

Spring 6-2024

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Olivia Geist
Portland State University

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Recommended Citation

Geist, Olivia, "*Tea Leaves* and Other Stories: Expressing Themes of Change and Loss through the Magical Realist Style" (2024). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 1486.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1518>

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Tea Leaves and Other Stories: Expressing Themes of Change and Loss through the Magical

Realist Style

By

Olivia Geist

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Bachelor of Arts

In

University Honors

And

Film

Thesis Advisor

J.J. Vazquez

Portland State University

2024

Magical Realism & the Representation of Trauma

In his essay “Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism” Eugene L. Arva notes a distinctive quality of magical realism: its tendency to involve a “missing” reality. He states that a “magical realist hyperreality is a missed, or a silenced, but at the same time a re-livable kind of reality” (81). This is created through the style’s tendency towards an evasion of this so-called reality, instead alluding towards it through the use of fantastic imagery and techniques such as symbolism and metaphor. This “falsehood,” as Arva puts it, has the paradoxical effect of drawing attention to the reality which it evades. It becomes a re-creation, or “re-presentation,” of this reality. Arva connects this tendency in magical realist works to ideas surrounding how art can represent trauma. He states that “magical realist images attempt to recreate traumatic events by simulating the overwhelming affects that prevented their narrativization in the first place” (61). The “missing” element within magical realist works can be seen as an imaginative space within which emotion, rather than reason or fact, can express stories of trauma.

In his essay “A still life of the wildest things: Magic(al) realism in contemporary Chinese cinema and the reconfiguration of the *jishizhuyi* style,” Eddie Bertozzi studies a similar idea in Chinese cinema. He places the idea of magical realism within modern China’s fascination with cinema. The Chinese viewer “perceived the medium as something technologically magical” producing images “that appeared to be ‘cut off from reality.’” Bertozzi’s study thus becomes focused on the magical realist style and its goals of presenting images, not as cut off from reality, but rather “as part of our everyday world” (157). Bertozzi looks specifically at Chinese filmmakers in the late 20th century who felt that the on-the-spot, cinema verité filmmaking that characterized Chinese ‘urban cinema’ was not accurately representing the current Chinese

situation. Instead, filmmakers such as Jia Zhangke pursued a “feeling of the real” within their films (163). Faced with the rapid urbanization and fast pace of life in China, Zhangke’s film *Still Life* becomes a magical representation of the story of a man and a woman returning to a small town in search of family. As the film progresses, its magical elements increase, such as a magician turning cards into money or a ghost-like young boy walking in and out of the frame without notice. Zhangke states that his urge to add these fantastical elements came from the need to “adequately express the utter strangeness of our contemporary reality” (166). In *Still Life*, the need to express inexpressible or ‘missing’ elements of dislocation in contemporary China is ultimately expressed through the use of magical realism.

Guillermo Del Toro’s magical realist film *Pan’s Labyrinth* demonstrates a similar use of the magical realist style. Arva notes the tendency in the magical realist style towards using a child’s perspective, working to resemble “a child’s awe and wonder at discovering the world around him” (80). *Pan’s Labyrinth* brings to life the traumas of the Spanish Civil War through the perspective of 11-year-old Ofelia. The film follows the story of Ofelia and her pregnant mother as they go to stay with the Captain, her mother’s new husband. While at the house, Ofelia discovers a faun who tells her she is the lost princess. In order to get back to her kingdom, Ofelia must pass three tests, each one more harrowing and dangerous than the previous. As the film continues, the borders between Ofelia’s reality and the fantasy world of the faun begin to intertwine. In one instance, the faun gives Ofelia a magical root to protect her mother and unborn brother. At first, the root seems to work and her mother’s illness improves. However, when Ofelia is unable to care for the root, it dies and without it, her mother’s condition worsens. Thus, Del Toro’s collision of fantasy and reality becomes the visual manifestation of his protagonist’s trauma, providing a way for her to cope and deal with her reality. It is through Ofelia’s innocent

perspective that the viewer can experience the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. As Arva states, by “relying on characters and events meant to surprise readers, the magical realist text seems to appeal to us because it is *important* to us” (80).

