

SLOWPOKES

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ABSTRACT

“Slowpokes” is a half-hour dramedy series that follows Lane (33), a disheartened comedian-turned-caregiver, and Doug (38), an underqualified legal consultant, as they stumble into a nebulous, trauma-induced relationship. Initially thrown together in a drunken near-collision, these two perfect strangers unwittingly bond in the aftermath of Lane’s mother’s abrupt passing. As Doug struggles to stave off an inevitable divorce and turn his passion for miniature sitcom sets into a full-time hobby, Lane wrestles with big questions about her life, her long-abandoned stand-up career, and her late mother’s estate—including a coveted home on the Toronto Islands.

This is a show about the bizarre bond that develops between two stunted strangers adapting to unfamiliar and highly unusual circumstances. Their budding connection feels genuine—but is it healthy? Are they just “trauma bonding”? And, with Doug (technically) still married, is it *ethical*? As Lane and Doug mourn their very different, but equally formative relationships, they’ll also have to navigate the confusion and ambiguity of this new one. Along the way, Lane will be revisited by different people from her past, including a frenemy from her former comedy days, and the transient stepdad she’d rather stay estranged from. Meanwhile, Doug can’t accept his looming divorce and keeps everyone in the dark about it—including (or perhaps especially) Lane.

“Slowpokes” straddles the fuzzy lines between endings and beginnings, tragedy and comedy, and friendship and romance. It’s about dumb luck and weird timing. It’s about loss and grief. And it’s about love—but, like all classic romcom couples, it takes Lane and Doug a while to realize that.

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INTRODUCTION: THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY OF A SLOWPOKE

You fall in love with the first idea, that little tiny piece. And once you've got it, the rest will come in time.

– David Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*

For as long as I've been an adult, I've had a late bloomer complex. This is evident in the Statement of Interest I wrote for my MFA application in January 2020, just a few months before graduating from York's BFA Screenwriting program. Here's the opening paragraph:

When I came to York in 2016, I felt like the female, freshman version of Billy Madison. Most of my peers were 18—the normal age to start a bachelor's degree—and there I was, a “mature” 28. I remember watching as the Twin Towers appeared in Tony's rear-view mirror during an in-class screening of “The Sopranos”, looking around at my classmates and thinking, “These kids were still breastfeeding on 9/11!” (In a Jersey accent, obviously.)

In other words, I felt old. I even felt hints of Failure to Launch Syndrome as a 19-year-old. And, now, at 34, it's (sadly) still a big part of who I am and how I regard myself. But, little by little, I'm finding ways to make this perceived shortcoming work for me—specifically in my writing. That's the one place where I've actually started to see it as a strength.

Early on in this program, I had an inkling that I wanted to tell a story about a character who's fallen behind in life, or at least feels that she has. Someone who hasn't yet found her place or purpose, while everyone around her seems to be self-actualized and flourishing. I'd been thinking about how and why we, as humans, mark our personal growth—and what or whom we're measuring ourselves against, exactly. Is it our parents and siblings? Our significant

others and friends? Greta Thunberg? Michael Bay? What constitutes a “milestone”? What’s the “appropriate” age to [insert big life event/achievement/decision]? Who decides these things, and who’s keeping score? (Answer: no one but us, it turns out.)

I initially called my project “Slowpoke” because that’s how I envisioned Lane, the first character to form in my mind. Once it became clear to me that I was writing a two-header, I pluralized it to represent both her and the other lead character, Doug. I think of these two as late bloomers, each in their own unique ways, for their own complicated reasons. And I liked how the title reflects the duo’s delayed realization that they belong together (true to classic romcom form).

It didn’t occur to me that this title would also reflect my own personal progress in the Graduate Program in Film—something I’ve consistently had to chart as I’ve moved through it, in my meetings with my supervisory committee, my symposium presentations, my progress reports, and, ultimately, in my own, self-doubting brain. What follows is an exhaustive account of how I very gradually and painstakingly arrived at the concept that would eventually become my MFA thesis project. In the context of the graduate program, the idea may have been a little late to bloom, but I’m so glad I gave “Slowpokes” time to find itself. It needed it, just like I have.

PART I: “BOOMIES”

In January 2020, I applied to the MFA program with a proposal for a half-hour dramedy series called “Boomies”. I’d developed this concept in my fourth-year TV writing course at York (2019-2020), then taught by Thomas Wallner, and I was keen to continue building on it. To give you a taste:

For most millennials, leaving the nest isn’t a seamless process. We might go away to college for a few years and forget what home-cooked food tastes like. But as soon as “The Graduation March” fades out, we’re back in our teenage bed, staring helplessly at a sun-bleached poster of The Strokes. Maybe we get into our first serious relationship and play house for a while. But after the inevitable breakup, we find ourselves bingeing the abandoned “Buffy” box sets in our parents’ basement. Indefinitely.

“Boomies” is an off-beat, serialized dramedy about Maren and Jonas, a couple of newlyweds in their early 30s who move from Berlin to Toronto—only to have their new apartment and Jonas’s music industry job fall through. Broke and desperate, they’re forced to move in with Maren’s parents in Midtown Toronto. This puts an anticlimactic spin on their fresh start, and a strain on Gord and Louise, Maren’s empty-nester parents who are grappling with fear and uncertainty regarding their retirement. The situation is aggravated by Maren’s brother Cam, an aspiring brewmaster and constant pain in Maren’s ass.

The series’ original title was “Boomerangs”—a reference to the phenomenon of young adults, sometimes called the “boomerang generation”, moving home after a brief period of independence. After learning that Lena Waithe had very recently produced a series called “Boomerang”, I changed it to “Boomies”, an amalgam of boomers and roomies (if that

wasn't already obvious). I ended up liking this title even better, mainly because of how stupid it looks, sounds, and is. (Thanks, Lena.)

Inspired by my real-life experience of moving back in with my parents as a married adult, “Boomies” felt like the most “me” thing that I’d written to date. But that was the problem: *I’d already written it*. I’d finished that fourth-year TV course with a pilot script, a detailed treatment of the second episode, a tight one-pager, and a solid 10-page pitch document, which included overviews of the first two seasons. After that, I went on to do several revisions of the pilot. The first was for my (unsuccessful) application to the Canadian Film Centre’s Prime Time Television Program in Spring 2020 (at least I got my first CFC rejection out of the way). Then, I punched up the script again for FEM Script Lab, where it was selected for a table read by a group of professional Toronto-based actors and comedians in June 2020. That session included a workshop, where I received detailed notes from the insightful lab directors, a handful of talented peer writers, and an incisive industry mentor, Rebecca Kohler (*Schitt’s Creek*, *Workin’ Moms*). Their feedback, along with my follow-up conversations with Rebecca after the lab, inspired even further revisions to the script.

On the one hand, sharing “Boomies” with people gave me a lot of encouragement and momentum. And, if I’d continued running with that project as my thesis, I certainly would’ve had my work cut out for me. There’s a ton I could’ve done to refine the pilot. If I were to re-read it today, I’m sure I’d find it in glaring need of extensive reconstructive surgery. I could’ve expanded the show bible and season arcs. Or I could’ve reimaged the show as a web series and written the scripts for 10 webisodes, making them as good as production-ready (something I seriously considered doing). Any combination of these options would’ve been perfectly acceptable to York, and I have no doubt that I would’ve received excellent

guidance on how to elevate “Boomies” from good to exceptional—if I’d stuck to my original plan.

But I didn’t. Something was nagging at me.

I couldn’t shake the suspicion that it’d be sort of lame to take a project I’d already made all this headway with, and essentially recycle it. I remember expressing this to Don McKellar, whose course I was enrolled in at the time. He agreed completely, saying it’d almost be like cheating. When I shared my doubts and concerns with my thesis supervisor, Ingrid Veninger, she totally got it, too. She’d read through the package I’d put together for “Boomies” and thought it was sleek and pitch-able, i.e., something I could already get industry eyes on, probably.

“Boomies” would’ve been the easier road, which is why I didn’t take it. I still believe in that project. I think it’s got legs, and I know I’ll return to it someday. But it wasn’t the thing I wanted to work on in this particular program, at this particular time. I knew that refining an existing project wouldn’t give me the same sense of accomplishment as seeing an entirely new one through, from start to finish. I don’t think I would’ve grown as much as a writer, either.

