then at the camera again.

LARA

(to the camera)
What? I'm just gonna draw the guy. It doesn't mean anything.

Lara hides her gaze away from the camera into the laptop screen like an embarrassed child.

EXT. PARK. THAT SATURDAY. AFTERNOON.

Lara and Arthur are sitting on the opposite sides of the bench. Lara keeps looking at Arthur, trying to catch details of his face for the drawing.

The sun is shining right on Arthur's face, with beams peaking through the branches of the tree behind Lara. Arthur is trying his hardest to stay still. Lara is extremely concentrated and even the kids running around in the park do not distract her from her job.

As the drawing slowly comes together, Lara looks up from the paper.

LARA

Did you move?

ARTHUR

(panicking)
Uhh, no!

LARA

(chuckles)
I can tell you moved.

ARTHUR
(putting his head down)
Sorry. My shoulders hurt from sitting
so straight.

LARA
(apologetically)
No, I'm sorry. We can take a break.

ARTHUR
Thank you.

Arthur exhales, as if he had been holding his breath this whole time. He gets up and moves his head around, trying to get rid of the pain in his shoulders.

LARA
That bad, huh?

Lara looks at the camera with a guilty expression.

LARA
(to Arthur)
I'm sorry, I lost track of time,
otherwise I would have given you a
break earlier.

ARTHUR
It's fine. Please stop apologizing.
(beat)
Can I see it?

Arthur puts his hand out and waits for Lara to hand him the paper. Lara detaches the paper from the drawing board and gives him the drawing.

LARA
Now, don't judge it too harshly, it's
not finished yet.

Arthur doesn't say anything and keeps looking at the drawing. The paper is blocking his face and Lara can't see his expression.

LARA
(upset)
I knew it. I knew you'd hate it.

Arthur takes the paper away from his face.

ARTHUR
You're joking, right?
(beat)

This is crazy. It's like I'm looking into the mirror.

LARA

I doubt you see a black and white reflection, with half of the contours of your face missing when you look into a mirror.

Lara takes the paper from his hand. Arthur takes a seat next to her.

ARTHUR

That's not what I meant.

(beat)

How come you can never take a compliment?

LARA

I don't know what you're talking about.

ARTHUR

C'mon, you either give a shy smile or change the subject. Why is that?

LARA

(to the camera)

I am not gonna pay for this therapy session, just saying.

LARA

(to Arthur)

I just... I don't take a compliment when I don't feel like I deserve it.

ARTHUR

That's sad.

LARA

(to the camera)

(sarcastically)

You think?

ARTHUR

I don't know if this does anything for you, but I have always been honest with my compliments, I've meant every word.

LARA

(to the camera)

I'm not sure yet but maybe it does do something.

Lara looks at Arthur then at the drawing. She silently lets the moment linger.

ARTHUR

And, hey, if you don't believe me when I call you talented, maybe you should get a professional's opinion.

LARA

What do you mean?

ARTHUR

There is an open art class happening next week. A famous painter is going to give a speech on her technique, then let the participants draw her model. I think later she goes around the room and gives everyone honest feedback. You should totally go.

(beat)

Plus, you'll meet new people and make some connections.

Lara stays silent for a while, then finally blurts out.

LARA

How do you know about this?

ARTHUR

My mom's the event manager.

(beat)

So? Will you go?

LARA

I'll think about it.

(beat)

Can we go back to this, please?

Lara's eyes travel to Arthur's portrait as she asks the question.

ARTHUR

Of course, Da Vinci, your muse is ready to continue.

LARA

(chuckles)

Alright, Mona Lisa, make sure the pose is the same as before.

They both laugh, until their laughter and all the background noise of the park fades away and music starts playing. Lara continues to work on the drawing as Arthur patiently sits straight.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. A FEW DAYS LATER. DAY.

Lara is sitting on her bed, with her back against the headboard. Her knees are bent with her sketchbook up against her legs. She tries to work on a sketch but keeps putting her pencil down or behind her ear. Finally, after not being able to concentrate for a while, Lara gets frustrated and aggressively runs her pencil across the sketch.

LARA
(to the camera)
(aggressively)
What?

Lara looks away and exhales. Her face becomes softer. She sits on the edge of the bed, with her legs touching the floor.

