

Dear Bianca, Carly, and CeCe,

Once again, thank you for building this writing community on a foundation of hope! Carly recently critiqued my query letter and it was incredibly helpful – I hope you'll consider the revised pitch for THE WET SEASON, my dual-POV, 80,000-word commercial fiction debut. Comps include Kevin Wilson's NOTHING TO SEE HERE and Kiley Reid's SUCH A FUN AGE, and I like to think of it as THELMA AND LOUISE with a much happier ending.

THE WET SEASON celebrates the feminist power of female relationships: platonic, romantic, and the gray areas in between. In 2015, 35-year-old Belinda is trapped by an abusive partner and Celeste, her former high school best friend, is stuck in an emotionally manipulative marriage. After an accidental encounter in a Los Angeles clothing store rekindles their connection, they escape to a Central American eco-utopia to flip a dilapidated and quite possibly haunted beachfront mansion that Celeste purchased for a dollar. As perpetual rain complicates Belinda's efforts to beautify the property while avoiding an overly friendly handyman, Celeste explores her queer identity. But the discovery that conservative laws threaten reproductive rights on the island – and the fixer-upper was once a medication abortion safe house that is again desperately in need – force Celeste and Belinda to address their conflicted memories of the past and different visions for the future. Their friendship might survive this test – but as a mysterious stalker watches their every move, their lives may also be at stake.

Commented [CL1]: This is such a good example of how a micro relationship can have a macro impact.

Commented [CL2]: Oh wow, this took a turn!

THE WET SEASON takes place in 2015, when I learned about the one-dollar homes for sale in Sicily and traveled to Costa Rica – I mashed up these experiences and the book was born. I have an MA in journalism from USC and am pursuing an MFA in fiction at Pacific University; my work was recently featured in [The Good Trade](#), [The Washington Post](#), and [Hippocampus](#), among others. My career as an environmentalist led to appearances from the "TODAY" show to TEDx and informs my creative writing.

I'm relatively well established on social media and 9,000 people – 98% female and 65% between the ages of 45 and 64 – subscribe to my newsletter, which is associated with my [Mommy Greenest](#) blog. These women are my target audience: From a recent survey, 96% are readers and 80% reported that they want to read my fiction. I also mentor young writers through 826LA and am an active member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association.

As per your submission guidelines, I've embedded the first five pages below. Thanks so much for your consideration!

All best,

Rachel Lincoln Sarnoff

2015 – BELINDA – LOS ANGELES

Belinda perches on a stool between two racks of clothes in the storeroom. Like a bird that can't commit to a branch, she shifts her weight nervously on the wobbly wood disk. She scrolls through her phone with one hand and shoves flaming hot Cheetos into her mouth with the other – five six seven at a time until her tongue swells and the near-fluorescent red bleeds into the corners of her **mouth**.

Commented [CL3]: Make this "lips" to avoid repetition of mouth

It's hot in the closet-sized space, probably ten degrees warmer than outside where the cloudy day registers eighty but the humidity makes it feel like a hundred – October's last shot at summer before it fades into the seventy-two-and-sunny of a Los Angeles fall. Belinda tilts back her head to tip crumbs into her mouth, careful not to let any dust drift onto her white cotton shirt, then tosses the empty bag into a small trash can. She sucks the orange residue from her fingers and wipes her palms on her black leggings. A bead of sweat runs down her forehead and trails the side of her face before disappearing under her shirt, tight against her neck. She unfastens the top button – exposing a small silver heart dangles from a delicate chain – and rolls up her shirtsleeves|

Commented [CL4]: We've had 2 paragraphs of pure description... intentional?

Ding.

At the sound of the doorbell, Belinda freezes. Her heart thuds and her pulse races and she lunges to inspect herself in a small round hand mirror nailed to the wall. Raspberry rims the waterline of her light blue eyes and wayward corkscrews threaten the uniform mahogany of her hair. Her full lower lip flames from the spice and the upper swells from the salt and a flush travels through her beige foundation like watercolor on paper. She presses her palms to her cheeks to cool them but now even her hands are hot.

Ding. Ding.

“Shit,” Belinda says. She pushes her sleeves back down and buttons up her collar.

Commented [CL5]: Typical of her? Or has she never done this before? (This = not be presentable when a customer walks in)

Inside the store, it’s dark – she’d forgotten to turn on the lights, again. Through the front picture window, the clouds move and a brief glimpse of sunlight flickers out. There is someone standing in silhouette near the window. Belinda reaches for the door handle behind her.

Commented [CL6]: But is the store open?

“Hello?” The figure steps forward and the sun breaks through the clouds and drenches the room in amber light. Belinda’s heart downshifts back to normal. It’s just a woman. Another new customer. Everything is fine.

“Is this the place to drop off clothes?” She’s tall – nearly six feet – and skinny, with a large cardboard box in her arms. Loose white tank, through which Belinda can see her flat chest and the faint outline of pink nipples, and faded jeans worn to threads at the knees. Her shiny, dark brown hair falls past her shoulders like a silk cape and her eyes are covered by gigantic black sunglasses.

Commented [CL7]: This is mostly still descriptive... intentional? I would want to see messy, active emotions. For example, she is noticing how this woman looks... does it stir any feelings about how she (herself) looks? Comparison might be the thief of joy, but it is the giver of character development and the helper of tension.

“This is it!” Belinda forces a brightness into her voice and the heat drains from her cheeks and back down under her collar. She clicks on the lights but only the one over the cash register illuminates. Forgot to get that fixed, too. Shit. Shit.