Methods

I first became interested in magical realism when reading Isabel Allende’s *Eva Luna* and consequently, *The Stories of Eva Luna*, a book of short stories told by the titular protagonist, Eva Luna. Inspired by *A Thousand and One Nights*, Eva Luna can be viewed as a Scheherazade-like figure whose captivating stories bring to life the world around her. In her essay “The Short Story,” Allende reflects on her process as a writer and storyteller. Throughout the interview, she emphasizes the intersection between fantasy and reality. Allende states,

“Often people ask me how much truth there is in my books. How much I invented. I can no longer trace a line between reality and fantasy. My mother says that I’m a hopeless mythomaniac, that she can’t recognize any of the anecdotes I tell about my youth when she was there too. I don’t understand what’s wrong with my memory, or, are there many truths? I don’t know. Maybe we should simply stick to poetic truths... (27).

Here, Allende alludes to a convergence between reality and fantasy. One is informed by the other, thus creating, as she puts it, a poetic truth. My question is how this process can be translated to film? Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth* provides an example of how magical realism can be used to represent ideas of trauma and violence. Similarly, I’m interested in the ways in which the magical realist style can be used to express themes of change and loss. Similar

to Allende's use of the short story format, I'm interested in utilizing the short film format. My thesis is focused on writing "tiny" stories, or screenplays that are no longer than one or two pages, and one longer, seven page screenplay. My experiences writing short films thus far involved a struggle to create what Allende describes as seeking to "establish a complicity" with her readers. Mystery, rather than reason, must be emphasized, giving way to the wonder and imagination often expressed through an innocent, child-like perspective. Thus, I developed the idea of the "tiny" story, moving towards broader, less specific narratives in the hopes of articulating themes of change and loss through the use of magical realism, situating my work within Allende's ideas surrounding the short story and magical realism, as well as within the discourse of the magical realist style.

Reflection

The process of writing these "tiny" stories was an exercise in creativity, as I wrote them largely over the course of ten weeks, coming up with a new idea for each script every week. The hard part was figuring out how to tell a complete story in less than 3 pages. It boiled down my writing process to the very basics, distilling each idea into what I felt was the core of the story. While this simplified the narrative, it also seemed, paradoxically, to add a level of mystery. For example, in "The Boat" the main character is a girl who struggles to leave her home but finds strength through the magical object of a tiny boat. The story begins with the girl looking for the boat on a shelf, then moves into a discussion with her friend in which we gain a bit of backstory, then finally getting to see whether the girl makes it off the island or not. We are not told the story behind the magical boat or why the girl has it, it's alluded to that she has struggled to leave before, but we don't know why she wants to leave or why it has been so hard.

As a writer, I really enjoyed the combination of the mysterious and concise structure within this short story format. However, a whole new challenge was presented when I recreated my tiny story, “Tea Leaves” into a longer seven page script. The original script tells the story of a young girl who can see the future through tea leaves. While at first the future is a beautiful and hopeful idea, she soon discovers something terrifying about her grandmother in the leaves. While her grandmother is adamant about not wanting to know the future, in the last scene, she finally allows her granddaughter to show her what she sees. The longer script follows this basic story, but is a larger, richer story. The main characters, Rosemary and her grandmother Ginger, now run a flower shop together, and through a short scene with Ginger's friend Iris, we learn a bit more about why Ginger has such an aversion to the future. The story is about Rosemary’s acceptance of change and her enduring love for her grandmother.

Since the beginning of my screenwriting journey, I’ve been attempting to tell a similar story to “Tea Leaves.” Expanding it into a larger script only made this more clear. Although the story is fictional, it was inspired by a lot of different aspects of my own life. I grew up drinking tea with my own grandmother, who passed away when I was young, a time of change and loss in my life. Rosemary is also an important name in my family, passed down between generations of women. The essence of the story, its themes of change and growing up, are themes I keep coming back to in my own writing. It’s why I decided to integrate them into my study of the magical realist style, a style whose inexplicable nature provides a strong foundation for expressing feelings of absence and loss, especially in the short film format, where all of the fun parts of screenwriting, plot and action, become vital. I believe that the magical realist style shines through, especially in my tiny scripts.

