

Writer's Block



by Laura Thoma

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Laura Thoma
laurathomaplaywright@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

SERA KEEL (Pronounced Sara) Woman 20-60. Insecure, unkempt and a bit frumpy.

ARES LEEK (Pronounced Heiress) Woman. Same age as Sera. Strong, confident, witty, dresses somewhat like an action hero.

CRITIC Middle aged white man.

MADDIE A strong soft spoken woman who moves with grace.

SETTING

A writer's apartment late at night.

SYNOPSIS

Sera is blocked and writing on a deadline. Unless she can get both her muse and inner critic to cooperate it seems impossible that she'll be able to get unstuck and deliver her manuscript on time.

IT'S WELL AFTER MIDNIGHT. SERA IS DRESSED IN SWEATS WITH HER HAIR ON TOP OF HER HEAD. SHE'S SITTING AT HER DESK, WRITING IN A NOTEBOOK---- HER LAPTOP IS OPEN NEXT TO HER.

SERA

(She writes for a few beats in her notebook then reads)

Ares (*Pronounced Heiress*) tip toed into the parlor. She checked the door before turning to speak. "May I help you?" She asked, timidly, doing her best to avoid eye contact.

(she balls up the paper and throws it)

Stupid! Why are you ignoring me, Ares?!

CRITIC

(The critic who is lying on the couch under a blanket sits up. He up lights his face with a flashlight then does his best Rod Serling (RS) Impersonation. It's clear this is not the first time Sera has heard or seen him.)

(As RS) Sera Keel alone in her apartment well after midnight is suffering from severe writer's block. Ignored by her muse she's beginning to wonder if she's really a writer.

(He turns off the flashlight.)

SERA

Rod Serling you're not.

CRITIC

Fine. You suck and you're a terrible writer. Better?

SERA

Totally. Now, how about you just sit there quietly.

CRITIC

Like that's gonna happen.

SERA

Your constant chatter is probably why I can't hear her...

(Sera checks her phone for the time.)

Four hours?!

(Sera collapses on her desk and groans she stays there for several beats then suddenly sits straight up.)

I can do this.

CRITIC

No, you can't.

SERA

Yes, I can! This is just a part of my process...I'm not going to focus on...

CRITIC

Your career slipping away? Good idea, there's nothing to worry about there.

(Sera collapses on her desk again. We see her go through several stages-- denial, anger, juvenile frustration, etc--before sitting up. She searches through the papers on her desk looking for her list.)

SERA

Where's my stupid list?

CRITIC

Why can't you ever keep things organized?

(She remembers it's on her laptop.)

SERA

Check, check, check, double check...this is f'n useless!

CRITIC

Well, making that was a waste of time... just like everything else you've done tonight!

SERA

Come on, Sera, think!

(She stands up and starts pacing getting more tense with every step.)

CRITIC

(He begins to sing the jeopardy theme song.)

SERA

Not helpful!

(She gives him a magazine and points to a chair across the room near a large plant.)

Go!

CRITIC

Oo Writer's Digest.

(He takes the magazine.)

Only because you're boring me.

(He goes to the chair. Sera gets a cushion from the couch and tosses it on the floor. She sits on it with her legs crossed.)

SERA

Okay.

(She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes.)

Relax...breathe...I have all the time I world...

CRITIC

No, you don't!

SERA

Read your magazine!

(The Critic sits back hidden by the plant. Sera does a series of breathing exercises.)

ARES ENTERS FROM SOMEWHERE IN THE APARTMENT, LOOKING LIKE AN ACTION HERO, DRESSED ALL IN BLACK WITH A POP OF COLOR. SHE SEES SERA SITTING ON THE FLOOR AND LAUGHS SILENTLY. SHE GOES TO THE KITCHEN TO GET A DRINK. RETURNING, ARES SITS ON THE COUCH AND PUTS HER FEET ON THE COFFEE TABLE. SHE SITS SIPPING HER DRINK AND WATCHING SERA FOR A FEW MOMENTS BEFORE SHE SPEAKS.

ARES

What the hell are you doing?

SERA

(Sera keeps her eyes closed but moves her head trying to figure out if Ares's voice is coming from inside or outside of her head.)