LARA
(to the camera)
I know, okay, I know what you're thinking - that it's just a stupid art class, that I should just suck it up and go and not make a big deal out of it... But it's not that easy.
(beat)
My whole life I have been told that this-
(takes the sketchbook and holds it near her face)
-is not serious enough, that it can't be my career, that I will never be able to become someone in the field.
(mocking and doing air quotes)
"Ooh, who are you trying to be? Picasso?"
(beat)
And it's like no, I'm just trying to be myself.
(beat)
Why can't you just let me be myself?

Lara's eyes fill up with tears. She looks down and takes a few seconds to compose herself.

LARA
(to the camera)

(looking up)
I'm scared I'll like it too much.
(beat)
I've spent the last three years of
uni trying to convince myself that I
would be a starving artist and
wouldn't be able to achieve anything
had I chosen that path.
(beat)
What if all of that goes away? In a
second, just like that... What would
I do? Go against everyone?

Lara looks to the side.

LARA
(under her breath)
Can I go against everyone?
(beat)

Lara sits in silence for a while, twisting the ring on her
pointer finger over and over again.

LARA
(to the camera)
Am I overthinking?
(beat)
Rhetorical question.
(beat)
Maybe I should talk to dad about
this...

Lara gets up from her bed and walks towards the exit of her
room.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara's father is sitting on the armchair that is pointed
directly at the TV. He is sitting deep into the armchair, with
the remote on the armrest. The noise of a Russian political
debate program fills the room.

Lara walks in and takes a seat on the edge of the sofa next to
the armchair. She glances at the TV.

LARA
(to the camera)
I know all these people by name. Not
voluntarily.

Lara looks down at the carpet, going over the patterns with her eyes, trying to tone out the noise of people screaming at each other in Russian.

Moments later, the program cuts to commercial. Lara's father lowers the volume and looks at Lara.

LARA'S FATHER

Բա՞ն ա եղել:

LARA

Չէ: Ի՞նչ պետք ա լիներ:

LARA'S FATHER

Բա ի՞նչ ես մի տեսակ:

Lara looks at the camera. Then looks back at her father.

LARA

Մի տեսակ չեմ:

(beat)

Յա, ըրր, արվեստի բաց դաս ա լինելու ես քանի օրը... ուզում եմ գնամ:

LARA'S FATHER

Ուզում ես՝ գնա:

LARA

(hesitantly)

Առհասարակ ուզում եմ ավելի շատ խորանամ նկարչության մեջ:

LARA'S FATHER

Ինչի՞ համար:

LARA

Դե -

LARA'S FATHER

(over her)

Մենակ չասես էլի եղ երազանքներիդ հետևից ես ընկել:

LARA

Ի՞նչ եթե ասեմ, որ ընկել եմ:

LARA'S FATHER

(with a strict tone)

Լառա, վերջացու՛: Ես թեմայի շուրջ արդեն խոսացել ենք:

LARA

Յիշում եմ: Բայց -

LARA'S FATHER

(over her)

(growing angry)

Ոչ մի <<բայց>>: Էդ քեզ ապագա չի,
քանի՞ անգամ ասեմ:

LARA

Բա ի՞նչն ա ինձ ապագա:

LARA'S FATHER

(calmly)

Ինչ որ հիմա սովորում ես:

LARA

Ես չեմ ուզում անգերենի դասատու
դառնամ: Ուղղակի չարյաց փոքրագույն
ընտրեցի:

LARA'S FATHER

(angry, gradually raising
his voice)

Ինձ չի հետաքրքրում: Էդ մանկական
երազանքի պատճառով ապագադ ջուրը չես
զգելու: Ի՞նչ ես մտածում՝ դու նստելու
ես սաղ օրը թիթեռ նկարես, մարդիկ էլ
դրան փող են տալու, հա՞:

Lara puts her head down.

LARA'S FATHER

(frustrated)

Մարդիկ հարցնեն աղջիկս ինչ ա անում,
ասեմ՝ նկարում ա: Խայտառակ կլինեմ:

(beat)

(calmer)

Ու առհասարակ նոր կարիերա ման գալու
փոխարեն, ընկեր ջարի քո համար ու
ամուսնանալու մասին մտածի:

The program on TV comes back from the commercial break. Lara's
father notices that and puts the program on pause.

