

Layla's Room by Sabrina Mahfouz

Extract 1: Layla and Monica

Layla and Monica are standing in the school toilets by the sinks.

Monica:

Yeh so just hold on to the sink, like this, and squat...easy.

They squat, looking serious in the mirror.

Layla:

Um, Mon? Are we gonna do this for the whole of lunch?

Monica:

As long as we can I reckon.

Layla:

It makes my thighs burn.

Monica:

Sort of the point.

Layla:

School is stressful enough without making it some sort of army workout bootcamp that –

Monica:

But think of the booooty –



Monica does a little dance with Layla. They both laugh and start squatting again.

Monica:

I think two of my most favourite things must be singing and squatting.

Layla:

Okay. 60 seconds only. Go.

Extract 2 - Layla's Room by Sabrina Mahfouz

Layla, Monica and Joe

Layla:

I do know, for example, that one time, me and Monica got caught shoplifting some lipstick. It's not something I'd done before, but Monica loved doing these selfie parties and we'd ran out of make up to make us look more likeable and of course we had no money /so we –

Monica:

We went to the shops and there was no stopping her, Layla, once she gets something in her head it's like, that's it, she is on a mission. Determined, that girl is, I wish I could be a bit more like that, but I'm so easily distracted /so –

Layla:

Monica gets distracted by some cute boy buying tampons – like hello, if a boy is buying tampons then it's pretty likely he's got a girlfriend and that he's a decent sort of guy who's unlikely to give out his number to any admirer but whatever. She's just staring straight at him, not noticing who's watching *her* as she puts some lipstick in her pocket and the security guard swoops over and soon enough I'm begging /for us –

Monica:

I end up begging this huge security guard to let us go home unpunished, cos my mum is ill – which was true at the time – and if she found out she might die – which

wasn't so true I suppose but I had to save us cos Layla /
was –

Layla:

I was doing all the work because I felt really bad that I
hadn't shook Monica out of her day dreaming when I'd
seen what was happening, so I used all the reasoning I
could with the big guy in the small room full of CCTV. I
told him we were victims of marketing ploys to get us
obsessed with our looks and we couldn't be expected to
afford the life we were supposed to lead and/ he –

Monica:

He was sweet. He gave Layla a tissue to wipe her tears
and he said he didn't want to cause my mum any extra
stress, so he let us go with a 12 month ban from all their
stores, but no police involvement, thank god, but that's
when/ I knew –

Layla:

I knew Monica's obsession with looks wasn't good for
me, so I started to lay off the selfie nights and trained
myself to not care about how many likes a picture got
and Monica was not happy about that. I guess that's
when she started seeing more of –

Joe:

Joe. What's your name beautiful?

Monica:

Monica.

Joe:

Do you like football?

Monica:

Um. Yeh.

Joe:

Who do you support?

Monica:

Um. Whoever you do!

Joe:

Ha. You're funny, I like you. Wanna come to my mates
to watch the match?

Monica:

Yeh. Yeh, thanks.

Layla:

Monica, we're supposed to be going out!

Monica:

Oh come on Lay, he's lovely, look at those eyes.

Layla:

You don't even know him, he could be a –

Monica:

Or maybe he's a -

Layla:

You need /to be –

Monica:

I need to go –

Layla:

But what about –

Monica:

Bowling can wait babe, we'll do it another day. Don't worry, I'll snapchat the whole way there, see ya later yeh? Did you hear him call me beautiful?

Monica walks away waving.

Extract 3 – Layla’s Room by Sabrina Mahfouz

Joe, Monica and Layla

Joe:

Oi, Layla, I hear your mum’s a carpet muncher.

Monica:

Joe, don’t -

Layla:

I think she prefers Lino actually, Joe.

Joe:

Ha, yeh, you like a bit of banter do ya?

Layla:

Is that your version of banter cos if so, I’m busy mate.

Monica:

Layla, he didn’t -

Joe:

I was wondering, yeh, like, just having a bit of a think last night before I went to sleep, ya get me, if that sort of thing runs in families and if so, like, when you’re gonna have a go –

Monica:

Joe!

Joe:

What babes? What I’m saying is, if your mate Layla here is looking to explore her sexuality and all that, needs a

friendly pair of girly lips to kiss, then I was gonna suggest – you.

Monica:

Me?

Layla:

I'm gonna leave you two to your gif porno fantasies and go to –

Joe:

So what, you saying Monica ain't kissable?

Layla:

Mon, seriously, are we doing this?

Monica:

Answer him Lay, don't you think I'm kissable?

I thought it was jokes, we'd kissed when we were really little kids playing games anyway and we always cussed boys for trying to get other girls to kiss each other in front of them so I thought Layla would get I was joking, she'd just be like, 'oh shut it Monica' and that would be it, but she went skitz...