Ares? Is that you?!

ARES

Yeah, it's me. Who else would it be?

SERA

Finally!

ARES

What the hell are you doing?

SERA

(Eyes still closed.) I'm relaxing... and clearly, it's working.

ARES

(Ares sips her drink and doesn't respond.)

SERA

Ares? Are you there?

CRITIC

(High pitched) Yes?

SERA

Very funny. I told you to read your magazine and leave me alone!

(Sera opens her eyes to see Ares sitting on the couch.)

Oh my goodness, you're here!

ARES

I am indeed. Who was...

SERA

But you can't be.

ARES

And yet, I am.

SERA

Must be lack of sleep.

(Worried she's hallucinating Sera lays down on the floor and closes her eyes tight. She sneaks a peak to see if Ares is still there.)

ARES

Still here! (Waving)

(Sera gets up and runs over to Ares. She stops and stares at her.)

SERA

It's only a hallucination...nothing to be afraid of

(Sera pokes Ares with intention.)

ARES

Hey! Stop it!

(Ares pokes Sera back. She doesn't respond as she seems to be shocked or dazed. Ares pinches Sera's arm and she snaps out of it!)

SERA

Ow! That hurt! (Rubbing her arm and realizing what this means.) You're really here...in my living room!

ARES

Of course I'm here with all the//

(Sera tackles Ares with a bear hug. Ares secretly enjoys it but eventually pushes Sera away. The Critic peaks out to see what's going on.)

ARES

Alright, alright...enough already!

SERA

Sorry, I'm just so excited! I can't believe you're HERE in my apartment and not just in my head!

(Ares adjusts herself and puts her feet back on the coffee table.)

ARES

Well after all the garbage you've been writing I felt like it was time to shake things up!

SERA

It's not garbage...grant it...it's not my best work but...

ARES

Tomato, Ta-matoe

SERA

If you don't have anything nice to say...maybe you shouldn't say anything at all.

ARES

How would that be helpful?

CRITIC

(Peeking through the plant)

Exactly!

SERA

Would you please take your feet off my coffee table.

ARES

Nope. I paid for it. It's mine.

SERA

Ummm, that's not true.

ARES

Kind of is...Now, can we focus? The clock is ticking... and you're fucking with my reputation.

SERA

It's MY reputation that's on the line, not yours!

ARES

I don't think so doll. It's me that people want to connect with...my adventures, my romances, and of course my witty repartee!

SERA

(*Getting up*) Yeah, and I write all of that!

ARES

C'mon...(Laughs) we both know that's not true. You wrote me girlie, needy, and weak...blech.

SERA

(*Sits in chair*) I did no such thing. I wrote you soft and...approachable.

ARES

Needy. That's why I started helping you.

SERA

(*Ignoring Ares*) Is that what you think? The thing is you were more interesting and less threatening when you allowed yourself to be rescued.

ARES

Right. I was more "*interesting*" when I sat around in the *parlor* waiting to be rescued by a man, or a monkey, or what was it in that one book? (*thinking*) oh yeah, a robot!

SERA

(*Guilty*) Okay, maybe not...but you were certainly easier to write. Besides, I always got decent reviews back then.

(The critic who has been watching from behind the plant--reveals himself by speaking.)

CRITIC

Bold, honest, exquisitely written reviews. If I do say so myself. Each one artfully described the generic storytelling, while celebrating the feeminine touch used to create a soft and supple main character.

ARES

(*To Critic*) Eww. (*To Sera*) Who the fuck is this guy?

SERA

My critic.

ARES

You have your own critic?

SERA

yeah...he's here a lot...really annoying.

CRITIC

Thank you. I'm new to the inner critic work. Glad to hear it's going well. I'm a freelancer by trade. I like the diversity of the work, never gets boring. I practice a smidge of arts and entertainment critique and there's always calls for people who specialize in Foo.

ARES

What the hell is Foo?

CRITIC

Family of origin...I concentrate in Foo shaming and what I like to call scar-casm.

CRITIC (Continued)

You know things like "Do you really think you should eat that? I mean your pants are looking a little tight."

ARES

What a weird occupation.

CRITIC

Says the fictional character.

SERA

He also thinks he's a Rod Serling impersonator.