So, it was settled: I’d begin a whole new thesis project. All I needed was an idea.

PART II: WISEMAN'S WORKSHOPS

Allow yourself time, let things brew. You're thinking about it, whether you realise it or not. Letting the unconscious take over brings in freedom and surprise and removes judgement.

– **Charlie Kaufman**, *BAFTA Screenwriters' Lecture Series*

As a student in Howard Wiseman's Graduate Screenwriting courses, I had the choice of either workshopping my existing thesis project (the one I'd applied to the program with) or exploring some new ideas that may or may not be related to it. Since my thesis was still very much in flux during my first year of the program, I took the opportunity to generate some new material. Howie met each student where they were at and gave everybody license (within reason) to change direction if/when a new creative seed emerged. This freedom was a gift; I really needed that time and space to reflect and cultivate some new stories.

In October 2020, I came up with a couple of series concepts for potential development. The hope was that one of these would become my thesis, or at least be a contender.

1. “**Songbirds**” (half-hour series, Comedy)

Logline: When the beloved conductor of an amateur seniors' choir gets #meetoo'd and placed on indefinite leave, the artistic director hires a wildcard entertainer to take his place, unwittingly transforming the locally lauded classical ensemble into something else altogether.

Thanks to my parents, I've been exposed to many adult amateur choirs over the years.

There's something both endearing and very funny about watching a group of dentists,

lawyers, retired teachers and accountants belt out musical pieces ranging from Brahms to

Bette Midler (I've seen the full spectrum). I'm also amused by the varying levels of personal

investment among choristers. For some people, singing in a choir is akin to karaoke. For others, it's a very serious endeavour. Regardless, there seems to be an earnestness that comes with belonging to a group of this sort. It's recreational without being a frivolous hobby. It demands a certain kind of focus and dedication. These organizations also come with their own unique sets of politics and social dynamics, which is fascinating to me. It's rich comedic territory, I think, and there's plenty of heart to be found in it as well.

2. **"Town of the Midnight Sun"** (6-part miniseries, Drama)

Logline: An aimless 19-year-old is forced to fend for herself in Dawson City when she's ditched by the shitty boyfriend she followed there for the summer.

I spent a summer in Dawson in my early 20s. It's a town that's usually depicted from a historical, gold rush perspective, but I've always thought it'd be a great backdrop for a contemporary show about young people. It's such a strange place which feels artificial in the way that its present-day reality is eclipsed by its attempts to preserve its history. I was interested in the sadness and eeriness of that.

For each of these concepts, I wrote a 4-page outline, including series synopses, character descriptions, sections about the shows' settings and worlds, and brief overviews of the first two seasons. The next step was to pick one and write a pilot script. At the time, I felt it was important to challenge myself by writing a drama, because I always gravitate towards comedy. So, I attempted to write the pilot episode of "Town of the Midnight Sun". It was a vomit draft in every sense of the word. I sheepishly handed it over to Howie in November 2020 and haven't thought about it since (until now).

I wasn't head over heels about "Songbirds", either. While I liked the premise, I didn't feel strongly enough about it to spend the next umpteen months of my life agonizing over it. So, for the remainder of the Fall 2020 semester and all of Winter 2021, I explored another idea I'd had, this time for a film:

3. *Stand By* (feature, Comedy/Drama/Family)

Logline: After moving into a nursing home against his will, a dementia-stricken recluse attempts to prove his autonomy by traveling alone from Toronto to Seattle to visit his daughter—but winds up stranded and disoriented in Tokyo.

Conceptually, this was my take on *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), with a little dementia in the mix (based on a family member, sadly). Tonally, however, I was aiming for something closer to Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* (2013) or Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016). While the premise has plenty of opportunity for over-the-top hijinks, my main focus was on the characters, their relationships and interpersonal conflicts. Like writer/director/producer Alan Ball (*American Beauty*, "Six Feet Under"), I'm most interested in watching and writing movies about "people dealing with people problems".

Of the ideas I came up with in Howie's courses, *Stand By* was the only one I considered expanding into a thesis project. Howie liked it, and so did the people in my cohort. I workshopped the story in class and wrote a detailed treatment. But I still didn't love it. When I shared the idea with Ingrid, she helpfully reminded me that I want to work in TV...So, why pivot to a feature? It was a valid point. A big reason I'd enrolled in this program was to build on my TV portfolio. I also wanted to write about my own demographic and *Stand By* wasn't going to fulfill that desire. However, the experience of writing the treatment and contextual

document helped me identify some of the themes that I wanted to explore in my thesis project.

PART III: BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD (AGAIN)

On a Zoom call in February 2021, Ingrid suggested that I take a step back and focus on *research*. I wasn't having any breakthroughs in the ideas department, so maybe I needed to delve deeper into my genre of choice: dramedy. Ingrid also encouraged me to pinpoint the intent behind whatever it was that I was working towards, i.e., was I writing something with the goal of directing and producing it myself, or would it ultimately be directed and produced by somebody else? She felt that the answer to this question would inform the approach I took to my writing, and that it was important for me to think about my project in the context of the real world and industry. I went away from our conversation with lots to reflect on, and we agreed that I'd submit a rough outline of a new idea by mid-April. Ideally, I'd commit to a thesis project by Summer 2021.

For the next couple of months, I followed Ingrid's advice. I took some of the pressure off myself as a writer and focused on being a viewer, an absorber, and a critical thinker. I watched new series and revisited old favourites. I finally got around to finishing "Six Feet Under" and "Girls" (HBO), shows I'd only watched sporadically while they were on the air. I saw "Transparent" (Prime) for the first time (representation issues notwithstanding, it was helpful in a formal sense). I read dozens of produced pilots that had been accumulating on my hard drive—some half-hour comedies, some hour-long dramas, and others somewhere in between. I read essay collections, television criticism and books about TV writing. Some were excellent, like Emily Nussbaum's *I Like to Watch*; others were duds, like Sheldon Bull's *Elephant Bucks* (no offence, Sheldon). Regardless, it was important for me to have this period of TV immersion.

Well, April rolled around, and I still didn't have any ideas—at least none that seemed worth pursuing. I sent Ingrid another discouraged email, telling her I felt like I was chasing

something that just wasn't happening, overthinking everything and feeling defeated—a great recipe for creative paralysis. I decided that, unless inspiration miraculously struck me in the next few weeks, I was going to have to work with one of the ideas I'd already come up with. At the time, the only viable options in front of me seemed to be *Stand By*, or the web series version of “Boomies”. Despite my hang-ups about the latter being the easy way out, I was actually leaning towards it. I'd been mulling over Ingrid's question regarding my real-world intentions, realizing more and more the importance of producing my own work. If I went the web series route, I'd be writing it with the ultimate aim of putting a team together and making the show. My thesis project could help put me in good shape to apply for funding.

There were a few reasons why I, once again, decided against this—the main one being that a web series didn't feel like an appropriate *solo* project. As stated in the MFA Handbook: “For screenwriters, a thesis is the final draft of an original feature-length screenplay or TV series that *they are the sole author of* (emphasis added)”. I'd been working on “Boomies” for a year and a half already and, while there was certainly enough of a story there for me to write a full web series on my own, that didn't seem like much fun to me. Also, if I'm being completely honest...I don't watch web series! There are a few exceptions, but the format just doesn't excite or inspire me. The half-hour dramedy, on the other hand, does.

PART IV: WHY TELEVISION? WHY DRAMEDY?

Up until fairly recently, there was a widespread wariness of television as a medium. To quote the TV critic Emily Nussbaum: “It was viewed as a shameful activity [...] If you were an artist, writing TV was selling out; if you were an intellectual, watching it was a sordid pleasure, like chain-smoking.” She goes even further, likening it to “a sketchy additive that corporations had tipped into the cultural tap water.”

Twenty-first century attitudes regarding television have evidently improved as production values have increased, storytelling has grown more cinematic and sophisticated and, of course, Video-on-Demand platforms have revolutionized the way we consume content. These days, esteemed auteurs routinely migrate over to the medium, redefining it as serious, criticism-worthy art.