LARA

Շուտ չի՞:

LARA'S FATHER

Յենց չիշտ ժամանակն ա:

LARA

Կլինի՞ գոնե ես մի բանը ես որոշեմ:

LARA'S FATHER

(raising his voice,
 stressing the last word)
 Էս սաւս մեջ ես եմ որոշում: Վերջ:

LARA
 Ե՞րբ եմ ես որոշելու:

LARA'S FATHER
 (angry)
 Երբեք: Կամուսանաս՝ մարդկ կորոշի:

(with an ironic smile)
 Մեկ էլ տեսար թողեց ևկարեւ:

Lara looks at the camera, anger dripping down her face.

LARA
 (to the camera)
 I'm fucking going.

Lara gets up from her seat and leaves, heading to her room.
 She closes the door behind her.

Her father watches her leave, still angry. He takes a
 cigarette out of the pack and lights it up, murmuring
 something under his breath.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. FEW DAYS LATER. DAY.

Lara is standing in front of the mirror, getting ready to go
 out. She brushes her hair, plays with it a little bit. Then
 she takes her mascara and applies it to her lashes. She then
 turns her face from side to side, examining her skin. She
 takes concealer from her vanity, puts a bit on her index
 finger and dots the product on a few blemishes around her
 face. With her middle finger Lara blends the product into her
 skin.

Her facial expression is calm and soft. She takes a step back
 from the mirror and looks at her reflection. Lara takes a
 strand of hair from the front right side of her head and puts
 it on the left side, creating a side part. Then she puts the
 hair on the right side behind her ear, with her left hand.

LARA
 (softly smiling)
 Not bad.

Lara grabs her tote bag from the chair next to her vanity and
 leaves her room.

INT. HALLWAY OF LARA'S HOUSE. MOMENTS LATER. DAY.

Lara comes out of her room and heads towards the door. Her father spots her from the living room.

LARA'S FATHER
 (screaming from the living
 room)
 Ու՛ր ես գնում:

Lara stops in her spot instead of going to the living and addressing her father from there.

LARA
 Դուրս:

LARA'S FATHER
 (still screaming)
 Բա ինչի՞ ես տեսց կարճ հազվել, որ
 թաղի տղերքը կայե՛ն:

LARA
 (to the camera)
 Yeah, 'cause that's my mission in
 life.

Lara rolls her eyes.

LARA
 (to her father)
 Շո՞ք ա:

Lara walks towards the door and closes it behind her.

INT. ART CLASSROOM. TWO HOURS LATER. DAY.

A large room, with beige walls, is full of people. We don't hear anything but music. A tall, middle aged woman, GWEN HANSON, is speaking, as students are sitting in a half-circle, each in front of an easel. The canvases are empty. Next to the woman is a model, wrapped in a sheet, stuck in a pose that looks hard to hold for a long period of time. In the back of the room are people who are just there to listen to the lecture.

The camera stays on the lecturer for a while as she continues to speak, then starts moving and showing the rest of the room, revealing some paint and contours on the canvases. The woman starts to walk around the room and comment on students' work, asking them questions. We still cannot hear anything but music.

She finally approaches Lara and looks at her work for a few seconds. Then, with a slight Scandinavian accent, speaks to Lara.

GWEN

Interesting. Why did you start with the hands?

LARA

Because I'm not drawing the rest of her body.

GWEN

(confused)

What do you mean? Why?

LARA

I draw whatever I feel drawn towards.

(beat)

And I think her hands are magnetic. The pale skin, the bluish veins, the lines, the long fingers... the neat fingernails, those tell a lot about a person, but that's neither here nor there, I guess.

(beat)

And, the pose she is holding...

(beat)

Her hands almost look like the hands from "The Creation of Adam". Except both hands are hers. And that got me thinking that, in a way, we create who we are and build ourselves up on our own. We often don't have a say in our circumstances but we decide what we take from them. So here-

(points at her work)

-the hands of the same woman meet in the middle to work together and create who she is.

Gwen patiently listens to Lara speak, alternating her gaze from Lara to the drawing.

GWEN

Do you always do this?

LARA

Talk too much?