For example, “Mr. Smith Goes to the Symphony” follows the story of Mr. Smith after he discovers that he’s accidentally been sent two tickets to the symphony instead of one. He confesses to his daughter that although he swears he didn’t buy a second ticket he used to go to the symphony so often with his wife, who has recently passed away, that it’s a weird thing to have happened. He then attends the symphony and just as it is about to begin, we hear the sounds of footsteps getting closer and closer, alluding to the presence of memory in a time of loss. While there are aspects of this short film that are inexplicable: the second ticket, the footsteps coming towards Mr. Smith, we understand what they communicate: Mr. Smith’s loss and his memory of his wife. Therefore, a very internal experience is brought outwards, not through what is explained, but through what is inexplicable. This became a goal in creating the tiny stories: to figure out how to show internal experiences and how to incorporate them in a visual medium.

This posed a peculiar challenge when creating my longer script, which in many ways felt like it lost a bit of its magical realist style during the transition from tiny story to short film. How to maintain a certain mystery to the narrative while also expanding it? A major part of the original story was the ending, and in particular, the empty teacup that we see on the table as they embrace. I was surprised when expanding the script that this moment seemed to lose a lot of its importance. Instead, the final conversation between Ginger and Rosemary and their final embrace became the ending of the film. I went back and forth for a while between having two empty tea cups versus one and other options which didn’t matter in the end. In many ways, this caused the story to move away from the magical aspect of reading tea leaves and more towards the internal and emotional journey of Rosemary after finding out that her grandmother is dying, thus lessening the use of the magical realist style within the film.

I learned a lot about my writing style while completing this thesis and attempting to weave magical realism into my work. Ultimately, it pushed me to focus on the most important parts of writing for film: plot, action, and the importance of *showing*, not telling. Screenwriting is, at its essence, about telling a good story and as I continue to improve my writing skills, it was vital to learn how to organize my ideas into the basic structure of storytelling.

In her musings on the short story, Allende emphasizes the importance of change. It is vital, you need “things to happen” (24). Once she figures out the element of change within the story it then becomes easier for her to discover its proper ending. In studying themes of change and loss within my thesis, I also discovered that change is integrated into the very structure of a story. It’s what makes us care, and as the writer, it is what ultimately inspires me to create.

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TEA LEAVES

Written By

Olivia Geist

INT. FLOWER SHOP - DAY

A little girl, ROSEMARY, around 8 or 9, sits at a table planting flower seeds. Next to her sits an older woman, around 50, attentively watching the actions of the little girl. This is her grandmother, GINGER. They are surrounded by a wonderland of green fauna: thyme, rosemary, and mint hang from the ceiling, and a large monstera with floppy leaves frames Rosemary's face.

Amidst the small forest, Rosemary holds out her palms and Ginger shakes a package of brown seeds into them. Rosemary takes the small seeds and gently sprinkles them atop the brown dirt of a flower pot. Ginger follows, encasing the seeds with another layer of dirt. Together, Rosemary and Ginger then press their fingers lightly into the flower pot, making sure that the seeds are safe.

Once the pot is finished, Ginger picks up a white teacup and saucer from the table. She takes one, two, and then three sips out of it, finishing the cup. Rosemary watches expectantly, and after a moment Ginger smiles and hands her the cup.

Rosemary's fingers are still caked in dirt as she wraps them around the teacup and peers inside, studying the leaves. She immediately begins to smile and looks up, holding the cup out to her grandmother.

ROSEMARY

It says-

Ginger shakes her head, pushing the cup away.

GINGER

Rosemary, remember, we don't share the future.

Rosemary pauses, looking slightly disappointed. However, she looks into the cup once more and from the scattered, mystical pattern within, there seems to emerge a bouquet of fully-grown flowers.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - YEARS LATER

Rosemary, now around 19 or 20, stands behind a register. Behind her, rows of colorful, bursting bouquets sit on a shelf. She holds a teacup between two hands, inspecting the interior. In front of her stands an anxious-looking CUSTOMER, who expectantly watches her read the tea leaves.

After a long moment, Rosemary looks up. She grins. The Customer's eyes widen with anxiety.

ROSEMARY
He's going to say yes.

CUSTOMER
(with relief)
You think so?

Rosemary nods seriously. She turns and studies the rows of flower bouquets, searching for a particular one. After a moment, she decides on a bouquet of particularly bright peonies which she hands to the customer.

ROSEMARY
Peonies, for good luck.

The customer eagerly takes the bouquet and hands over a few dollars in payment.