I realized I wanted to be a TV writer about three and a half years ago. I was taking a TV Writing course with Rebecca Schechter at York and, very early into it, Rebecca told us something that really stuck with me. She said that, in film, the director rules. But in TV, the writers do. (If you want to split hairs, the executive producers/showrunners are technically the people with the most creative control over a show... Then again, they're also writers, usually.) This perspective got me really excited about the medium. While I'm interested in directing, writing is my first love and what I feel I do best, and I've found my strength and greatest joy in episodic storytelling. I'm a child of HBO and a couple of TV junkies, so this is no shocker. I love spending an extended period with characters in a world where, like a good book, you're sad to leave it when it's over.

As for dramedy? To me, it's the most true-to-life genre. Real life makes us laugh and cry, so shouldn't television? In my opinion, "Freaks and Geeks" was the first show to really nail that tricky balance between humorous and heartfelt, and it has paved the way for so many other excellent series. It's my all-time favourite show (so much so that, huge nerd that I am, I've co-produced and performed in a couple of live readings of the scripts, complete with a live score). While "Slowpokes" is set in a completely different time and place than "Freaks and Geeks" and deals with very different subject matter, I hope that it can occupy a similar space in terms of realism and tone.

What about Canadian TV?

[...Crickets...]

I was traveling with my boss not too long ago, and there was a very friendly and inquisitive passenger on our flight. When it came up that my boss is a TV writer/showrunner, the woman asked if she might know any of her work. My boss replied, "I don't know, do you watch Canadian TV?" It wasn't Chatty Cathy's response (a polite "sometimes" that unequivocally meant no) that surprised me. It was the question that caught me off guard. If I'm being honest, I only watch Canadian TV because I want to be a TV writer, and I consider it an important part of my homework. But it's a depressing realization when you find out that even the people who *make* television in this country are operating under the assumption that no one is watching it.

I am not alone in the opinion that most Canadian TV kind of sucks. It's tricky to pinpoint, but there's something about it that just feels *off*. For the most part, when I'm watching a Canadian TV show, I'm *aware* that I'm watching a TV show. I can't get lost in it, because the characters feel like actors, their clothing feels like costumes, and their hair and makeup

look like they've been styled for a camera, not for their everyday, ordinary lives. There are exceptions, of course, but more films come to mind than series. (Not to be harsh but, even then, the amount of genuinely great work that doesn't require the qualifier "for a Canadian movie" is lacking, in my experience.)

To be clear, I'm aware that most of this comes down to money. We have a very limited number of platforms in this country, and they just don't have the budgets that networks like HBO and Hulu do. Still, there's got to be a way that we can make Canadian TV feel less artificial on the whole. I don't know what it will take, but I want to be a part of that movement. Canada needs bold programs that challenge genre conventions and the trappings of network television. Our screen-based media industries (generally) lack nuanced, true-to-life representations of our diverse communities, and I'm determined to change that as a screenwriter—starting with my hometown of Toronto. I'm driven to help create offbeat, honest, and meaningful content that's both culturally specific and universally resonant. To elevate the quality and resonance of Canadian television, making shows that will hit home in this country, south of the border, and around the world. TV is the medium of the future, and I think Canada's got to step up its game.

PART V: “SLOWPOKES”: CONCEPTION & COMMITMENT

In June 2021, I *finally* had the initial spark for a new project and, by mid-July, I’d written the first draft of a series outline. There was no lightbulb moment with “Slowpokes”, and I’m not sure that I’ve had one with anything else that I’ve written. It’s usually more of a cumulative thought process, with several nascent nuggets bouncing around inside my head for months on end, until eventually some connective tissue starts to form. Below are a couple of the main nuggets that ended up sticking.

My goal with every story that I write is to ground it in in some (usually semi-autobiographical) truth. Most of my ideas grow out of my own experiences, observations, and obsessions. In fact, they all do. As I mentioned, “Boomies” was directly inspired by a somewhat recent chapter of living in my childhood bedroom with my husband. A few years ago, my experience of living in Berlin and my fascination with the dubbing industry sparked a weird screenplay about a body-swapping German voice actor. I’ve always admired writers who mine their own lives for stories and do so with emotional honesty—which, for me, is one of the most essential qualities of any series.

Aging Parents & Children as Caregivers

Sadly, my father-in-law has been declining into dementia for several years now. His circumstances became especially dire last December, necessitating a move to an assisted living home in Berlin. Since then, he’s gotten noticeably worse. Fortunately, he still knows my husband and me, but he’s frequently confused about time and place, especially his own whereabouts. His illness has also significantly impacted his mobility; he needs help showering, using the toilet, and he no longer has the coordination or physical strength to walk

more than a couple of meters. On our most recent visit to Berlin, we really struggled to get him outside for fresh air, even with his wheelchair and the extra help of his caregivers.

As a daughter-in-law and wife, I'm deeply affected by this situation on an emotional level. As a writer, I'm able to find meaning in it. *Stand By* was directly inspired by my father-in-law, and "Slowpokes" deals with some of the same themes. Most of us will outlive our parents, and I'm interested in the inevitable role-reversal that occurs when children become caregivers to their parents. Sometimes that flip occurs at a natural time. My grandma's health started to go downhill in her late 80s, and my mom gradually took on the role of caregiver over the next several years, until she died last year at age 99. Other times, this shift happens prematurely. One of my best friends lost her mom (my godmother) when we were only 19. And many people go through this when they're even younger.

In Lane's case, she was in her late 20s when her mom got sick, which is still quite young. In the first few versions of "Slowpokes", Lane's mother Martha suffered from stroke-induced dementia. I've since changed this, but the concept of an aging parent and an adult-child caregiver is still central to Lane's story—even if we only get a brief glimpse into that part of her life in the pilot episode.

Lane as a Comedian

When I was 19, I applied to the Comedy Writing and Performance program at Humber College. One of the people I auditioned for was Joe Flaherty, who, in addition to his work on "SCTV", played Harold Weir on "Freaks and Geeks" (NBC). The audition went well, and I was offered a spot in the program. At first, it all seemed very promising. I'd be taking a sketch course with Robin Duke, also of "SCTV" fame, and I was so excited to be among like-minded people in an intimate, creative context.

Unfortunately, the experience turned out to be miserable. For one, my peers were predominantly 18- and 19-year-old dudes who only wanted to talk about their dicks. While I envied their confidence, I didn't find any of them funny. I recoiled into myself. It wasn't the good kind of discomfort that Steven Pressfield discusses in "The War of Art", where the resistance you feel towards something is proof in and of itself that it's what your soul needs. This was not that. It was the visceral feeling of not belonging somewhere and needing to get the hell out. So, after suffering through a semester of Yuk Yuk's amateur nights and games of "Yes, let's!", I bailed.

After dropping out, I turned to another passion of mine: music. In some ways, this was a more earnest form of expression for me, and it led to some wonderful experiences over the next several years. It's how I met my husband, so I wouldn't change a thing. But I have often wondered where I'd be now if I'd stuck around the Toronto comedy scene. Lane's backstory in "Slowpokes" was directly inspired by my own experiences in that program, and that somewhat wistful feeling of being way out of the loop in a scene you once considered yourself to be a part of.

I wouldn't necessarily classify "Slowpokes" as a comeback story, but Lane certainly revisits her past life and pursuits, and I do intend for the series to follow her slow and circuitous reintegration into the Canadian comedy scene. More than that, though, I think her journey is about her being freed from a very unusual situation that had been holding her back, and embarking on a new path of self-discovery. Lane is figuring her shit out, just like the rest of us.

Lane as a Personal Assistant

For years now, a friend of mine has been working as a personal assistant to a very peculiar “gentleman of leisure”, and he’s shared some pretty wild and hilarious stories with me. I’d already been looking for a way to incorporate this job into a project when I got hired as someone’s personal assistant myself a year and a half ago. In my case, it’s been a positive experience that’s already opened some exciting doors. It’s also the most unusual job I’ve ever had, and it’s given me some amazing material. I just hope I can figure out a tactful way to use it that doesn’t result in being terminated. (Thankfully, my boss has a great sense of humour.)

