

Title: DON'T FOLLOW ME

Genre: Mystery / Thriller

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## ACT I

First person narrative. Open with monologue: *identity is a danger. It is something that signals your presence to the predators.*

Girl arrives in a new city (LA). Looking for bland apartment, bland neighborhood, bland everything.

*I tried for weeks to be nothing, to make no effects. It never worked. Days would go by. I would lay in my apartment with the lights off, moving past windows in a crouch or a crawl, never disturbing the blinds, never showing myself, so that no passer-by would notice. Then hunger would get the better of me. I'd go out with my eyes cast down, wrapped in blank sweatshirts, blanks sweatpants. Be nothing. Be air, be invisible. Then a cashier would catch my eye and smile, and I would know that I had been seen. I would know beyond a doubt.*

*It wasn't enough to be invisible. Invisible was impossible. I couldn't disappear into nothing. I would have to disappear into something else.*

She starts a new instagram account. She sets all of her settings to private and she starts following girls who she thinks sort of look like her, i.e. are the same age and in the same area as her, starts doing what they do. She posts pictures of herself doing those same things, but it's only the check to see if, when she looks at them, she sees someone else. To see if the illusion is complete. Her bio line reads "Don't follow me."

(Her first photo is of herself at lighthouse atop a cliff overlooking the sea. The road winds down almost to the cliff's edge. It is the beginning of her becoming \_\_\_\_, the girl who is stronger than her and who will shield and protect her.)

This effort is a success. She keeps following more and more people, getting more and more ideas. When she goes out she feels the completeness of her disguise. People's perceptions slide over her, viewing her and accepting her in sum as a perfect forgery, an accepted facsimile. No one suspects a thing. She is invisible inside this shell.

People start requesting to follow her, requesting to follow her back, but she lets those requests sit.

She is starting to run out of money. She signs up with Instacart. It's another way to be invisible. She walks up and down the aisles in her bright green teeshirt as a cog, a soulless functionary of a world now automated with people working for computers, blood and flesh the actionaries of silicone commands.

She hangs out at the grocery store near her apartment, waiting for orders to come in, with the other Instacart shoppers. One of them, GBFF, takes an interest in her. He thinks she's incredible. So well put together. So poised. He just loves her whole thing.

He tries to follow her on instagram. She doesn't accept his request. He asks her about it the next time he sees her. She evades the question. Later he creates an excuse to look at her phone, goes into her app, and accepts his follow request. He sees all the other pending requests. There are hundreds of them. Why is she working at instacart, he wants to know. She should be an influencer.

He keeps bugging her. Finally he tricks her, goes into her app, and accepts all the follow requests. When she finds out she is upset, but she cannot stand up for herself. She lets him push her into letting it stand.

## ACT II

She starts to become popular. She is more confident in her "disguise," and so is willing to let it happen. She starts to feel special, appreciated, loved. She becomes more and more addicted to posting and checking. It is, she muses, the perfect relationship - people radiate love towards her, towards the thing she has created, opening themselves fully, and while she is free to receive it she is also free to remain hidden away, safe. She sees herself as a small mouse whose only concern is for its small comfortable nook and its daily ration of food that is easily found, spilled off the table or kicked under the baseboard or left out on the counter. There is always more than enough, more than she could ever need, and there is never any danger to the mouse. It emerges at night, when no one is looking, and takes what it needs before hiding away again. If she is clever, if she takes only small scraps and leaves no visible sign, the people of the house never know she exists at all.

She has been accepting followers, now. She accepts one that causes her to hesitate. She's not sure why. It might just be paranoia. But she feels like she recognizes something about a person hiding behind a mask. There is nothing identifying here at all. There are no direct shots of his face, his surroundings. The captions are bland, etc., etc. She accepts the request despite the voice in her head saying, Wait. The mouse, its eyes grown wide with fear, saying, Don't.

People have been requesting that she wear their brand, etc. She has been giving out her PO Box number via DM. She has the feeling that she is being watched when she goes to check... but she has had this feeling a lot. She always has tons of packages, and she can feel everyone else's curiosity, interest, jealousy when they see the brands she's receiving. Now it feels like something else. She can't put her finger on it. Again, she ignores her concern.