CUSTOMER
I don't know what I'd do without you.

The satisfied customer leaves and Rosemary sighs, leaning against the register desk as she takes the last sip of her own cup of tea.

When she finishes, she casually studies the contents. Her face slowly turns to a frown as she brings the cup closer to her face.

There is a pause and then, suddenly, she drops the cup back onto the table and takes a step back, looking terrified.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - AFTERNOON

Rosemary sits at a table with a woman around 70 years old. This is IRIS, her grandmother's friend. Sunlight pours into the space. Rosemary smiles slightly as she reads the contents of the teacup.

ROSEMARY
You said you've been having this pain
for a while?

IRIS
It's like my knee is trying to tell me
something.

Rosemary raises an eyebrow, inspecting the cup. She opens her

mouth to speak, but is quickly interrupted by a sharp voice.

GINGER

We're not reading the future, are we?

Ginger enters the room. She looks older now, more tired. She carries a basket of lavender on her hip and a ball of string in one hand, using the other to tug on Rosemary's hair as she sets the material down on the table and whisks the cup away from in front of Rosemary. Rosemary begins to protest, but Ginger SHUSHES her.

GINGER

Rosemary. The future isn't ours to share.

IRIS

But I've got a pain in my knee that just won't go away.

Rosemary's grandmother shakes her head as she sits down. All three of the women take a handful of the lavender and begin to tie them together with string.

GINGER

If I asked for a reading every time I had a pain that wouldn't go away, I'd never stop asking.

Rosemary looks quickly towards her grandmother, but says nothing.

IRIS

You know, my son asked me to move in with him the other day... I never thought I'd hear that.

Rosemary's grandmother shakes her head disapprovingly.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Strange isn't it, getting older... having to give certain things up.

GINGER

Well, if it means living in that huge house your son has...

Iris lets out a laugh.

As they speak, Rosemary watches them thoughtfully: the way their hands move as they tie lavender, their smiles and

laughter.

GINGER
Rosemary?

It takes a moment for Rosemary to respond.

GINGER
Rosemary, is everything alright?

Rosemary looks up. She nods and manages a smile.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - EVENING

Rosemary and Ginger stand behind the register, organizing flowers into different bouquets.

Ginger struggles to lift a bouquet, her hands beginning to shake uncontrollably.

After a painful moment, Rosemary quickly takes the flower from her grandmother's hand and finishes the bouquet.

Ginger clasps her hands together, slowly easing the shaking. Rosemary's expression turns to concern.

ROSEMARY
Grandma... earlier today I saw something in-

GINGER
Rosemary, please.

ROSEMARY
I know it's about the future but-

GINGER
(strictly)
Rosemary.

Ginger collapses against the register desk and Rosemary catches her, leading her towards a chair.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - THE NEXT MORNING

Out of the corner of Rosemary's eye, Ginger sits at a table, holding a warm cup of tea between her hands. Rosemary glances worriedly towards her and then sucks in a determined breath.

She leans down so that she is eye-level with a teacup and saucer that sits on the desk in front of her. Resting her

head on folded arms, she stares with determination at the cup. Steam billows upwards, half masking her face.

After a moment Rosemary straightens, blows lightly on the cup and then brings it to her lips. She takes a sip, and then another, and another until the cup is empty.

She squeezes her eyes shut for a moment, as if making a wish before blowing out birthday candles. When she opens them, she inspects the inside of the cup. A long moment passes. Rosemary's face contorts as she holds back tears. Slamming the cup down onto the table, she puts her head in her hands.

The noise seems to startle Ginger, who looks up from where she sits at the table.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - AFTERNOON

Rosemary tries again. Sitting amongst a row of tall glass vases full of tulips, Rosemary lines up three different cups of tea and pours hot water into each. Ginger sits across from her, cutting off the stems of tulips in order to fit them to each vase. She watches her granddaughter with a raised eyebrow.

Rosemary takes the first teacup and blows lightly on the top before taking one sip, and then another, and another, and another... until, finally, the leaves are ready to be read. She peers inside... and immediately lets a SIGH of frustration.

Ginger raises an eyebrow.

GINGER

I could use some help with these tulips.