The Toronto Islands

In my first semester as a grad student, I took a Narrative Directing course with Don McKellar. We had only one assignment in this course: to write and direct a 5- to 8-minute short film. With COVID-19 raging and another lockdown looming, I was feeling uneasy about orchestrating a shoot. I knew that, for both safety reasons and simplicity’s sake, I’d want to keep personnel to an absolute bare minimum and shoot the project entirely outdoors. I racked my brain for accessible exterior locations, struggling to come up with one that felt unique. Eventually, it hit me: the Toronto Islands.

I’d long been intrigued by the Ward’s Island community, having gotten to know it through my islander friends, and decided that this would be my location. I’d also never really seen it onscreen before, apart from the scene in Sarah Polley’s *Take This Waltz* (2011) where Michelle Williams’s character rides The Scrambler. Loosely inspired by John Hughes’ *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), I came up with a story about two ex-friends scrambling to find their way home from a bachelorette slumber party on Ward’s Island after missing the last ferry to Toronto.

When a severe weather alert was issued for our first day of production, I assumed it was typical Ontario being typically hysterical about what would end up being a 20-minute period of light showers. But, for maybe the first time in the province's history, the alarmism was warranted. Extreme winds, freezing temperatures, hail...It was a shitshow. We pushed the shoot by a couple of days, but the weather still wasn't great. We were shooting outside, in November, in Toronto—and in fact on an island that is reliably 5 degrees cooler than the city at any given time.

We shot the film over two consecutive nights, with only a 4-hour window between sundown and the literal last ferry—which we all needed to catch (and, hilariously, came dangerously close to missing). It was frantic and cold and exhausting, but at least we didn't have to contend with a psychotic windstorm. One of my islander friends generously let us shoot some scenes in his backyard, offering his kitchen as a place to plug in our Crockpot and offload footage throughout the shoot. We were relieved and kind of amazed that we pulled it off—and just in the nick of time, Covid-wise.

This experience may have deterred me from ever typing the words “EXT.” and “NIGHT” in the same scene heading again, but it also inspired me to explore the island further. *Last Boat* didn't depict the community at all (we only had 3 actors). And, being shot in the dark and in the cold, it hardly showcased the physical location. When I wrote the script, I'd wanted to include some atmospheric shots, but our shooting schedule ended up being so tight that we didn't get any B-Roll. We didn't do it justice, and the finished product left something to be desired, visually, and probably in lots of other ways.

The story also centred on two city people who are just visiting the island. I wanted to write about some of the people who live there.

PART VI: DUAL PROTAGONISTS

When it occurred to me that “Slowpokes” should be a two-header, I knew that I’d need to create two equally compelling characters. I found this to be quite challenging, along with figuring out how to give each character equal weight, screen time, and complimentary arcs over the span of the series. The details of Lane’s past and present relationships, jobs, etc. changed significantly over the course of writing this project, but the essence of her character felt very clear to me from the beginning. Doug’s character, however, took a lot longer to form in my mind.

Evolution of Lane

The obvious reason that Lane came to me more easily is that I’m also a woman in my mid-thirties with a comedic sensibility. Still, she wasn’t a fully formed character from day one; she’s evolved as much as any other aspect of the project. Here is the first-ever character description I wrote for her, in July 2021:

Lane (age 34), our protagonist. She used to make fun of women in their thirties who were insecure about aging...until she sort of became one of them. Since her graphic design career got derailed and her engagement to her college boyfriend fell through, her ambition and self-confidence have totally plummeted. After a futile year of freelancing, she desperately accepted a personal assistant job for a high school acquaintance’s aunt, which has only made her feel more adrift and under-accomplished. Meanwhile, her friends all have cushy full-time jobs and are in committed partnerships, many of them with kids—things she’d like to have in her life, too, but they still haven’t happened for her. Her 35th birthday is just around the corner and she’s feeling the pressure to “settle down” like never before, but struggling to figure out an attainable, fulfilling version of that that feels true to who she is.

For a while, I thought I was telling a story about a character navigating what journalist Rachel Syme dubbed “the swerve” phenomenon. Specifically for women, it’s the period between ages 33-38 that “so many big decisions and future plans have to be squeezed into”. Since entering into the mid-thirties zone myself, I’ve felt a definite shift in my perspective and priorities. Things that weren’t concerns for me as recently as two years ago suddenly have more urgency, and the question of how to “have it all” (in my case, a fulfilling creative career and a family) looms large. So, I wanted to draw on some of my experiences and observations from this time, and the relatable stories/fears/doubts that other female friends have shared with me as we go through this confusing and consequential phase of our lives.

From the beginning, Lane’s journey in “Slowpokes” has been (partly) about coming out of a long-term relationship and struggling to get her shit together. First, the relationship was with a would-be fiancé. Next, it was with a douchebag comedian who ghosted her and moved to Brooklyn. And, finally, it was with her mom. Initially, Lane’s mother was just one of many things that Lane was dealing with as she pieced together her life puzzle. Like Hal in *Stand By*, Martha was still somewhat with it, and her ability to live independently was only just coming into question at the start of the series. Lane didn’t live with her, and I didn’t plan for her to—nor did I plan for Martha to die. The story was going to be about moving Lane’s mom into assisted living.

It was around December 2021 that a writer friend helped me realize that Lane needed a concrete *reason* for being a slowpoke. What had caused her to fall behind in life? The show then became about Lane being relieved of her duties as a caregiver when her mother dies, but not having a clue what to do with her newfound freedom. I didn’t really want to write a grief story, though, nor did I want to spend too much time on Lane’s mother and her illness. Obviously, Lane is affected by her mom’s death and has grief to process. But she’s also

worked through a lot of it already. In some ways, Lane lost her mom back when she had a stroke, a few years before the story even begins.

In her current form, I think Lane is still feeling “the swerve” in certain ways, but it isn’t her main issue. A big reason for this shift was removing her breakup from the equation. In a very early draft, she’d been trying to get pregnant with her long-term boyfriend and was already heartbroken from a miscarriage when he left her. Now, Lane is still dealing with heartbreak, but it’s because she’s lost a parent, not a partner.

Evolution of Doug

It took me a long time to figure out who Doug was, and to make him feel worthy of being not just Lane’s love interest, but also a protagonist in his own right. Initially, the male love interest was a completely different dude who doesn’t resemble Doug whatsoever. Here’s the description I wrote for that guy:

***Wolf** (age 26), Lane’s love interest. He grew up on Denman Island in BC and lost both of his parents only a few years apart. Since he has no other family on the west coast, he decided to move to Toronto to live with his similarly-aged cousin. He’s not a huge fan of the city but he likes his ferry job okay; it reminds him of home. He doesn’t plan on staying forever, or even beyond the summer—he’s just biding his time while he figures out his next move. With no post-secondary education, his options are limited, but he figures he’ll save up some money to go traveling.*

Obviously, Wolf didn’t make the cut (yawn!), but I wrote about half a dozen other versions of him and tried on about as many character names before he finally became *Doug*. In the first few drafts of the pilot, this guy was a lot dopier and more of a bro. At one point, Ingrid even took issue with how dumb he was, to the point that she actively didn’t want Lane to get

together with him. Clearly, my intention to make him naïve was resulting in him seeming unintelligent, and I didn't want to risk other people feeling this way about the character and the Lane/Doug relationship. He needed more definition and dimension.

As I started to reconceive of Doug's character, something I knew was that this character was eager to be a dad, and his partner of many years would break his heart by leaving him. A couple I know went through a breakup during the height of the pandemic and continued sharing an apartment for months afterwards. They ended up working things out (they just got married a few weeks ago), but I thought it'd be interesting to look at a couple who don't. In the first several drafts, Doug and Victoria were already a couple months into their separation when the story began, but I realized this was a mistake. It's much more dramatic if we see this happen; it's the inciting incident for Doug's journey in the show. The other inspiration for Doug's personal life was a story I'd heard about friends of a friend who were getting divorced because the woman lost her sexual interest in her husband after going off the birth control pill. That was several years ago, but it stayed with me and ended up feeling very fitting for Doug's marriage. I also wanted to flip the cliché of women pressing their commitment-phobe male partners into having a baby. Especially in relationships where the female partner is younger, I think it's more common than we think for men of a certain age (in this case, in their late 30s) to be the ones who are feeling the pull to procreate.