(chuckles)

Not really.

GWEN

(smiles)

I meant put so much thought and meaning behind your work.

(beat)

(laughing)
But thank you for answering my second question as well.

LARA
(smiling)
I do. Not so much with my portraits but with the rest, yes, pretty much always.

Gwen continues to smile and puts her hand out to Lara.

GWEN
What's your name?

LARA
Lara.

Lara puts her hand out as well and shakes Gwen's hand.

GWEN
Nice to meet you, Lara.

Before Lara can answer Gwen walks away and approaches the next student.

LARA
(to the camera)
(excited, terrified)
OH MY GOD.

INT. ART CLASSROOM. A LITTLE LATER. DAY.

The students get up from their seats and take their aprons off. Their canvases are no longer blank, each has a unique drawing on it.

The model gets down from the little stool she was standing on, wraps herself in the sheet a bit tighter and leaves the room.

The listeners from the back of the room make their way towards the front, trying to speak to Gwen. The students do the same after putting away their tools.

Lara, however, doesn't rush to speak to Gwen. She calmly gets her tote bag and puts her pencils there. She then unscrews the canvas off of the easel and puts it on the floor.

Lara looks at the crowd surrounding Gwen. Each person speaks with so much enthusiasm, while taking their sweet time. Lara takes out her sketchbook and rips a page off. Taking one of the pencils she writes a note to Gwen.

"Thank you for the lesson and for taking the time to discuss my art. It was truly an honor. With gratitude, Lara."

Lara puts her tote bag on her shoulder, takes her canvas and walks towards the exit of the room. She leaves the note on the table next to the entrance.

On the other side of the room, Gwen, through the crowd of people, notices Lara about to leave and calls out to her.

GWEN

Lara, do you mind staying for a while? I would love to speak to you again.

Lara nods a few times, then turns to the camera, with a confused facial expression that reads "I don't know either" and shrugs her shoulders.

INT. ART CLASSROOM. A LITTLE LATER. EVENING.

Lara is sitting on a chair, waiting for Gwen to finish speaking to every guest and student. As the last few people leave, Gwen brings a chair over and sits next to Lara.

GWEN

Sorry you had to wait for so long.

LARA

Oh, no worries.

GWEN

I just wanted to take more time to discuss your art.

Gwen takes out the note Lara wrote out of her pocket.

GWEN

Nice gesture.

LARA

I just didn't want to leave without saying anything.

Gwen smiles.

GWEN

So, what art school did you go to?

LARA

(to the camera)

Art school? With the father that I have? I don't think so.

LARA
(to Gwen)
I didn't go to an art school.

Gwen looks confused.

GWEN
So who taught you how to draw?

LARA
I... I kinda taught myself. Just
practiced a lot, I guess.

GWEN
(confused, a little
shocked)
Okay... Uhm, are you at least
studying art right now?

Lara looks at the camera and laughs.

LARA
(to Gwen)
(stuttering)
No, no. My dad... and pretty much
everyone else... they think I won't
be able to make a career out of it...
so it's pointless.

GWEN
(loudly)
Bullshit. Look at me. I travel the
world, paint and teach others how to
do it. If this isn't a career then I
don't know what is.

LARA
(to the camera)
Yeah, tell that to my dad.

GWEN
(with hesitation)
I'll tell you what, I'm teaching a
three month art course in Saint
Petersburg this upcoming summer.

Lara stares at the camera, confused, then silently looks back
at Gwen.

GWEN
I think you should absolutely take
it. There are still a few spots
available.

Lara's eyes widen as she directs her gaze at the camera.

GWEN

I see talent in you, Lara, as well as passion. Please consider my offer.

LARA

I... I don't know if I could... I mean, I don't know if I deserve this opportunity.

GWEN

Of course you deserve it.

(beat)

Lara, how long did you believe in Santa for?

LARA

Until I was 10 or 11. But what does that-

GWEN

(over her)

You believed in the existence of an imaginary man for 11 years of your life but can't believe in yourself for 5 minutes?

LARA

(to the camera)

That's a nice Facebook status from 2011 but I wasn't taught to believe in myself like I was taught to believe in Santa.

GWEN

Promise me you'll think about it.