CRITIC

(He clicks on his flashlight)

(As RS) What you're about to watch in this apartment has never before been seen. A writer, a muse, and a critic partake in a different type of storytelling.

ARES

Hey, that's not bad.

CRITIC

Thank you, I've been working on it.

ARES

Back to your block...Sera, you're never going to grow as a writer if your only goal is to write a docile character that never challenges you.

SERA

That's not my only goal.

ARES

Oh, right, apparently you also want to get misogynistic reviews.

CRITIC

Look at you using BIG words.

SERA

When you say it like that I sound pathetic.

ARES

I can't argue with you there.

SERA

It's not that I don't want you to challenge me. But you don't seem to understand that reviews matter!

CRITIC/ARES

Critic: They certainly do. Ares: Bullshit!

SERA

The more assertive I write you, the harsher the reviews.

CRITIC

(In an announcer voice.)

In Sera Keel's latest book, *Sundown at Noon*, her main character, Ares Leek has become angry, aggressive, and well, frankly, rather butch. She seems to be giving the middle finger to femininity.

ARES

Who cares what that insecure dill weed thinks?

CRITIC

Thank you for illustrating my point so beautifully, Miss Leek.

ARES

(To the Critic) Bite me!

SERA

Ares, don't antagonize him. I care what he thinks and what he the others write...I do. I want people to like me...and you.

ARES

What is it about you and being liked? I don't care who likes me. You need to learn to let it go!

SERA

That's easy for you to say, you don't live in this world.

ARES

I'm right here. And just because you're afraid to stand up for yourself doesn't mean I'm going to let you change who I've become.

SERA

I'm the writer, not you. YOU are merely a figment of my imagination. You don't exist!

ARES

I don't exist? Please. I'm the one who made you a writer. I taught you everything you know about creating interesting and complex characters. You can't do this without me.

CRITIC

(Pulling out a small notebook or tablet and leaning in.)

Is this banter a regular part of your writing process?

SERA/ARES

No!

SERA

See, *this* is what he and I don't like about you...you've become cocky and arrogant.

CRITIC

I don't know...she's kind of growing on me. I like that she's direct and speaks her mind.

ARES

(*To Critic*) Thank you. (*To Sera*) I'm not cocky. I'm confident and that's because I had to fight to claim my own worth! You could take a page out of my book!

(Realizing what she said makes her laugh.)

See what I did there?

SERA

You're not funny.

CRITIC

She kind of is.

ARES

Why do you get upset when they call me butch?

SERA

Because you're not!

ARES

(Makes a look at me gesture.)

I'm an independent woman who doesn't define herself through a man...not to mention my awesome gender fluid style...to an insecure man that means I'm butch.

CRITIC

Is this about the Bechdel test?

ARES

(To Critic) Look at you knowing something relevant!
(To Sera) Are you afraid if they call me that, then they'll call you butch too?

CRITIC

Oo! That's a great question!

ARES

Right?! I thought so.

SERA

No. It's not that at all! I just got better reviews when you were less independent and more... girly.

ARES

So you're going to let the reviewers decide what you write?

CRITIC

Really? Because I have some great ideas...let me just find them...

(He flips through his notebook or tablet.)

SERA

I can't talk about this right now. I need caffeine.

(Sera goes to the kitchen for a diet coke.)

CRITIC

What about a young woman in a Nunnery who likes to sing?

ARES

Don't tell me...she makes clothes out of curtains or better yet, she's there hiding from the mob.

CRITIC

No. But, those are great ideas! You should write them down.

ARES

Hey, Sera, how's end of the book coming along?

SERA

I can't hear you!

CRITIC

It's not going well at all.

ARES

Yeah, thanks.

CRITIC

Oh, here's one...there's a guy see and he lives on a farm...he's a former big time executive and wants to build a rocket...

ARES

Sadly that would probably sell.

SERA

(Entering from kitchen)

I don't have time for this idle chit chat Ares, I'm on a tight schedule.

CRITIC

Of not writing but pretending to write.

ARES

You do know your writer's block isn't going anywhere until you unpack that review, right?

SERA

Are you threatening me?

ARES

(Laughs) No. I'm not the one in your way.