In the first several versions of this character, he lacked a *thing*. Lane's was comedy. What was Doug's hobby or passion? I considered making it music but couldn't think of an interesting angle on it. (Plus, the millennial male lead in "Boomers" is a musician and I didn't want to repeat myself.) I remembered an interview I'd read with Paul Rust, one of the co-creators and the co-star of "Love" (Netflix). When asked about how his character Gus and his friends write theme songs for movies in their spare time, Rust said: "We were trying to

capture the idea that my friends and I are indoor kids.” *Indoor kids*. This idea stuck with me, and I wanted to give Doug an equally specific and equally nerdy interest or hobby.

The miniatures thing came about for a couple of reasons. In my second semester of the MFA program, I took a critical theory course that intimidated the hell out of me, but the final project was the most fun I’d had that entire term. I pitched a speculative art project of a real-time, stop-motion remake of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987)—yes, the second project I’d submitted for a York course that was inspired by this film. This involved charting Neal Page (Steve Martin) and Del Griffith’s (John Candy) circuitous journey from New York to Chicago, via Wichita, Jefferson City, and St. Louis, using found footage of YouTubers’ location-sighting and images from Google Street View. Clearly, I share Doug’s dorky obsession with recreating my favourite movies/shows, and this was the first seed for his artistic passion. But I wanted Doug to create a different kind of video tour. I also wanted his recreations to be instantly recognizable onscreen. That’s when I decided that he should build dioramas of iconic 90s sitcom sets and make video tours of them for his YouTube channel.

There definitely seems to be an audience for replicas of pop culture staples. I’ve come across a few mini recreations of TV sets on the internet. This past summer, my brother and I gave our Dad a 1,326-piece “Seinfeld” Lego set for his birthday. Something called *The Friends Experience* recently opened at Yorkdale mall, which I still don’t quite understand, but it seems to be a large-scale exhibit of set recreations from that sitcom. There’s also a huge audience for miniatures in general, with so many Instagram accounts devoted to them, attractions like Little Canada popping up, and shows like “Best In Miniature” getting greenlit. (Evidently, parts of this series were directly inspired by Little Canada. A good friend of mine works in Guest Services there, so she’d be an excellent consultant for Season Two.)

PART VII: PILOT

I liked to think of the dormant script curing like ham in a hickory woodshed. Each day I left it alone, it got better. And now it was time to check on the progress it had made without me.

– **Miranda July**, *It Chooses You*

By early 2022, I was getting pretty frustrated with my lack of progress. Thanks to a holiday bout of COVID-19, I hadn't written a word over the winter break, because I'd spent those weeks in bed. But I did catch up on a lot of TV shows, including "Insecure" (HBO), "Work in Progress" (Showtime), and "Sort Of" (CBC/HBO Max). Oh, and "Dawson's Creek" (WB), which would weirdly find a place in what I was writing. So, I was still doing research...But I still wasn't *writing*.

In February 2022, I finally managed to churn out a first draft of the pilot. I was so happy to have *something* written in screenplay format. Even if the script needed a ton of work—and it most certainly did—I had gotten over the first big hurdle. I really think we should give our first drafts more credit. They exist solely to be rewritten, but they're tough as hell. No matter how much they make us cringe, it's a miracle whenever one materializes.

PART VIII: FEEDBACK

There comes a point in every project, at least for me, when I cannot move forward without getting input from another mind. To write anything in absolute solitude is a huge challenge—and I think this is particularly true when it comes to TV writing. There’s a reason that “auteur” series are few and far between; television is an inherently collaborative medium. On most shows, there’s a whole team of writers who build the series together. As the sole author of “Slowpokes”, I obviously didn’t have a writers’ room, but I did lean on various people whose contributions I’d like to acknowledge.

First Readers

I think that every [writer] has a single ideal reader; that at various points during the composition of a story, the writer is thinking, ‘I wonder what he/she will think when he/she reads this part?’ For me that first reader is my wife, Tabitha.

– **Stephen King**, *On Writing*

Like Stephen King, my ideal reader is my partner. Carl isn’t a screenwriter. He’s an extraordinary musician, but he’s never written a script in his life (although there may be a romcom cowrite in our future). It doesn’t matter, though. He’s smart, funny, and he understands storytelling. And we have the same taste. Carl is a natural story editor who never fails to point me towards solutions. When I get lost in the details, he helps me see the bigger picture. He’s also German, so he’s incapable of sugar-coating. And he’s the person whose intuition I trust and whose laughter I want to hear more than anyone else’s in the world. For all of these reasons, he’s the first person I go to for notes.

The other person I pester for feedback is my good friend Maisie, a brilliant TV writer and sometimes filmmaker. Maisie is a straight shooter, but an extremely encouraging one. She’s

always down for a brainstorm and she asks great questions that push me to dig deeper into my characters and their stories. She's a great problem-solver, too.

Consultants

Another really important part of writing (so I'm learning) is recognizing the limitations of your own knowledge and when to seek input from an expert. Take the buddy cop show "Pretty Hard Cases" (CBC/NBCU) for example, which I did some work on this past summer. Neither of the showrunners and none of the writers have ever worked in law enforcement. So, questions regularly arise about that world, ranging from terminology to police protocol. If there's ever any uncertainty about the plausibility of a procedural story beat, the writers' room will bring in their go-to guy, a former sergeant with the Toronto Police Service. He also reads the scripts before they're produced, flagging anything that doesn't ring true.

As another example, some productions might have a "sensitivity consultant" if they're depicting a marginalized experience or identity, to ensure the accurate and respectful representation of that life or individual. Depending on the project, this type of consultation can be essential.

In the case of "Slowpokes", the main things I needed help with understanding were the complexities of buying and selling property on the Toronto Islands. I knew my islander friends Ivy and Chris would have lots of helpful insider info on this topic. Thankfully, they were both willing to share it with me.

My friend Ivy and I worked together for a few months last summer while she trained me to take over her job. During this time, we had lots of opportunities to chat about what each of us was working on. I knew Ivy's brain would be a great one to pick about the story I was trying to develop; her parents have lived on Ward's Island since the early 80s, and she's still very

connected to that community. She offered me several key pieces of information, which have ended up being of significance to “Slowpokes”:

1. Because the Toronto Islands are a public park, islanders own their physical houses, but not the lots that they’re built on. The land is public.
2. Residents of the Toronto Islands are required to live there for at least 220 days out of every year; in other words, they can’t go away for more than 145 days per year (about 5 months).
3. Legally, homeowners can only transfer their houses to a spouse or a child. Anyone who isn’t direct next of kin is ineligible.
4. There’s a buyers list that caps at 500 names, and those names are drawn through a lottery system. Ivy herself has been trying to get her name on this list since she was 17 years old. She still hasn’t had any luck (although her partner recently scored a spot).

Ivy also pointed me to a juicy Toronto Life article about a property battle on Ward’s Island involving adult adoption:

As word spread, the community went into a frenzy. Two camps quickly formed, one ardently supporting the men, the other just as ardently opposed. One meeting, held on Zoom, devolved into a shouting match. The same people who had gathered for ukulele lessons and lay in shavasana beneath the willows could barely stand to look at each other. Propaganda promoting one viewpoint or the other began to appear in mailboxes.

Howie was familiar with this story, too, and it planted an important seed in my head: maybe I could incorporate a housing scandal into this story. After reading the article, I dug up the

Island Residential Act online. I was pretty sure my female protagonist's journey would begin with the death of her islander mother, and she'd have to figure out what to do with the house. So, I started thinking about plausible oversights in the mother's will, lease, or in the Island Act itself that could potentially complicate things for her daughter and raise questions around ownership.