Rosemary shakes her head and continues on to the next cup.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - DAY

BEGIN MONTAGE:

We watch as Rosemary falls deeper and deeper down a rabbit hole of tea leaves. Sitting at a TABLE in the back of the flower shop, she feverishly reads teacup after teacup.

SHOTS BEGIN TO FADE TOGETHER:

- We see Rosemary create a herbal blend, mixing lavender and chamomile together and then pouring them into a teacup.

- Hot water comes to a rolling boil, forming a string of pearls across the water's surface.
- Rosemary pre-rinses a batch of black tea, pouring hot water through a strainer full of tea leaves and then placing the damp tea leaves into a teacup.
- Rosemary squeezes her eyes shut and takes a sip out of a teacup.
- One teacup after the other is slammed down onto the table, some rattling their saucers while others topple to the side, tea leaves spilling out of them.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - EVENING

Rosemary rests her head against her arms, looking completely defeated amongst the numerous used teacups that cover the entire table. Her hand half rests on the teacup closest to her.

GINGER (O.S.)

Rosemary?

Rosemary doesn't look up at her grandmother's voice. In fact, she seems to be unable to gauge her presence until Ginger sits down next to her and takes her hand.

Rosemary looks up. She purses her lips, seemingly trying to hold back tears. Ginger holds out her arms and they embrace.

We hear Rosemary's muffled sobs.

ROSEMARY

I couldn't change the future...

She sits up, looking at Ginger.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

And Grandma, you're so sick... I just... I just wanted to try.

Ginger seems unable to respond for a moment. She runs a hand through her granddaughter's hair. Then, she nods towards the final teacup.

GINGER

Alright Rosemary, tell me the future.

She holds out a hand and Rosemary obeys, handing her the cup. Ginger peers inside. She pauses for a long moment, seeming to

process whatever lays inside the cup.

Then, taking a steadying breath, Ginger takes a nearby teapot full of what must be lukewarm water by now and pours it into the teacup. She swirls the teacup once, twice, and then pours it out.

Water spills across the table. Ginger hands the teacup back to Rosemary. Her granddaughter peers into the cup for a long moment. Then, leaving the cup on the table, she embraces her grandmother.

We see the teacup on the table. It is empty.

FADE TO BLACK.

Tea Leaves
Tiny Script

1 INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

1

Light pours into a cluttered, oval room through large windows that cover half of the walls. A wrinkled hand sets down a tea cup, followed by a smaller, smooth hand setting down an identical one.

We see a little girl, smiling contently as she finishes the last sip of her tea. This is ROSEMARY, around five or six-years-old.

Her grandmother, JANE, sits in a chair opposite of Rosemary. She nods and gestures towards her granddaughter's empty cup.

Rosemary nods seriously and lifts the cup towards her face.

We peer in with her. At the bottom of the cup sit a pile of damp tea leaves which begin to move before our eyes. They take the shape of a large tree, full of leaves. Rosemary looks up, offering the cup to her grandmother. Jane holds up a hand.

JANE

Remember, Rosemary, we don't share
the future.

Rosemary nods, but she glances out of a window towards a small, bare tree that sits in the middle of their yard. She grins.

2 EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

2

An older Rosemary, now 14-years-old, sits below a fully grown tree, exploding with bright green leaves. She holds a teacup. It's a warm, summer day. Jane stands a few feet away, cutting the hedges that grow alongside their driveway.

Rosemary finishes the last few sips of her tea and looks down into her cup. This time, it seems, the contents aren't as positive. She becomes immediately concerned.

Standing quickly, Rosemary runs over to her grandmother. She pulls on Jane's arm, gesturing towards the contents of the cup.

Jane turns, realizes what she's seeing, and pushes the cup away.

JANE

Rosemary! We do not share the
future!

Rosemary continually attempts to show her grandmother the cup. She tugs at Jane's sleeve, tears forming in her eyes. Jane

refuses to look.

3 INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

3

A lamp lights a cramped bedroom. Jane lays in a bed. She looks weak and exhausted. Rosemary sits by the bed, taking tentative sips out of a cup of tea. Her hand shakes and Jane reaches out, touching her arm.

Rosemary shakes her head. She lifts her hands and SIGNS something to her grandmother using ASL. Jane sighs. She takes her granddaughter's hands.

JANE
Alright Rosemary... show me the
future.