LARA

(hesitating)

I promise. I'll think about it.

(beat)

Thank you for the offer... And the validation... And the encouragement. You've done the most for me today really.

GWEN

You gotta support young talent.

LARA

And please don't get me wrong, I would love to study art, I'm just not sure if my parents will let me.

GWEN

I understand, I do, but if you live your life trying to please others you will never be truly happy.

LARA

(to the camera)
She isn't lying, you know?

INT. 3RD FLOOR OF THE UNIVERSITY. NEXT DAY. AFTERNOON.

Lara and Bella are sitting on the windowsill, in their spot.

LARA

Dad will kill me.

BELLA

Lar, this is a one in a million opportunity.

LARA

(frustrated)
I know. But dad will kill me. You know how he gets, Bel.

BELLA

(frustrated and enthusiastic at the same time)
I do but you can't miss this. The teacher herself invited you to take the class and guess why.

LARA

(calmly)
I have a feeling you're about to tell me why.

Bella takes Lara's shoulders into her arms and starts to shake her.

BELLA

Because you're talented. Because you're passionate about this. Because you live and breathe this. Everyone can see it from a mile away.

LARA

(sad)

Everyone except dad, apparently.

Bella stops shaking Lara.

BELLA
(screaming)
Well, screw your dad.

Bella pauses at the realization of what she just said. Lara chuckles under her breath.

LARA
Thanks for the support, babe.
(beat)
And I wanna go, I really do.

BELLA
(screaming)
Well then go!

ARTHUR
Go where?

Bella jumps from her sit, since Arthur came from behind her and she didn't notice him.

BELLA
(angry)
Oh my god, don't scare me like that.
Jesus.

Bella slaps Arthur's arm.

ARTHUR
(to Lara)
Where are you going?

LARA
Nowhere.

BELLA
Yet.

LARA
(to Bella)
(quietly)
Please stop.

Bella rolls her eyes, then looks down.

ARTHUR
Lara, can I speak to you? Alone.

BELLA

(under her breath)
Oop.

Lara looks at Bella with an annoyed expression. Bella mouths "sorry" and jumps off the windowsill.

BELLA
(frantically)
I have to go. I have this thing, at a place. Very important.

Bella takes her bag, kisses Lara on the cheek and walks away.

BELLA
See ya!

Bella walks behind Arthur, then turns around and mimes "he likes you" by pointing at Arthur, then making a heart with her hands, then pointing at Lara.

Lara, trying to not let Arthur notice, quickly tilts her head to the side, tenses up her lips and makes her eyes round, signaling Bella to leave. Bella makes an "okay" sign with her hands, blows Lara a kiss and goes down the stairs.

Lara turns to Arthur awkwardly smiling.

LARA
(to the camera)
I'm scared.

LARA
(to Arthur)
So, what did you wanna talk about?

Lara gets down from the windowsill and stands in front of Arthur.

ARTHUR
(hesitating)
Well... I, uhm, I just wanted to tell you that, uhh -

LARA
(to the camera)
(scared)
Oh god.

ARTHUR
(composing himself)
Okay, you know what, I'm just gonna go ahead and say it. I like you.

LARA

(to the camera)
(eyes running)
Oh.

LARA
(to Arthur)
Oh.

LARA
(to the camera)
Wow, it matched. This rarely happens.

Arthur looks at Lara, she looks back at him.

LARA
(to the camera)
I should probably say something.

LARA
(to Arthur)
Listen, Arthur, you're a great guy,
but...

Arthur puts his head down at "but".

LARA
But I don't like you like that. I'm
sorry.

ARTHUR
No, don't apologize, you can't help
how you feel. I get it.

LARA
(to the camera)
God, he's such a good guy and I'm
such an asshole.

LARA
(to Arthur)
(quietly)
Plus, I think I need to learn how to
love myself first.

ARTHUR
Yeah, no, I get it, really, I do. How
about we forget I said this and keep
being friends.

LARA
If it's okay with you, then I would
love that.

ARTHUR

Hug?

Arthur opens his arms for Lara, smiling. She hugs Arthur.

LARA
(to the camera)
I hate myself.

They pull away after hugging for a few seconds.