Months later, I called up my friend Chris, who was born and raised on Ward's Island. The house he grew up in belonged to his mum, who sadly died of cancer a few years ago. (Her celebration of life in Chris's beautiful backyard inspired some of the imagery in Episode Two of "Slowpokes".) I told Chris that I was trying to construct a property battle between the daughter and the estranged husband of a deceased islander, and I wanted to better understand what happens to an islander's home when they die. I knew that Chris's dad had inherited his mum's house after she passed, despite their having been separated for many years, but I didn't have any legal context. How had they arrived at this decision? Were there any legal complications when it came to the transfer of ownership?

Chris shared (and gave me permission to share in this paper) that, when his mum was in her final days, they arranged for a lawyer to come to Princess Margaret Hospital so she could legally add Chris's dad as a joint tenant on her lease. Chris's parents were still legally married, and Chris had recently bought his own house on Ward's Island, so it only made sense for his mum to transfer her home to her spouse. (This decision would also spare Chris and his family the headache and expense of probate court.) This was the first key piece of the puzzle for my story: that Lane's stepdad would be a joint tenant on her mother's lease.

Chris also helped me understand the role of the Land Trust, explaining that they're basically the landlords of Ward's and Algonquin Islands. I had lots of questions about how this works. Specifically, I wanted to know how strict they are about the residency requirement, i.e. that islanders must live on the island for a minimum of 220 days per year. Chris told me that, as far as he knows, nobody even tracks this. He said that the Trust's involvement would usually be complaint-driven, e.g. maybe a neighbour notices that a house has been vacant for the past 4 months and gives the Trust a heads up. But the chances of anyone coming by in an official capacity would be low (and illegal, he thinks). This was very helpful information for me to have because I wanted the stepdad character to somehow make it look like he'd been living in the house all along, even though he'd moved out years ago. Chris gave me the idea of creating a paper trail, and I decided on some government-issued mail that had been collecting at Lane's house since her stepdad moved out.

Some other details Chris helped me with:

- 1) I wasn't sure how formal or informal an islander's negotiations with the Land Trust might be, or what space they even work out of. Chris said that, in terms of a meeting, the level of officiality could vary; it could even just be a stop-and-chat on the street. But he told me they have office hours on the second floor of the Riviera (formerly the Rectory Cafe), so Lane could realistically drop in for a chat with someone there. I could've invented a physical location for the Trust, of course, but having it be above the Rectory worked out well for the story, and I love to be as accurate and true-to-life as possible with this type of thing.

- 2) For accuracy's sake regarding Lane's lost wallet in the pilot episode, I wanted to know if her Ontario Driver's License would say *Ward's Island* on it in real life. Chris confirmed that it does.

My islander friends weren't the only people I went to for input on this project. Something I generally find really challenging about character building is coming up with their careers. I'm having enough trouble figuring out my own without having to invent one for an imaginary person. Most real-life adults work, though, so imaginary adults need to work, too. But how often should a character be seen performing their job on-screen? This is a tricky thing to figure out because, depending on the job, too much is boring, and too little is suspect. But the bigger issue is that there usually needs to be a *reason* for assigning a particular job to a particular character, as far as the larger story is concerned. If you could swap out a character's job for any other job, you might have a problem.

When it came to Doug's vocation, I knew a few things. He needed to have a boring day job that a) he wasn't passionate about, but b) paid the bills, and c) he could do from home and tune out while working on the thing that truly interests him. The other big piece was that I wanted his day job to give him some skill or knowledge that would ultimately prove useful to Lane in her time of crisis. I suspected that it'd be helpful for him to have some legal acumen, but I couldn't make him a lawyer. Law school requires a level of dedication that I don't think Doug would've given to something he didn't genuinely care about. I also just didn't see him as a lawyer, so I wondered if he could do something lawyer-adjacent.

Last Christmas, I got to chatting with My Friend's Boyfriend (henceforth MFB) about a brilliant docuseries that I'm obsessed with, and he'd been hearing good things about. One

particularly memorable episode features the clownish CEO of a company (whose name, along with MFB's, will remain anonymous) who turns out to have landed himself in a pretty high-profile lawsuit off camera. I was floored to learn that MFB had been peripherally involved in this case, in a legal consulting capacity. Essentially, he is a ghost writer for expert witnesses. I asked MFB a bit about his educational background; he told me he studied philosophy and economics in university and got a job at a small consulting firm through a childhood friend. Did he study law? Nope. *Perfect.*

Although I wouldn't need or want to go into too much detail about Doug's education and employment in the series itself, MFB confirmed for me that he could've lucked his way into an obscure legal job without having a law-specific background. MFB also told me about some of the more boring lawsuits he's worked on. He said the trademark ones are the worst, which helped me write the Zoom scene in the pilot. I decided on a logo lawsuit between two weed dispensaries because those things are literally everywhere, and the idea of a Boomer earnestly explaining the difference between two near-identical pot leaves amused me.

PART IX: HOME STRETCH & MEANINGFUL CHANGES

I am not much of a writer, but I am a stubborn little bulldog of a reviser.

– **Mary Karr**, *The Art of Memoir*

I have a serious case of self-doubt-induced procrastination. It's killer. I also have a ruthless inner critic. I overthink. I panic. I sabotage myself. But when I *really* need to do something, I (eventually) do. To really get moving on this project, it turned out I just needed to book the time off and give it my undivided attention. (Who knew?) After months and months of gathering material, reflecting, planning, etc., most of the actual, literal *writing* (and endless rewriting) of this project has taken place within the months of June and October 2022.

If I were to outline all the changes I've made to "Slowpokes" during this period, I'd have enough pages for a whole other paper. I've made so many tweaks, both big and small, that I've unavoidably lost track of them. It's been a mostly incremental and intuitive process, but here are some of the more deliberate adjustments that stand out to me as significant.

Pilot Opening & Lane's Backstory

The first-ever version of the pilot opens at Comedy Bar in the year 2013. Lane is an active comedian, along with her douchebag boyfriend, Kurt. The two of them are gearing up to move to Brooklyn in hopes of advancing their careers. After they've both performed at the club, Kurt heads to a party in an Uber with a couple of other comics, while Lane plans to ride her bike to meet them there. But as she's unlocking it, her ex-stepdad calls to tell her that her mom has had a stroke. It's established that Lane's mother is no longer together with this guy, and Lane thinks he's a real loser. Lane rushes to the hospital, calling Kurt from a corridor, but he can't hear anything over the party music and hangs up. We then cut to Lane's present-

day routine of caring for her mother (much like in the present draft) and learn that Lane basically never heard from Kurt again after that phone call. When her mom got sick, he effectively ghosted her and moved to Brooklyn without her.

On the first read, Ingrid and Howie suggested that I shorten the distance between the flashback and the present. Nine years felt like too big of a jump to them. I agreed and changed it to four, opening the episode in the year 2018 rather than 2013. I also added a scene at the hospital, where Lane finds her ex-stepdad in the waiting area, and it's very tense. Through a conversation with the doctor, we learn that this wasn't Lane's mother's first stroke, but it's her most severe one yet, and Lane should prepare herself for the possibility that she may never really recover.

At a certain point, it occurred to me that this material was all backstory that could be revealed to the audience in other, more interesting ways than an opening flashback. While there were aspects of this opening that I really liked, I realized it could and probably should be cut. Firstly, I was over-complicating Lane's mother's condition. There were too many steps. It's unnecessary and confusing for her to have had a stroke or two in the past, and then have another stroke in the opening of the pilot—especially when the intention is for her to die at the end of it. *That's* the real inciting incident. So, I decided that the show should open in the present instead, with Lane's mom already being sick. In this version, the backstory is just a single stroke that gave rise to Parkinson's, which is what she's now suffering from. Then, she passes away at the end of episode one.

The other big decision I made was to cut Kurt out of the story altogether. I replaced him with Alex, realizing that I'm much more interested in Lane's complicated history with a female frenemy and fellow talented comedian than some hack asshole she never should have bothered with in the first place. (For Lane and Doug to both have partner-related baggage

also made their character arcs feel a bit too symmetrical.) Finally, the Brooklyn storyline felt a bit artificial, and I realized it wasn't adding anything worthwhile to the story. Why not just focus on Lane's relationships with the Toronto scene and the people in it? This simultaneously simplified and enriched Lane's story for me.