SERA

Yes, you are. Every time I try to write the parlor scene you...

ARES

That's all you, doll...you're the one who can't stomach all the fucking shit you're writing.

SERA

Why do you always have to be so vulgar?

ARES

Why did *you* write me that way? Maybe cause that's how you wanna be?

SERA

Not even close.

ARES

I don't know----seems awfully suspect to me.

CRITIC

I would tend to agree.

SERA

Of course you would.

ARES

Maybe that's why you're blocked -- because you're still pretending to be little Miss Sunshine.

CRITIC

Now, that was a great movie!

ARES

It really was.

SERA

If you would just help me...

ARES

I'm not going to help you write some tired old parlor scene...it's trash.

SERA

No, it's not. It's nostalgic...it harkens back to when we first began.

ARES

Bullshit, Sera. It's a knee jerk reaction to a review that made you feel bad about yourself for some reason.

SERA

I've had a lot of reviews, Ares. I think I can handle them.

CRITIC

She makes a good point.

SERA/ARES

Thank you!

ARES

I just want to know why this particular review has you scrambling to change storylines in our book that a month ago you found empowering, authentic, and impactful?

(Beat)

SERA

It's *my* book.

ARES

Oh, really...is that so?

SERA

Yes, as a matter of fact it is.

ARES

You sure that's the way you want to play this?

(Sera and Ares stare at each other.)

CRITIC

Wow, you could cut the tension in here with a knife.

(Ares gets up to leave.)

ARES

Good luck, with your deadline.

(Ares is about to exit.)

SERA

Ares, wait!

ARES

What?!

SERA

Please stay.

ARES

And why would I do that?

SERA

Because...I need you.

ARES

You used to. And you used to value my opinion.

SERA

I still do... but you also have to value mine.

ARES

I do when it's not based in fear. I know you Sera...and I know something's off.

SERA

You don't know everything, Ares!

CRITIC

(To Ares) Outside opinion here, but you were much more palatable to readers in the early days.

ARES

To some readers.

SERA

No, he's right my reviews back then were great!

ARES

(Patronizing) Yeah, and after the first couple of books how much did you enjoying writing the others?
(To the Critic) Do you want to play some cards?

CRITIC

I'd love to.

(The critic goes to the couch. Ares gets up pulls a bonnet out of her pocket and puts it on. She then proceeds to look for a deck of cards. The critic clicks on his flashlight and lights himself.)

CRITIC (Continued)

(As RS) Ares Leek friend to Critic and card shark is looking to shake things up to push her writer to go where she's never gone before.

LIGHTS OR MUSIC ARE USED TO
 CREATE AN INTERLUDE THAT
 SHOWS THE PASSAGE OF TIME.
 DURING IT ARES SEARCHES FOR
 CARDS, THE CRITIC FOLLOWS HER
 AROUND LIKE A KID BROTHER.
 SERA GETS HER LAPTOP AND THE
 BLANKET OFF THE COUCH. SHE
 SITS ON THE FLOOR AND HIDES
 UNDER THE BLANKET. WHEN THE
 INTERLUDE ENDS, WE ENTER HOUR
 TWO ARES, AND THE CRITIC SIT
 ON THE COUCH. SERA COMES OUT
 OF THE BLANKET AND OPENS HER
 LAPTOP. WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF
 CARDS BEING SHUFFLED AND THEN
 DEALT AND SERA'S TYPING,
 WHICH SEEMS TO BE MOSTLY
 DELETING.

ARES

Do you have any nines?

CRITIC

Go fish

ARES

Hey, I fished my wish!

CRITIC

What does that mean?

ARES

It means I got my nine and I get to go again!

CRITIC

Are you making that up?

ARES

No, it's a real thing. Now, give me all your Jacks.

SERA

What? You two are buddies now?

ARES

Why not? I don't care what he thinks of me and he's kind of funny.

CRITIC

You're not so bad yourself. Go fish.

ARES

Your turn.

CRITIC

Do you have any threes?

ARES

Here you go. *(Hands the cards over)*

SERA

(Irritated) Can you please lower your voices.

ARES

I would think the sound of people playing cards would help inspire your nostalgia.

SERA

(She glares at Ares while putting in her ear buds.)

You don't inspire anything!