LARA
(to the camera)
Tell me why this was the hardest
conversation I have ever had.
(beat)
Oh, that's right! That's 'cause I
haven't told dad about Petersburg
yet.

EXT. LARA'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE PATIO. DAY.

Lara is at her grandmother's house. Lara, her grandma and the neighbor from before are sitting on the patio, drinking coffee.

NEIGHBOR
Էդ Արուսենց հարցը տենց էլ բարևել
չսովորեց:

Lara looks at the camera and blinks a few times judgmentally then tunes back into the conversation.

LARA'S GRANDMA
Դե լավ, դու իրա բարևին չեիր մնացել:
Քեզ մի քիչ ծանր պահի:

Lara looks at the camera, chuckles and shakes her head.

NEIGHBOR
Լառա ջան, տենց էլ չեկար սղուս հետ
ծանոթացնեմ:

LARA
(to the camera)
Ugh.

LARA
Դե ես դեմ չեմ, բայց կասե՞ք ինչ
նպատակով եք ուզում մեզ ծանոթացնեք:

NEIGHBOR
Դե ո՞նց ասեմ, իհարկե լավ կլինեք, որ
գույժ կազմեիք: Մենք իրար ընտանիքներով

վաղուց չանաչոււմ ենք: Դու էլ գիտես ինչ
մոտիկ եմ տատիկիդ հետ: Շատ հարմար
կլինի, որ իրար ուզեք:

Lara looks calm but when she turns her gaze to the camera, all that is seen in her eyes is anger.

LARA

(to the camera)

I don't think I can take this any longer.

NEIGHBOR

Յամ էլ, արդեն ժամանակը եկել ա, որ և՛ ինքը, և՛ դու երկրորդ կես գտնեք ձեր համար: Էլ ինչի՞ երկար ման գաք, հենա իրար քթի տակ եք էլի:

LARA

(to the camera)

(frustrated)

I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna say it.

Lara turns towards the neighbor.

LARA

(to the neighbor)

Վերջացրի՞ք: Դե հիմա ինձ լսե՛ք:

LARA

(to the camera)

(surprised)

Oh god, I really am gonna do it.

LARA

(to the neighbor)

(angry)

Նախ ես անցած անգամ ասեցի, որ ամուսնանալու միտում դեռ չունեմ: Ու իրոք չեմ հասկանում ուրիշի անձնականի մեջ՝ ձեր քիթը մտցնելուց ինչ հաճույք եք ստանում, բայց դե լավ, հաշվենք, որ ամեն մեկը իրա հոբբին ունի: Բայց ի՞նչ ա նշանակում «համար կլինի, որ իրար ուզեք»: Ամուսնանում են, որ համար լինի, թե՞, որ երջանիկ լինեն: Կամ էլ ի՞նչ հարմարության մասին ա խոսքը: Կարո՞ղ ա 15-րդ դարն ա, մենք էլ հարևան երկրների թագավորական ընտանիքների ժառանգներ ենք ու մեզ ամուսնացնում եք բարեկամական կապերը ամրապնդելու համար:

The neighbor grows visibly annoyed and angry by Lara's nerve to confront her but Lara doesn't give her the chance to get a word in.

LARA

Ու առհասարակ, եթե ձեզ թվում ա, որ ես կյանքս կկապեմ մի մարդու հետ ում մաման իրա համար սուրճ խմելուց բարեխոսում ա՝ չարաչար սխալվում եք:

Lara gets up from her seat.

LARA

Հա ու մեկ էլ, ինձ երկրորդ կես պեսք չի: Ես կիսատ չեմ, ես լրիվ եմ ծնվել:

Lara walks towards the entrance of the house, leaving her grandma and the neighbor behind. Before walking in, she looks at the camera.

LARA

(to the camera)
(shocked)

Wow!

(giggles)

That felt great!

Lara enters the house, very pleased with herself.

EXT. LARA'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE PATIO. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara's grandma sits there, speechless. The neighbor looks angry but instead of ranting to Lara's grandma she blurts out.

NEIGHBOR

Չէ, սղուս համար Լառային ուզել հաստատ չարժի:

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. FEW DAYS LATER. DAY.

Lara is sitting on her bed with her phone in her hands.

LARA

(text)

I'm telling dad about Petersburg today.

BELLA

(text)

Good luck.