I also wanted Lane's slowpoke-ness to be more her fault, in a way. In the Kurt version, she was more a victim of circumstance. He leaves her high and dry, and her humiliation around that event is the main reason she withdraws from comedy, because he's becoming this bigshot and she feels like everyone pities her. I think this was getting in the way of Lane's core reason for bailing on comedy, which is that her mom got sick. In the current version, that is the one and only reason she steps away from the scene—however, it gradually becomes her *excuse* not to return to it. Logistically, Lane could have continued performing while taking care of her mom (we've seen how willing Dawn is to take care of Martha so she can take a night off). What's really holding Lane back is fear; more specifically, the belief that she's lost her sense of humour because of her bleak circumstances. This puts Lane's perceived failure as a comic solely on herself, rather than it being tied up with someone having wronged her. And, unlike Kurt, Alex turns out to be a friend who helps Lane find her way back to doing what she loves.

Brian's Role and Function

For as long as Lane's stepdad has been in the story, I've known that he'd attempt to weasel his way into getting her mom's house. However, just like with Martha and her illness, Brian initially functioned more as a part of Lane's past than as an active character in her present-day storyline. I realized that he needed to have a clear role from the very start of the series and not only appear in a flashback (which I'd already cut at this point). Rather than having him live down in Mexico since leaving Lane's mom and only resurfacing at her funeral (a

version that was once in my head), I decided he should have more of a presence around the island, even if it begins as a peripheral one.

Knowing that I still wanted Brian to be an avid sailor, I decided that he lives on his sailboat year-round, docking it at Marina Quay West—so, he's not directly on the island, but he's still around. Lane's ferry trip to Toronto at the start of the pilot seemed like the perfect place to introduce him. I liked the idea of Brian's identity being anonymous/ambiguous at first, and only later revealing their relationship to the audience. Then, I decided to make him a contractor/all-purpose handyman. There were a couple of reasons for this. The first is that it gives him a plausible purpose to be on the island (doing odd jobs for his friends), even if he's no longer living there. The second reason is that it creates a stronger tie between him and the house. He put all this work into designing his dream home, building an addition on it—the irony being that this is what causes him to lose the house in the end.

In the first few drafts of Episode 2, Lane's exchange with Brian at Martha's funeral really made him seem like an antagonist. His ulterior motives were too obvious from the get-go. Now, my hope is that the audience believes he's there for the right reasons at first, and maybe even thinks that Lane is being a bit unreasonable, holding a grudge without seeing the whole picture. I may have more work to do here, in terms of softening his character and tricking the audience, but I've attempted to make it seem as though Brian is trying to be helpful to and supportive of Lane. Despite his desire to win back the house, I think there's a part of this character that genuinely does want to do right by her.

I also integrated Brian into the story more by creating a consequential encounter between him and Doug at the Island Cafe. This leads to him gaining access to Lane's house and the evidence he needs to take occupancy of it (or at least attempt to). This not only validates Lane's hatred of Brian, but also gives her reason to believe that Doug has betrayed her trust.

Addition of Joanne

Joanne came into the story quite late in the game. Initially, I had it that Brian's lawyer shows up at Lane's house while Doug is staying there, and Doug inadvertently reveals that Lane isn't currently living there. (In this version, Doug was in fact just housesitting, and the reason Lane got into trouble with the Trust had nothing to do with a sublet, but rather with the island's occupancy rules. My intention was to fictionalize the residency requirements so that islanders are barely allowed to leave their houses, but this caused issues in terms of Dawn's storyline. More on that below.) Then, the lawyer calls Lane at work, revealing Brian's intentions over the phone, right then and there. Lane rushes home to the island, explodes at Doug, then drops by the Land Trust office with her mom's will, seeking backup.

One of the issues with this version was that Lane's Land Trust meeting was with some faceless representative whose sole function was to provide Lane with information about her mother's lease. I decided that the Land Trust needed a face, and that face became Joanne. In the current version, she's introduced in the pilot as a pesky islander who Lane and Dawn both find really annoying. I've changed it so that the square dance Dawn is attending in that episode is a retirement party that Joanne insisted on throwing for the chair of the Land Trust, whose job she wants, setting up this storyline from the get-go. Then, rather than having Lane break some rule regarding the island's occupancy requirements (which felt too convoluted), I decided that Joanne is spearheading a war on subletters. I've planted a few clues about this along the way, including Dawn's joke to Lane about not letting any squatters stay in her house while she's away.

Rather than Joanne revealing everything to Lane over the phone (as the lawyer did previously), she now calls her in for a meeting, and Lane assumes she's in trouble for subletting her house to Doug. This creates more suspense, and even more confusion and

drama when she gets to the office and discovers Brian sitting with Joanne in her office. I also hint at Joanne having always harboured feelings for Brian, giving her a motive for wanting to assist him with the takeover of Martha's house, beyond the fact that Lane didn't get her subletter approved.

Dawn's Absence

When I first wrote Dawn's trip into the story, I had her going off to Scotland with some ladies from her choir. There was a scene where she calls Lane from a raucous pub in Aberdeen, plus a few subsequent check-ins. But a Scottish subplot didn't really serve the story, and a vacation with friends didn't feel important enough for Dawn to leave her grief-stricken goddaughter alone in the immediate aftermath of her mother's death. The birth of a grandchild, however, is a plausible reason for Dawn to be pulled away, and it also creates more of an internal conflict for her: she feels like she's choosing between her two children.

For a short while, I toyed with a version where Dawn's son lives in Australia, and she gets booted out of the country for smuggling some of Martha's ashes over and illegally scattering them in the ocean. Although I found this sort of funny, I decided to shorten the distance, making her son live in Halifax—and having Dawn decisively come home early to be there for Lane. This is key, as it proves how much Dawn truly thinks of Lane as her own daughter.

Another small element I added at quite a late stage is the conflict between Lane and Dawn, regarding Brian's name having been added to Lane's mother's lease without Lane's knowledge. Dawn's character was feeling a bit too simplistic as the cheerful godmother next door. I felt it was important for her and Lane to have a bit of an issue in the story, and for Dawn to then redeem herself by making Lane listen to Doug and providing the final puzzle piece (the blueprints) after he discovers the loophole in the Island Act.

PART X: ON ROMCOMS

So, you're telling me there's a chance...

– **Lloyd Christmas**, *Dumb and Dumber*

There aren't very many traditional romantic comedy *series* out there. Historically, romcoms have tended to be movies. "Love" (Netflix) is one of the few shows that belongs in this category, and it was an important inspiration for "Slowpokes", conceptually and tonally. I had decided that I wanted to give equal screen time to my two main characters, introduce them separately, and bring them together through some unexpected encounter at the end of the pilot. Having seen "Love" when it aired and remembering that it kicked off in a similar way, I studied the pilot script of that series as a kind of structural blueprint in the early days of developing my project. Only recently did I realize that I (inadvertently) used the same device for the meet-cute: a wallet. In "Love", Gus (Paul Rust) pays for Mickey's (Gillian Jacobs') coffee at 7-Eleven because she forgot her wallet at home; in "Slowpokes", Lane drops hers on the bike path, which is what forces Doug to follow her home.

Beyond the pilot episode, however, I can't say that I looked to any particular model as I was writing the show. I'm not saying that I've reinvented any wheels; I'm sure parts of my series are totally derivative of other, much better ones that have come before it, and it contains more than a few clichés. The truth, though, is that I didn't consciously set out to write a show like X, Y, or Z. I had an idea for how to bring two heterosexual strangers of the opposite sex together, and the rest of the story evolved pretty intuitively. I followed my own gut and my characters', listening to their wants and needs, and paying close attention to their strengths and flaws along the way.

Some people might read my series outline and wish that Lane and Doug had gotten together sooner than the end of the first season (Ingrid and Howie have both suggested to me that they should). I've thought a lot about this and, ultimately, it wouldn't feel true to what I'm going for with these two characters, which comes down to ambiguity. From the get-go, it was important to me for Lane and Doug to have a murky relationship, and for the romance to be a slow burn. In Episode 3, for example, I tried to create the excruciating awkwardness of the "morning after" scene in *When Harry Met Sally...*, just without a sexual/romantic encounter. Lane and Doug are intimate the night before, but they don't have sex, which creates a strange tension between them. I guess I'm tired of seeing on-again, off-again relationships in shows and movies, and I wanted to show a different kind.