“Welcome to Preloved.” Belinda steps behind the counter, where a tuberose oil diffuser fails to mask the faint smell of mold.

The woman makes her way through the racks of linen shirts and gauzy skirts, arranged by color and type. She touches the sleeve of a silk dress, delicate as a spiderweb. “I read about this place in the paper,” she says.

“Only a few people saw that,” Belinda says. “Most people find us through social.”

“My husband still gets the paper,” the woman says. “So archaic.”

“I wish I did,” Belinda says. “I probably wouldn’t be so stressed out if I didn’t read the news every time I looked at my phone. Did you hear about the airstrike in Afghanistan? We missed the Taliban and hit a Doctors Without Borders hospital. So sad.”

“Horrible.”

Belinda clicks into sales mode. “So, we’re like a library for clothes. We give you fifty percent of what we accept as credit, which you can use in the shop. There’s no payout, like a consignment or thrift store – you just get clothes. It’s like sharing a closet with hundreds of other women with amazing taste. We’re technically a club. Twenty-five a month and you have thirty days free to try it out.”

“Sounds perfect,” the woman says. Usually, new customers run around the store inspecting the racks. There are always questions – Can you give me cash? How do you decide what my clothes are worth? What if I don’t like what’s here – can I get a free month? But this one doesn’t seem that interested in the process or even the clothes. She just stands there holding the box.

Commented [CL8]: I really like this interiority

Belinda starts a new member form on the desktop, then flips around the small white plastic kiosk. “You can start filling out the form and I’ll do your intake so you know how much credit you have to spend.”

“Okay.” The woman sets the box on the counter and taps at the screen.

“There are four hundred other members so there’s a lot of great stuff coming in and out,” Belinda continues. “You can shop once a week – but if there’s something going on we make exceptions. Like if you need a date-night dress.”

The woman makes a strangled sound. “That’s not happening,” she says. She pushes the hair from her face and a giant, square-cut diamond on her left ring finger shimmers in the light.

Belinda's heart has returned to normal but there is now a flutter of excitement in her stomach – a little pulse there, like the staccato beat of a hummingbird's tiny wings. That ring must be three carats at least. There are sure to be treasures inside the box.

Even after a year at Preloved, Belinda still gets a voyeuristic thrill going through people's clothes and imagining their lives. Granted, the shop attracts a certain demographic – white, affluent, environmentalist women, just like the Santa Monica neighborhood where it's located – but even within that homogeneity there are vast differences.

Inside some boxes, the clothing is organized by style and type and smells of natural laundry detergent perfumed with essential oils – lavender, sweet orange, sage. Belinda imagines these women tucking perfect sleepy children into bed, pouring a half glass of chardonnay, and sinking into a claw-foot full of bubbles before making slow love to their husbands on four-thousand thread count, organic-cotton sheets.

Commented [CL9]: Is she imagining this with envy? With mild horror?

And then there are the dropped-off bags full of crumpled garments with loose buttons or missing zippers that smell of sweat, sex, and god knows what else. In Belinda's fantasies, these women torpedo glass ceilings, squeeze in daily Reformer sessions, keep a stable of boyfriends, and fly to New York for the weekend. They don't have time to wash and launder and fold, but their thousand-dollar cocktail dresses keep the store in business.

Belinda wonders what her own box would look like. Six months ago, it would have smelled of bleach and starch, the clothes neatly folded and stacked. Now, she's not so sure.

The woman stands at the desk and looks at her curiously. "Are you the owner?"

"I just work here," Belinda says. She opens the box to peer inside and tugs at her shirtsleeves so the cuffs cover her wrists as the flutter in her stomach grows stronger. Inside the box, it smells like exclusive, expensive perfume – sandalwood and jasmine and some rich

Commented [CL10]: Does she wish she were the owner?

representation of the scent you get when you turn over a log. There are two neat columns of sweaters, all still tagged from Saks and Neiman's and Saint Laurent and St. John, with prices that start at quadruple digits. Belinda strokes the knit, soft as a baby bunny's belly and culled from the wispy chin hairs of Peruvian goats. Jackpot. Even if it's a hundred degrees outside, quality cashmere in the window is always a draw.

"We can totally take these." She closes the box and looks up.

"Belinda?" The woman leans forward and pushes up the big black sunglasses so that they sweep the hair out of her face.

Suddenly, like a lens coming into focus, Belinda recognizes the features of the person standing before her. "Celeste?"

The woman leans awkwardly over the counter with her arms outstretched. "Can I...?"

"Oh my god, stop!" Belinda darts from behind the counter and into her arms. She feels the warmth of Celeste's back under her palms, the thick muscles in her shoulders. Inhales the still-familiar scent of her skin – nutty and sweet, like almonds mixed with coconut in the back aisle of a health food store, slightly tinged with chlorine. Celeste's arms are heavy on her shoulders and she pats Belinda's back tentatively as if testing to see that the person she's hugging is real.

Something relaxes in Belinda's chest that she hadn't realize had been clenched. Even now – after seventeen years – Celeste still makes her feel safe. Safety. It's something Belinda hasn't felt in months.

And that's not safe at all.

Commented [CL11]: I wish there had been a reference to her being familiar before.

Commented [CL12]: What specific thoughts are going through her mind? Specific emotions? Showing us her external reaction is great but what about her internal one? I want that too, and I want contrast.

Commented [CL13]: I really like the last line.