Layla:

I was so infuriated I went to the library and finished my English homework, some poem about identity, with more fire in my pen than I'd maybe ever had. I'd never been spoken to like that. I realise now I was lucky, a lucky one, cos when I started looking online to find some sort of amazing reply to their stupidity, so many girls deal

with that sort of stuff and much much worse all their lives
but I always thought I'd be...fine. I was alright. But...
So my poem was full of raging statements about identity,
about why does being a girl mean shaving off leg hair
and in adverts for razors there's no hair even there but
they shave anyway and they're always that same shade
of tanned like no other legs exist and that's before we
even get to the armpits – there's deodorants that
promise you beautiful underarms I mean, seriously, even
the creases of our bodies need beauty treatments?
And there was a whole bit about why who you love or
fancy is really nobody's business and why boys try to get
girls to kiss each other, like as if even that can really
only be for them and how grown men shout out of car
windows when we walk home like we should know how
to make our school uniforms less appealing and –

Layla stops, exhausted.

Extract 4 – Layla’s Room by Sabrina Mahfouz

Layla and Reece

Layla:

In a bittersweet twist, Reece came up to me that day. Started our first proper chat. I’d semi-secretly fancied him since I heard his mum call him Ri-Ri at the school gates –

Reece:

Layla, wait up.

Layla:

Oh, hi Reece.

Reece:

I...er...I just wanted to check you’re cool and that?

Layla:

I’m fine why wouldn’t I be fine?

Reece:

Um. In class. You’re always, I mean, you’re like, the star pupil and that. I like...listening to your stuff so...

Layla:

Oh. Oh. Thanks. Yeh, I’m just, tired, I guess.

Reece:

I guess she’s not telling me the real story, but it’s like, I don’t know her too tough to start acting all like, tell me what’s up Layla. I’ve secretly liked her since she did some sick poem about the suffragettes in history. She’s

different, she says the kind of stuff I think about out loud and that's, that's like proper inspiring.

Layla:

I can tell Reece is kind. Not only that he is like, my dream guy, cheesy as that sounds. But in the back of my mind as he talks I can just see Joe's lips moving round and I think, I don't want to get involved with a boy right now, what if he ends up like Joe?

Reece:

So like, I was wondering if...maybe when you're less tired or whatever you could um, read me that poem?

Layla:

What one?

Reece:

The one you didn't in class, cos you usually do so –

Layla:

I don't really like that one.

Reece:

Ok. You got others?

Layla:

Loads.

Reece:

I could come round after football on Saturday?

Layla:

I babysit my little brother on Saturday.



**Theatre
Centre**

Reece:
Sunday?

Layla:
That's my...um, library day.

Reece:
Okay, well, cool, like, maybe sometime.

Layla:
Yeh, definitely. It was nice talking to you, see you
tomorrow.

Extract 5 – Layla’s Room by Sabrina Mahfouz

Layla, Monica, Layla’s Mum, Joe

Layla:

Monica passed on my refusal to Ryan and it didn’t go down so well, in fact it seemed like him *and* Joe were attached to my back. They pinged my bra in the corridor, in the canteen, in the classroom, so immature.

Monica:

Yeh sure, the bra pinging thing is well immature, but it’s like, boys innit, so course they do dumb stuff. It happens all the time. I’m surprised it hadn’t happened to Layla before. I told her just ignore it, they do it to everyone.

Layla:

I started to wear t-shirts under my shirt, even on the hot tropical type days, to make it harder for their spindly fingers to find their way under my bra strap and ping it. They’d ring my phone all night, leave voicemails of one of them heavy breathing like weirdos, but they withheld the number so nobody could do anything and mum said...

Mum:

Don’t answer if you don’t know the number darling, ignore it.

Layla:

Yeh, sure.

One day Joe and Ryan followed me home. Making moaning noises behind me, calling me -

Joe:

Slag. Sket. Hoe.

Layla:

I wouldn't run, kept walking slow. Then it got quiet and I was worried, turned my head a little to the side and bang! I felt arms grab me and pull me into some bushes at the side of the street, all scratchy and prickly and hands were running all over me and trying to get inside my shirt and...up my skirt and over my face and I was fighting them, I knew some boxing moves and I used them til I felt my knuckles hit bone and *then* there was a real moan and the hands fell away and I ran away until I got home and felt like I couldn't breathe.

Mum found me collapsed in a heap on the kitchen floor, near the very spot she'd had me.

Mum:

My god, Layla, darling, what's wrong?

Layla:

It's all gone wrong mum –

Mum:

I'm sure it's not that bad, darling, come here –

Layla:

Come here. Come ere. Come.

Mum:

Don't pay them any attention.

Layla:

Do you want some? You want some. I know you do. I heard you do.

Mum:

You have to just ignore them.

Layla:

You love it like. You like it like.

Mum:

Don't even give them the time of day.

Layla:

Dirty. Dirty. Dirty little. Frigid little. Give me a little. Take a little. Little –

Mum:

You're bigger than them. And you have to study.