(beat)

You got this!

LARA
(text)
Thanks.

BELLA
(text)
Let me know if you need anything,
okay?

LARA
(text)
Okay.

Lara locks her phone, puts it on her bed and gets up. She heads towards the bedroom door.

LARA
(to the camera)
Wish me luck.

INT. LIVING ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara comes out of her room and heads towards the living room. Her father is sitting on the armchair, watching TV. Lara takes a sit on the sofa.

LARA
(to the camera)
Here goes nothing.

LARA
(to her father)
Չնացի եւ քաց դասին:

LARA'S FATHER
(angry)
Ես քեզ չեի՞ ասել, որ չգնաս:

LARA
(calmly)
Ասել էիր:

LARA'S FATHER
(still angry)
Եվ՞: Իմ խոսքը քո համար արդեն արժեք
չունի՞:

LARA
(still calmly)
Ես տեսց քան չասեցի:

LARA'S FATHER
(screaming)

Մնում էր՝ ասեիր:

LARA

Էդ դեռ վերջը չի:

Lara's father looks at her with an angry expression, waiting for her to reveal the rest.

LARA

(quietly)

Դասախոսը իմ աշխատանքը շատ հավանեց ու ինձ էս ամառ հրավիրեց Պետերբուրգ՝ իրա երեք ամսյա դասընթացին մասնակցելու:

LARA

(to the camera)

Brace for impact.

LARA'S FATHER

(angry, screaming)

Էս աղջիկը ինձ կաթվածի կհասցնի: Ի՞նչ դասընթաց: Ի՞նչ Պետերբուրգ: Դու ոչ մի տեղ չես գնում: Էդ էր մնում պակաս՝ իմ աղջիկը մեակ գևար Ռուսաստան, էն էլ երեք ամսով: Սոռա՛ցի՛:

(beat)

(lighting up a cigarette)

Ու էս քեզ դեռ անցած անգամ ասեցի, որ էս մանկական երազանքի թարգը տաս: Էդ քո խելքի բանը չի: Դու ապագա կին ես: Փոխանակ չաշ սարքել սովորես, որ վաղը, մյուս օրը ընտանիքդ սովից չմեռնի, Կան Գոգ էս խաղացնում:

(beat)

Մեծ աղջիկ էս արդեն, չե՞ս հասկանում, թե ինչն ա ավելի կարևոր:

LARA

(slightly raising her voice)

Դե հենց էդ ա հասկանում եմ, դրա համար էլ ուզում եմ գնամ: Էս մանկական երազանք չի, պապ, էս ամբողջ սրտով սիրում եմ էս գործը: Ու ի՞նչ էս կարծում, որ տաղանդավոր չլինեի, եդ կիևը Էդքան մարդու մեջից մեակ ինձ էս առաջարկը կանե՞ր: Այսինքն, դու ի՞նչ գիտես էս տաղանդ ունեմ, թե չէ: Գոնե մի՞ անգամ գործերիս ևայած կաս: Գոնե մի՞ անգամ քեզ հետաքրքրել ա, թե ամբողջ կյանքս, շարաթը յոթ օր, օրը քսանչորս ժամ ինչ եմ անում թուղթ ու մատիտը ձեռքս: Փոխարենը՝ Ռուսաստանի առաջին

ալիքի սերիալների բոլոր դերասաններին
դեմքով ճանաչում ես: Ապրես:

(beat)

(frustrated)

Ամբողջ օրը մտածում ես, թե ուրիշները
ինչ կասեն՝ հազաճիս մասին, կարիերայիս
մասին, Ռուսաստան գնալուս մասին, բայց
անգամ մի բոպե չես մտածում, որ իմ
երջանկությունը ավելի կարևոր ա, քան
ուրիշների կարծիքը:

(beat)

(calmly)

Ես չեմ պատրաստվում ամբողջ կյանքս ինքս
ինձ տալ «Ի՞նչ կլիներ եթե գնայի»>>
հարցը ու գոջալ, որ ես շանսը ձեռքիցս
բաց թողեցի: Երեք ամիս առանց ինձ ստեղ
կդիմանաք, բայց ես սող կյանքս
ափսոսանքով ապրելով չեմ դիմանա:

(beat)

(firmly)

Ու վերջում՝ ինչ որ մեկի կնոջ տիտղոսով
բավարարվելը իմը չի: Իմ ապագան լրիվ
ուրիշ տեսք ա ունենալու:

Lara turns on her heel and heads towards her bedroom.