CRITIC

Ouch. Do you have any fives?

ARES

Go fish. Give me all your eights!

CRITIC

How did you know?!

SERA

Haven't you learned yet...*(childish mocking)* Ares knows everything!

ARES

Do you have any sevens.

CRITIC

Go fish. (Taps Sera on the shoulder.) Look, just write Ares the way you used to and I'll give you a great review...and I'll even go easy on the beating you up for the bad material routine.

ARES

How is that going to help her grow as a writer?

CRITIC

Come on the kid's suffering over there. Do you have any Queens?

ARES

Go Fish. (Beat) Any eights?

SERA

I'm sorry, okay...

ARES

For what?

CRITIC

Go fish.

SERA

For saying that about the books...

ARES

Oh! I fished my wish again.

CRITIC

Are you sure? Let me see!

SERA

Ares, are you listening to me?!

ARES

Not really.

SERA

You know you inspire me and I do think of the books as ours.

ARES

That's mighty big of you to say considering I wrote the last seven.

CRITIC

Really? (Picking up his tablet) Is that true?

SERA

No! She didn't ...you know what? Fine, she's right. She took the lead on some of those books and it was great!

ARES

It was great because you wanted me to help you push our boundaries...until you read that stupid review...

SERA

Let it go!

ARES

Do you have any threes?

CRITIC

Go Fish.

ARES

Sera, why did you write me in the first place.

SERA

What?!

ARES

(To the Critic) That was clear and concise wasn't it?

CRITIC

I thought so. *(To Sera as if she has trouble hearing)* She wants to know what originally inspired you to create her character.

SERA

Yeah, I heard her, you don't need to translate.

CRITIC

Just trying to help. Any fours?

ARES

Go fish. Sera, answer the question.

SERA

I don't know. I was struggling...maybe I was lost...I guess I wondered what it would be like to feel more confident.

SERA (Continued)

So, I created a character who was... and then I wrote adventures for her because I knew she was braver than me and I wanted her to inspire me.

ARES

That was more confident than you were? Wow.

SERA

How is that helpful?

ARES

Right. Are you saying I don't inspire you any more?
(Beat) Any sixes?

SERA

Oh for Pete's, sake.

(Sera gets up and takes the cards from them.)

CRITIC

Hey! I was winning!

ARES

Not even close, Sunshine.

SERA

And take off that stupid bonnet! I get it I'm repressing you.

(Ares, takes off the bonnet
The Critic takes it from her
and tries it on. Sera pulls
it off his head on her way
back from putting the cards
away.)

CRITIC

She seems to be avoiding your question.

ARES

I noticed. Sera?

SERA

It's not that you don't inspire me... You're just pushy and sometimes...you're too much.

ARES

Well, you better get used to it Buttercup because the new and improved Ares is here to stay!

SERA

The thing is... the new you combined with the bad reviews are affecting my sales.

ARES

It's not all about sales, you know that.

SERA

I do...but sales effect contracts...and I can't continue to evolve the series if my books aren't being published.

ARES

They're not going to pull your contract. You get letters every week from women telling you how much you've inspired them to become their own hero.

SERA

They care more about the sales than the letters.

CRITIC

Really? You get letters every week? I've never gotten one.

ARES

(To Critic) And that surprises you why *(To Sera)* Come on, Sera, people taking time out of their busy lives to write you...that's powerful shit.

CRITIC

It sure is.

SERA

Yeah, it's great. But I'm under a lot of pressure. You don't understand what it's like to have everyone comment on your work day in and day out...it's exhausting.

CRITIC

Try having to read everyone else's work. You wouldn't believe how many terrible writers there are out there!

ARES

(To Critic) Not. Helpful. (To Sera) You're right, I don't understand. But, I do know what it's like to live a life (*stops herself*) or at least a book as someone I'm not. And I know it doesn't feel good. Pretending to be less than you are while....dimming your own light, just to make other people comfortable.

SERA

That's what you think I'm doing?

ARES

I think you're holding yourself back because you're afraid some relic (*motions to the Critic*) won't understand you or your voice.

CRITIC

Hey! I thought we were bonding here?!

SERA

This isn't funny. (To Critic) You have all the power.