Rosemary finishes her cup. She looks into it and tears spring to her eyes. Shakily, she hands the teacup to her grandmother.

Jane looks into the cup for a long moment. Then, she sets it down and holds out her arms. They embrace.

We see the cup on the side table. It is empty.

FADE TO BLACK.

Mr. Smith Goes to the Symphony

1 INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

1

A man, around 60, sits at his dining room table. He holds an envelope and two tickets in his hands. This, is MR. SMITH. His face is set in a frown as he studies the two tickets.

After a moment, he pulls a BLACK PHONE from his pocket and dials in a number which he reads off of the side of one of the tickets. It rings a few times before someone picks up.

MR. SMITH
Hello? Hi, I'm calling about an
issue with my tickets to see
Mahler's 1st symphony...

Beat.

MR. SMITH (CONT'D)
Yes, you sent me two tickets but I
only remember buying one...

Beat.

MR. SMITH (CONT'D)
Well yes, I'm absolutely sure I
only bought one... I'm the only one
going... yes I know they're non-
refundable but the thing is, I
didn't buy a second ticket!... What
do you mean you're just as confused
as I am? I only bought one!

Mr. Smith, now visibly annoyed, listens to whoever is on the other line for a moment.

MR. SMITH (CONT'D)
All right, yes, okay... I
understand. Okay, mhmhm.... Thank
you.

He sets down his phone, shaking his head. There is a pause, then he places his head in his hands.

2 INT. RESTAURANT BOOTH - AFTERNOON

2

Mr. Smith sits across from a young girl in her mid-twenties. This is his daughter, MARIE. In front of them sit two pieces of pie, one apple and one pecan. There is a casual ease between them but also a slight awkwardness. After a moment of silence, Mr. Smith speaks.

MR. SMITH
The weirdest thing happened the other day... I accidentally bought two tickets to the symphony instead of one...

MARIE
Dad, I told you I'm going out of town that weekend, I'm sorry.

MR. SMITH
Oh, I know... I think I really just messed up the amount... but I could've sworn... I mean, I *know* I just bought one.

They eat in silence for a few more moments before Mr. Smith looks up thoughtfully.

MR. SMITH (CONT'D)
You know, I used to go to concerts so often with Laura... maybe I'm just so used to getting two...

Marie pauses, and then she nods a little sadly.

MARIE
Laura loved going to concerts.

Mr. Smith smiles, a little sadly.

MR. SMITH
... And Mahler was her favorite.

He looks into his pecan pie.

MR. SMITH (CONT'D)
There are still so many little things that remind me of her.

Marie studies her dad.

MARIE
Nothing little about that, Dad.

3 INT. SYMPHONY HALL - EVENING

3

Mr. Smith sits in a red theater seat, facing forwards. We hear the muffled haze of pre-show noise, the chatter of couples and families and friends. An EMPTY SEAT sits next to Mr. Smith. He studies the show pamphlet in his hands.

Then, the quiet chatter fades into applause. Mr. Smith looks up. From behind him, we hear faint FOOTSTEPS, coming closer and closer...

Then suddenly, music.

Light explodes across Mr. Smith's face. We begin to hear a full orchestra playing some loud and thunderous piece.

We see the expression on Mr. Smith's face, one of absolute awe and intense emotion. Tears form in his eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

The Poster Shop

1 INT. BEDROOM - DAY

1

NATALIE, 22-years-old, sits in her bed, her red covers pulled up to her chin. She stares blankly up at the white ceiling above her.

The walls around her are covered in a variety of different posters. A large poster of Amelie FROWNS, looking concerned as she studies Natalie.

Another poster features a BEARDED MAN with a teacup on top of his head. He leans out of the poster.

BEARDED MAN
(in a thick Russian accent)
Come on, Natalie. I know you've
never done this alone, but you must
start somewhere.

A poster of WILDFLOWERS comes to life beside the Bearded Man. A bright yellow daffodil with eyes in its petals coughs.

DAFFODIL
At least drink some water.

Natalie's eyes dart between the different posters. She shakes her head.

NATALIE
I can't.

She glances at a photo of two little girls holding hands and waving at the camera. It begins to move. We watch as the girls smile, their hands moving back and forth.

The other posters suddenly retreat into their frames, looking nervous.