## ACT III

She pulls up in front of her apartment and he is there, waiting on the front step. His ginger whiskers, his pale green eyes. The way he talks, his upper lip doing all the work, all the movement, like a perpetual sneer, his upper teeth showing white, the cupid's sharp. He says her name her old name, the name she left behind, and she is paralyzed, the name a sort of spell.

How did you get here, she finally asks.

I drove, he says.

You hate driving, she says. You never drove. You always made me drive.

I drove, he says again. He nods toward the car parked at the curb. Let's go for a drive, he says.

They go. She drives, he directs. We learn their dynamic through this exchange. It is her city, but he tells her where to go. She's dominated instantly. Her surrender to his will is a foregone conclusion.

He tells her how much he loves her, how worried he was about her, how mad he was. But he forgives her. He understands why she did it. She's afraid of what they have. She's afraid of how intense and real it is.

He moves into her apartment. She doesn't post on instagram anymore. Walking with him she feels naked, exposed. She thinks about the rat catcher in medieval times, carrying a stick loaded with rats all hung by their tails. Rats meant to live in the shadows now hauled out into the light, into the open square to be seen and reviled. The girl she created on instagram is gone.

Sometimes, when he is asleep, she goes on her phone with the brightness turned so far down that she almost can't make it out, and checks the app. She scrolls through her old images, crying silently in mourning for the best friend and protector she has lost.

She becomes hollow, empty, without intention. She becomes an appendage, a satellite. She goes back to wearing bland, colorless, design-less clothes. She stops making herself up, stops creating any sort of image. She is a function of his will.

At night she acquiesces to his desire. She is passive, accepting. She does not revolt. Revolt is a function of comparison, a sense that things should not be this way, should be some other way. She does not feel this way because she does not imagine other ways. There is only the forever present of what is, of what will always be. To dream of anything else is to live in perpetual heart-break. That, at least, she will not do.

They run into GBFF. He doesn't recognize her at first. He wants to know where she's been, what she's been up to, he hasn't seen her posts in forever, etc etc. BF answers for her, doesn't let her speak. GBFF gets it. Before they leave she goes to the bathroom, and GBFF is waiting there. She doesn't have to explain, he says. He will help her. She could leave with him right now. Go home, pack a bag, and then text him when she's ready. He will come get her. He will drop what he's doing. She doesn't say anything.

Back at home BF falls asleep watching TV. She looks at him sleeping there, then goes in and packs. She leaves everything the brands sent her. She takes the essentials... the things she arrived with. She texts GBFF. He says he'll be there in ten minutes. She waits sitting on the floor, listening for any sound from the other room. Finally her phone buzzes, a text from him, he's here. She goes out through the window, runs down the street. She gets in the car and they drive off.

Drive past the lighthouse where she took her first instagram photo.

At the apartment she can't stop shaking. He tells her she doesn't have to talk about it, doesn't have to explain anything. She wants to, though. She does. She says how it was with him. She says how they first started, the weird sort of intensity they had together. How he used to say that he's the only one who really understands her, the only one who would ever really understand her. How they're made for each other, the only ones made for each other. And in a weird way he's right. She can't help it with him, somehow.

She gets a text. It's from him. It says, "Come outside."

She looks through the window. He's there.

Scene plays out: GBFF is in the doorway, BF is leaning against the car, she's in between them. GBFF tells her she doesn't have to go with him. She doesn't even look at him. She walks to the car. BF opens the driver's side door and she gets in. They drive off.

How did you find me?

Tracking app on the phone. After last time he had to. He didn't have a choice. It almost killed him, when she disappeared. He felt like his head was going to cave in every second, without her there.

She laughs. She's crying. We're made for each other, she says. There's no one else in the

world for either of us.

That's right, he says.

The lighthouse comes into view. She turns the wheel suddenly and speeds down the drive. The dark ocean shows back a thousand points of moonlight. The split-rail fence evaporates before them; the engine pitches high into a whine as the wheels slip the road resistance, accelerate impossibly. It's a sensation like flight, like final freedom from the harsh laws that hold and limit, that bring you crashing back with each attempt at flight. He says nothing. The car falls from view, down into the dark, and is swallowed up forever.