INT. UNIVERSITY. CAFETERIA. THE NEXT DAY. MORNING.

Lara is sitting alone in the cafeteria, dipping her french
fries in red ketchup that looks infused with chemicals and
eating them.

Arthur approaches her with a smile and sits in front of her.
She smiles back.

ARTHUR

Hey.

LARA

Hi. Want some?

Lara pushes her plate with french fries towards Arthur. He
takes one and puts it in his mouth.

LARA

No ketchup?

ARTHUR

It looks poisoned.

They both chuckle.

LARA

I'm leaving for summer, by the way.
To Saint Petersburg, for a three-
month-long art course.

ARTHUR

(smiling wide)

Lara, that's awesome. I'm so happy
for you.

Arthur squeezes her hands that are resting on the table.

LARA

Had you not pushed me to go to that
art class, I wouldn't have even know
about this opportunity. So, thank
you, I owe you big time.

ARTHUR

No, you don't. Your talent got you
where you are, not me.

Lara looks down and smiles.

ARTHUR

But I will gladly accept a fridge
magnet as a souvenir from Petersburg.
Just wanted to put that out there.

Lara laughs loudly and nods.

INT. HALLWAY OF LARA'S HOUSE. LATER THAT DAY.

Lara opens the front door and heads straight to her room, not
even throwing a glance towards the living room, where her
parents are.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Lara sits down on her bed and takes out her phone. Instead of
changing, she starts scrolling her social media feed.

Lara's mother opens the door and walks in. Lara looks up and
locks her phone. Her mother takes a seat next to her.

LARA'S MOTHER

Հորդ հեռ խոսուցի:

LARA

Ե՞վ:

LARA'S MOTHER

Ի՞նչ «և»: Ոնց որ հորդ չես ճանաչում՝
սկզբից գոռում ա, հետո՝ մտածում:

Lara rolls her eyes.

LARA'S MOTHER

Պազիս ազդվել էր սասճերիցդ:

Lara gets surprised.

LARA'S MOTHER

Էն, որ ասել էիր, որ քո արվեստը ու
երջանկությունը իրան չեն հետաքրքրում:
Նեղվել էր դրանից:

LARA

Սուտ բան չեմ ասել, մա՛մ:

LARA'S MOTHER

Սուտ չի, բայց չափազանցությունն ա:

Lara rolls her eyes again.

LARA'S MOTHER

Դե լավ վերջացրու: Կարևորը ասեց, որ
երեւ սա իրոք քեզ կերջանկացնի, ուրեմն
թողնում ա գնաս ու գումարը ինքը
կմուծի:

Lara's face changes. Her eyes become wide, she is taken aback.

LARA

Լու՛րջ:

Lara's mother nods.

LARA

Չե՛ս խաբում:

Lara's mother shakes her head no.

Lara screams and hugs her mother, smiling as wide as her
cheeks will allow it. Lara's mother smiles as well and strokes
her back.

LARA

Ես էլ արդեն սասիկից էի էդ փողը
խնդրել: Ինչ լավ ա՛ էդ խեղճ կնոջը
ծախսի տակ չեմ գցի:

Lara's mother shakes her head.

LARA'S MOTHER

Ուց հասկացա, դու սենց, թե սենց գլխւն
էիր:

Lara breaks their embrace, shrugs and nods.

INT. LARA'S BEDROOM. MONTH AND A HALF LATER. NIGHT

Lara is standing in front of the mirror. She is getting ready to go out. She brushes her hair and parts it from the side. She takes her mascara and applies it to her lashes. Then she takes her foundation and a sponge and gently applies the product on her face, creating an even tone. Lara then puts chapstick on her lips and rubs them together.

Lara takes a step back from the mirror and smiles, her smile so genuine and pure.

LARA
(to herself)
Cute.

LARA
(to the camera)
I told you I'd find love by the end
of this.

Lara walks up to her suitcase, rolls it out of the room and shuts the door behind her.

THE END.