CRITIC

No, I don't. You're the one choosing to believe everything I say.

ARES

Don't you get it Sera? You're the one with the power.

SERA

It doesn't feel way.

CRITIC

Think about it. Your fans don't care what I have to say. They really don't. Negative review or not they read your book anyway, because your voice matters to them.

ARES

See even he gets it.

SERA

My fans are the reason I'm afraid of changing things. Them and I don't want my books relegated to some "niche" booklist.

ARES

So you're afraid of not being main stream?

SERA

No. I'm afraid of being labeled a queer writer. And it's not because I'm not proud, I am... but not everyone is willing to do the work to find themselves in someone else's story. I know I'm going to lose readers.

ARES

(Ares opens her mouth to speak)

SERA

And don't you dare say "Who cares!" Because I do. I'm not like you, Ares. I care very much about what people think of me.

CRITIC

I totally get that. Nobody likes Critics.

ARES

(*To Critic*) You're not so bad. (*To Sera*) Look, everyone has moments of caring too much about what other people think. But what really matters is what you think.

CRITIC

Sometimes I write what's expected of me and not what I really want to write.

SERA

Join to the club.

CRITIC

Really? There's a club? How often do you meet?

ARES

Can we focus here?! We're on a deadline remember.

CRITIC

Right, sorry.

ARES

Sera, you should write what you want to write!

SERA

I know...but, I don't want to be labeled.

CRITIC

You already are...you're a woman, a writer, a woman writer, a fantasy writer, some would say a...

ARES

Enough with the listing...there's something deeper going on here.

SERA

Yeah, kind of...the thing is...if I write the stories I want to write then I'll have to deal with the voices in my head.

CRITIC

Are you working with another freelancer?

SERA

The minute I start to write a love scene with two women in it...all these horrible voices seem to seep out of the recesses of my mind.

CRITIC

What do they say? Do any of them sound like Rod Serling?

SERA

They say things like..."Dykes will burn in hell"...or "Writing gay characters is a form of indoctrination."

CRITIC

Sounds like you have a dick infestation.

ARES

Should you really be calling yourself that?

CRITIC

It's not me. It's a D.I.C. problem.

SERA

What is that?

CRITIC

It's short for deep down internalizer of contemptible chaos. Those guys are no joke.

ARES

Could you be a little more specific?

CRITIC

Well, technically speaking, they're trained to take external bias such as homophobia or racism and internalize it. Their only job is to make you hate yourself. And they do it by using banned practices from the ICL to override and destroy your critical thinking skills.

SERA

ICL? What's that?

CRITIC

Inner Critic League. D.I.C.s originated from a group of members who refused to adhere to the ICL guidelines. They were banned from the league years ago. They're ruthless and give us all a bad name.

ARES

There must be some way to combat these Dicks.

CRITIC

According to the research the best course of action is to forcefully set a boundary. You must do this the minute you hear them. Then, and only then write down what they've said and do your best to identify the original source.

ARES

Great, we've got a plan.

CRITIC

Do you remember what they last said to you?

SERA

Interesting...So you're saying the best way to deal with the D.I.C.s is to reverse engineer the internalization process? THAT is a great idea for a book!

ARES

Sera, come on! Answer his question...this is important.

SERA

I know it's f'n important Ares! I'm the one who deals with it ALL the time! I'm the one who hates herself... (Shocked) I didn't mean that. I just...

CRITIC

It's very typical to feel that way. The D.I.C.s are trained to convince you to believe them and not yourself...

ARES

Let's stick to plan...What was the last thing they said to you.

SERA

Dykes will burn in hell.

CRITIC

And do you remember the first time ever heard that?

SERA

I don't know...

ARES

Come on Sera, you can do this.

SERA

Ahhh, so stupid. (Beat) fine...I was eating my eggo waffles and watching Davy and Goliath...don't ask it was a christian claymation series.

CRITIC

Oh, right...a boy and his dog...gee Davy...

SERA

Right. Anyway, I got lost in my thoughts. I was thinking about my friend Cassandra and how much I liked to hold her hand...it was only in dance class but her hands were so soft and her fingers were long and thin...Davy and Goliath must have ended because suddenly there's a tv evangelist waving his bible and preaching that the homosexuals and dykes are going to burn in hell. I immediately got a sick feeling in my stomach...and I felt ashamed of thinking about Cassandra... But not really...it was confusing. I mean I didn't totally believe the evangelist...but he spoke with such authority.