2 EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

2

Natalie sits at a bus stop, wrapped in a puffy, black coat that almost engulfs her. Still, she shivers. She holds the small photo of the two girls between her hands.

A bus pulls up and Natalie gets on.

3 INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

3

Natalie sits down in a bus seat next to a YOUNG GIRL reading a TEEN VOGUE magazine. She studies her surroundings. Overhead, an advertisement for a e-cigarette brand depicts a sultry looking

WOMAN with a short, black bob holding a bright green vape. The woman leans out of her frame.

E-CIGARETTE WOMAN
Natalie, darling, first day back at
work?

Natalie nods slightly.

Next to her, a MODEL from Teen Vogue wearing a huge, blonde wig comes alive on the page. She leans over to look at the photograph Natalie holds between her hands.

MODEL
What a nice photo...

The model sighs.

MODEL (CONT'D)
Oh, to be a kid again.

Natalie looks at her photograph. Smoke from the e-cigarette woman's vape envelops Natalie's photo. She coughs, fanning the smoke away with her hands.

The photograph comes to life once more, the two little girls waving happily.

The bus comes to a stop. Natalie gets off.

4 EXT. STREET - DAY

4

We watch as Natalie hurries down the street, attempting to ignore the many questions from posters taped to lamp posts, advertisements on the sides of buses, street art, billboards, and discarded pamphlets.

5 INT. POSTER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

5

Natalie enters a dark store. She inhales. Across the room, above a countertop, a sign reads "NATALIE AND ABIGAIL'S POSTER SHOP".

Natalie walks forwards, past poster after poster hanging from the walls. After a moment, she pauses in front of one of the posters.

An advertisement for FEBREEZE, the poster depicts an empty field full of colorful wildflowers and golden yellow grass.

Natalie pauses, staring at the photo. All around her, nature sounds begin to pour into the space.

Natalie rubs her nose, exhaling.

Then, she walks the rest of the way to the countertop and tapes the photo of the two smiling girls to the wall just underneath the sign.

Natalie takes off her coat, getting to work.

The Boat

INT. ROOM - DAY

A pair of eyes light up the screen, staring directly ahead. They begin to move in and out of sight as they trace small, silhouetted figures lined up on a shelf. Something about the shelf is meticulous and organized. Tightly observed.

The eyes belong to THE WOMAN, around 22. She pauses, her mouth moving. We hear incoherent whispers. She reaches out and grabs one of the silhouetted figures.

Her eyes disappear and so does our light.

1 EXT. CAFE PORCH - AFTERNOON

1

The woman sits outside, on the porch of a cafe. She holds a mug of something warm, and looks outwards. We hear the sounds of waves lapping against a shore, as if water is nearby. However, in front of the woman there is nothing but fog and rain. Nothing farther than the road can be seen.

Next to her sits a FRIEND, another girl around the same age. Both of the women look outwards, into the fog.

FRIEND

Have you thought about seeing a doctor?

WOMAN

No, its just this island... it's amnesic.

She shakes her head.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter anyway... I have a plan.

She rummages through her JACKET POCKET for a moment before pulling out a small figurine of a boat, shiny and clean. Her friend raises an eyebrow.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I won't forget this time.

In the distance, we hear faint horn sound. The woman gets up, heading for the exit.

2 INT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS**2**

The woman enters the interior of the cafe. It's full of people, packed into tables and leaning against the bar.

They all, however, move in slow motion. The woman begins to struggle against this sluggishness, listlessness, making her way towards the exit.

3 EXT. ROAD - A FEW MOMENTS LATER**3**

The woman emerges, exhausted, onto the street. She walks forwards persistently but she seems to become more and more visibly afraid.

She passes a slow-moving RED PICK-UP TRUCK, a DOG that seems to run but doesn't move more than one inch.

Ahead of her sits an empty dock surrounded by fog.

The woman pulls the little boat from her pocket and pushes forwards. The zombie-like presences seem to multiply. We hear her heartbeat. She sucks in a deep breath, her bright eyes dimming. It becomes increasingly harder to move forwards.

Then, she lifts the figurine up into the air. It floats amongst the slow-moving heads. Another HORN blares in the distance and the woman emerges from amidst the slow-motion.

In front of her, fog clears to reveal a life-size replica of the boat in the woman's hand.

There is an exhale.

FADE TO BLACK