I think the other reason I held off on bringing these characters together sooner is that I wanted to give Lane and Doug a real shot at a healthy relationship. Having them hook up at a time when they're both in a terrible place didn't seem like the way to go if I wanted to achieve this. Anytime I considered where each of them was at emotionally, I couldn't really picture them getting physical. Perhaps this has resulted in a totally boring, G-rated series, but I think there's a certain innocence to both of these characters that I wanted to preserve. For a while, I even considered making it more of a friendship love story in the vein of "Somebody Somewhere" (HBO).

PART XI: POP CULTURE REFERENCES

One of my favourite parts of screenwriting is inserting pop culture references into my scripts. I know that, if “Slowpokes” ever gets made, there will probably be multiple clearance issues on every page, and I’ll have to change a lot of names and other details. For now, while that’s still very much an “if” and not a when, I’ve decided to have fun with it and write the series as if I have all the money in the world and everyone’s permission to do everything. Here are a few of my favourite references in “Slowpokes” and the inspiration for them.

Doug’s “Seinfeld” Diorama

My husband and I are never not watching “Seinfeld”. We may go days or a month without seeing an episode, but we’re always working our way through the series at any given time. Once we finish the finale, we go back to the pilot and start the cycle all over again. (I think we’ve done this about 3 times in the 9 and a half years we’ve been together.) This explains the first diorama we see Doug making in the pilot episode, and, as discussed, his obsession with 90s sitcoms is an extension of my own.

Runaway Twain

About four years ago, I gave my friend Josh a used copy of Shania Twain’s iconic album *The Woman in Me* on CD, as an earnest birthday present. We had a routine of cranking her tunes while updating the specials at the Roncesvalles restaurant we both worked at, before putting on “cool” dinner service music. Soon after, Josh started a cover band called Runaway Twain, and I’m honoured to call myself a member. (He’s Shania; I just sing harmonies.) I thought it would be silly and fun to include a fictional version of this band in “Slowpokes”, and Victoria’s sister’s wedding seemed like the perfect opportunity.

“Batter Up Canada”

“Batter Up Canada” is pretty much a direct spoof of “The Great Canadian Baking Show” (CBC). There’s a fair bit of crossover between the latter series and the people in the Toronto comedy scene, so this seemed like a plausible gig for one of Lane’s comedy idols to have signed on for. I have also spent more hours than I’d like to admit watching German cooking shows with my mother-in-law, which have evidently seeped their way into my psyche and therefore my writing. (I would’ve loved for Lane to get hired at “Der Teig geht auf!” but *that* would’ve felt a little far-fetched.)

PART XII: LESSONS & OBSERVATIONS

I think you often have that sense when you write—that if you can spot something in yourself and set it down on paper, you’re free of it. And you’re not, of course; you’ve just managed to set it down on paper, that’s all.

– **Nora Ephron**, *Heartburn*

As I near the end of my 6 years (!) as a Screenwriting student at York University, I’m reflecting on all that I’ve learned about writing and about myself—particularly since graduating from the BFA program and going through the MFA. There have been many lessons, but I’ve tried to synthesize them into six key ones. One for each of my years at this university.

1. **It takes a while to figure out what kind of writer you are.** I’m not talking about genre or form or any of that stuff. What I mean is that it takes a long time to understand how you work, including your ideal writing environment and your habits (both good and bad). The word “discipline” gets thrown around a lot when it comes to writing, but I prefer “practice”. Writing is a practice, and each of us develops our own in time. I’m still very much in the process of figuring mine out, including which approaches are productive for me and which are not. We all have our own personal preferences and tendencies, so this also takes a lot of practice.
2. **You always need more time than you think you do.** I’m a slowpoke, and that’s okay. But a problem I have is setting unrealistic goals and then beating myself up when I don’t meet them. I know that the solution to this comes down to budgeting more time for writing, and also for easing into that activity. It’s like David Lynch says in his book, *Catching the Big Fish*: “If you want to get one good hour of painting in,

you have to have four hours of uninterrupted time.” It takes time for me to get into a zone where things are flowing, and it’s a real challenge to accomplish anything if I have a meeting or an appointment hanging over me. That uninterrupted time is crucial.

3. **Writing is just as much verbal as it is written.** I used to think it was all about the words on the literal page; the flawless formatting, the perfect word choices, the absence of grammatical errors. When I think back on all the writing workshops and notes sessions I’ve participated in while at York, they’ve primarily been about *discussion*. It’s so helpful and important to talk things out. Conversations can really help unblock you and they often unlock key pieces of your story.
4. **Breaks are important.** Depending on how productive a day I’m having, I’ll either forget to take a break, or I’ll refuse to because I don’t feel that I’ve earned it. This, of course, is a very unhealthy and moronic attitude, and one that I’m trying to shift. Even if you can only afford to go for a 10-minute walk around the block, it’s so important to allow yourself to recharge and reset. In this way, breaks are kind of like sleep, i.e. something we all need to give ourselves enough of.
5. **Good enough is good enough.** As discussed, I have perfectionistic tendencies, but I’m slowly learning to accept that, at a certain point, you just have to let go and move on. Screenwriting isn’t life or death stuff (although it can sometimes feel like it). And “Slowpokes” isn’t going into production tomorrow. It’s going into my committee’s email inboxes, and then we’re going to have a conversation about it.

6. **Writing is hard, but it should also be fun.** At the end of the day, that's what I'm in it for. In the words of Anne Dillard, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." I'd like to spend my days and my life writing and making things, and having a good time doing it.

PART XIII: CONCLUSION (?)

Say who you are, really say it in your life and in your work. Tell someone out there who is lost, someone not born yet, someone who won't be born for 500 years. Your writing will be a record of your time. It can't help but be that. But more importantly, if you're honest about who you are, you'll help that person be less lonely in their world because that person will recognize him or herself in you and that will give them hope.

– **Charlie Kaufman**, BAFTA Screenwriters' Lecture

You always need as much time as you are given to complete a project, and it's never really "final"—especially when it's in the written form. The version of "Slowpokes" that I'm submitting to York U is a snapshot of the show at this particular moment in time. It is far from perfect, and I will most certainly continue honing this project after I defend my thesis. It will continue to evolve. It may even change in fundamental ways. I want to stay open to that.

In my final meeting with Ingrid and Howie, they had a number of notes to offer me for my last pass at this project. Many of them I agreed with and have since integrated. Others I was unsure about and may consider for future revisions. There were also a couple of suggestions that they both felt strongly about but which didn't resonate with me, so I've left those ones alone for now. I'm sure they'll make for some interesting points of discussion at my thesis defense, and I look forward to diving in.

So, what are my post-defense next steps? The first is to share my pilot script and series bible with some working TV writers and producers. I work for one, and I've made some other meaningful connections in the industry through that job. My hope is that someone will like the idea enough or see enough potential in this project to want to support it somehow. To help me make it better. I want to whip it into pitch-able shape and, if possible, approach some production companies. In a dream world, I'd get some development money for it. I'm also

hoping that this script will help get me into a writers' room. Slowly but surely, that's starting to look like it's within the realm of possibility.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: About Me

Laura Gladwell is an “emerging” writer and musician from Toronto. After a prolonged stint in Europe, performing her own songs, singing backup for a German cult entertainer you’ve never heard of, and teaching English to toddlers, she returned home to pursue a career in screenwriting. So far, Laura has written and directed the short comedies *The Vacation*, *Brunchophobia*, and *Last Boat*, the latter of which she also co-starred in. She recently assistant directed the comedic web series *Ascension Luncheon* and the short action comedy *Ride or Die*—both twisted brainchildren of Brooklyn-based comedian Sara Hennessey. Notably, Laura has also dabbled in dog wrangling on the buddy cop show “Pretty Hard Cases” (CBC/NBCU). Since 2019, she has been a member of Toronto’s preeminent Shania Twain cover band, Runaway Twain.