SERA (Continued)

I developed some sick kind of infatuation with evangelists and their hate. Then several years later right around the time I decided I wanted to be like Joe on the Facts of Life, my favorite english teacher said "writing masculine women or worse gay characters is a form of indoctrination." What? I couldn't believe she said it. I mean first of all I thought she was gay. But who the F would say that? I didn't understand how somebody who was so smart and so well read could say something that ignorant. That's moment I knew I couldn't trust anyone.

ARES

Did you tell your mom what your teacher said?

SERA

No! I didn't tell anyone...What if my mom felt the same way? I pushed all my feelings down...that worked for a while. But then in my early twenty's I met this girl and I couldn't ignore my feelings anymore. We kissed and for one split second I knew I was home, but then it was like an army of bile and self hatred over taking me as those voices came flooding back...oozing out of every crevasse...like you said...it felt like an infestation.

CRITIC

Horrible, and the more you try to ignore them the stronger they get.

SERA

I've learned that the hard way. I've never been able to stop them.

ARES

Until today. No wonder that review sent you spiraling.

CRITIC

Sharing that story is a great start. Now you got to practice calling them out every time you hear them.

SERA

What do I say?

CRITIC

There's no right thing to say. You can yell No! or something that makes you feel strong.

SERA

No!

ARES

What else got?

SERA

Not today!

ARES

Oh, I like that! Do it again!

SERA

Not today! Because today, I'm going to write queer characters and books so people can see themselves. I want to make a difference.

CRITIC

Good for you! That will certainly make a big impact on your D.I.C.s

ARES

Look at you being so encouraging.

CRITIC

Why you surprised? I'm in the business of motivation.

ARES

Is that what you really think?

SERA

Do you know that most queer characters these days don't even pass the Vito Russo Test? I want to be apart of changing that!

CRITIC

Pass the what?

ARES

Come on now, you know what the Bechdel test is but not the Vito Russo? I guess you've got some homework to do!

SERA

It was actually inspired by the Bechdel test. GLADD developed it to determine how LGBTQ characters are portrayed in film. But I'm going to use it to test my narrative.

ARES

That's enough. It's up to him to do his own homework!

CRITIC

Challenge accepted.

SERA

I've never told anybody about the evangelists before... Thanks for pushing me... It kinda feels good to share some it...you know? Though it's also a little embarrassing.

CRITIC

That's the D.I.C's.

ARES

Follow the plan!

SERA

Right. Not Today! (Beat) I need chocolate...anyone else want some?

(Sera exits to the kitchen. The Critic turns on his flashlight Ares watches.)

CRITIC

(As RS) What you have just witnessed is someone coming to terms with the power of words, experiencing their destruction from the inside out. But hatred doesn't win tonight because Sara Keel will use her words for good and not evil. In choosing to heal herself she will in turn help others feel seen. What will you choose to do with your words? (Non RS) Got any ring dings?

ARES

Hey, you're getting pretty good at that!

INTERLUDE--ENTERING HOUR
THREE. SERA GOES TO THE
KITCHEN AND BRINGS SNACKS.
THE CRITIC AND ARES MAKE HAND
PUPPETS WITH THE FLASHLIGHT.
WHEN IT ENDS THEY ARE ALL ON
OR AROUND THE COUCH.

ARES

I think this is great, Sera! It's so cool you're going to put more of yourself into your work.

SERA

I'm not sure how I'm going to do it, but I want to at least try.

ARES

What about that waitress from the diner? What...two books ago? She was really interesting.

MADDIE

(Walks in from somewhere in the apartment.)

It was three books ago and thank you.

ARES

Right. I could feel her...your vibe the minute I walked into the diner.

SERA/MADDIE

Sera: Really? Maddie: (Flirty) Really?

ARES

Yeah, of course. (*Locked on Maddie*)

CRITIC

Now this is chemistry. You should definitely write about them?

SERA

Maddie, this is Ares

(They shake hands but don't let go. The critic clears his throat)