

The Girlfriends

Blow a kiss, fire a gun. All we need is somebody to lean on



A larp by Elin Gissén and Rosalind Göthberg
Based on a book by Karolina Ramqvist

Introduction

You're having a party, just the four of you. You are all the girlfriends of members of a criminal gang. That is how you know each other, that is why you are friends. Your old friends didn't understand your choices, they disapprove of your partner and it got harder and harder to keep them in your life. The other girlfriends get it. They know what it's like to have a man who can do whatever he wants. Who is above the rules, and can bring you above them as well. And they know what it's like waiting for a call, or a text, or any sign of life when he is on the job. Like tonight. Tonight the boyfriends are robbing a value transport.

"The Girlfriends" is a larp based on the book "The Girlfriend" (Swedish: "Flickvännen") by Karolina Ramqvist. The purpose of the game is to tell a common story from a more uncommon perspective. We often read, see, hear or play stories about criminal gang members, their victims or the police officers hunting after them but not as often about their partners and families. The larp also explores themes such as heteronormativity, destructive relationships, group dynamics, secrets, and vital decisions.

Number of players: 4

Number of GM:s: 1

Runtime: 3 hours

Practical:

- **Room:** A room large enough for 4 people to be able to move/dance around a bit in. A table and some chairs. An empty wall or table to put memory notes on.
- **Equipment:** Computer or phone to play music from (playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/01EBnc9HZXlylMod0Q8BZO?si=YmdxvEfbR5KHYdqLpYL09Q>). Speakers
- **Props:**
 - Wine bottles (filled with water or something else representing wine) and wine glasses (plastic)
 - "Drugs" (tic tacs or something similar)
 - Cellphones (our suggestion is that the players use their own but turned off)
 - Pens for the workshop (one for each player)
 - Tape (or something else) to put up the memory notes with
 - Optional: Party decorations for the room

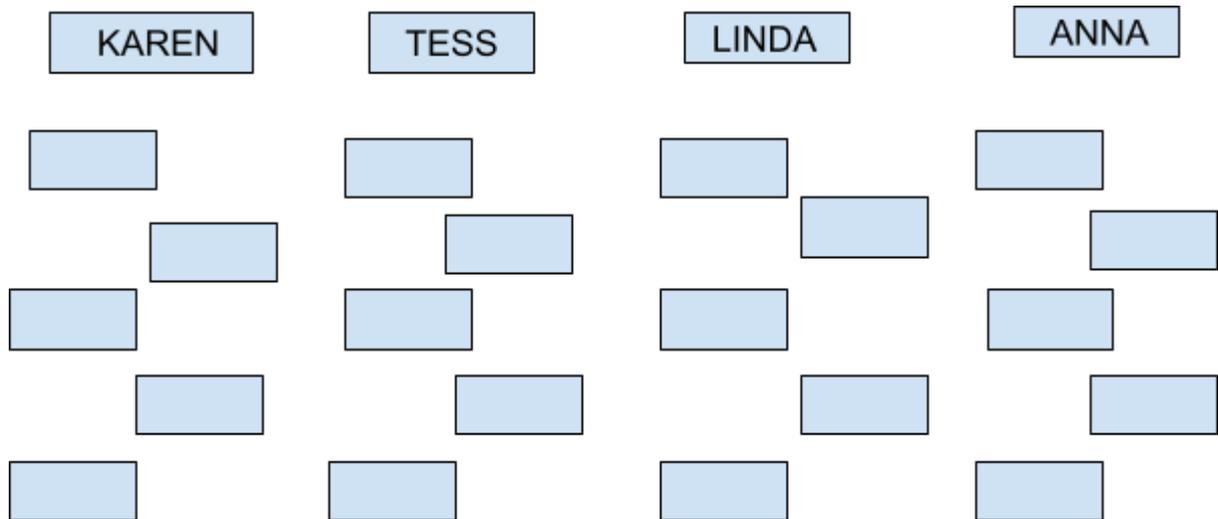
Preparations

Characters

Cut the memory sheets along the lines, so that each memory is on a separate piece of paper. Put the memories together with the character they belong to, for example using a paperclip

Memory wall

Choose an empty wall in the room that you can use as the memory wall. If you don't have a wall, whiteboard or similar that you can put up papers on with tape, magnets, etc, you can lay the papers out on a table instead. Prepare the wall (or table) by putting up "signs" with the characters' names (you can find these on the last page in this document.) Do not put up the actual memories yet, this will be done during the workshop. When it's done, it should look something like this:



Workshop

Intro (10 minutes)

Welcome

Gather everyone in a circle. Make a presentation round, ask the players to say their name and something about why they have chosen to play this larp. Tell everyone the time schedule:

- Workshop, ca 1 hour 15 minutes
- Short break
- Larp, ca 1-1,5 hour
- Short debrief

About the larp

This larp is written by Elin Gissén and Rosalind Göthberg. It is based on a book called *The Girlfriend* ("Flickvännen" in Swedish) by Karolina Ramqvist.

Read the pitch: *The larp takes place during a party, where you four are the only ones invited. You are all the girlfriends of members of a criminal gang. That is how you know each other, that is why you are friends. Your old friends didn't understand your choices, they disapprove of your partner and it got harder and harder to keep them in your life. The other girlfriends get it. They know what it's like to have a man who can do whatever he wants. Who is above the rules, and can bring you above them as well. And they know what it's like waiting for a call, or a text, or any sign of life when he is on the job. Like tonight. Tonight the boyfriends are robbing a value transport.*

The idea with the larp is to tell a common story from a more uncommon perspective. We often read, see, hear or play stories about criminal gang members, their victims or the police officers hunting after them but not as often about their partners and families. This larp is supposed to focus on the girlfriends, and we will not put that much focus on the boyfriends, their gang, exactly what kind of criminal activities they are involved in, etc. The players should feel free to make things up regarding this during the larp if they need to, it doesn't have to be very realistic (for example it's perfectly ok to take inspiration from tv-series) and it doesn't have to be consistent throughout the larp.

The larp also explores themes such as heteronormativity, destructive relationships, group dynamics, secrets, and vital decisions.

Playstyle

Once you start playing, you will remain ingame until the end of the larp with no breaks. The playstyle is naturalistic in a slightly heightened setting, aiming for a pressure cooker-feel, where everyone is showing a flawless facade, being besties, and jabs come disguised as compliments.

Characters (50 minutes)

Hand out the characters. Our suggestion is to just do it randomly and tell the players to let you know if they really don't want to play the character they got (if that happens, sort it out with the other players, asking if someone would be willing to switch, etc.). If you want to assign the characters in another way, feel free to do so. Tell the players that the characters are partly non-transparent, meaning that they shouldn't share anything about their character with the other players until you tell them to.

Read through the characters and write memories (15 minutes)

Tell the players to read through their character descriptions and the pre-written memories. Hand out pens and tell them that when they are done reading, they're going to complete the unfinished memories. These should be about the same length as the pre-written ones and will revolve around who the character was before she met her boyfriend. One will be about **a dream the character had** and the other **one about someone who used to be important for the character**.

Presentation (5 minutes)

Gather everyone again and take a round where everyone gets to present their character to each other. The presentations should include the character's name, her boyfriend's name and stereotype/position in the gang and a short introduction, one or two sentences about the character (NOT the characters' secrets).

Secrets

Every character has a secret and every character knows someone else's secret. This part is supposed to be non-transparent, meaning that the players shouldn't talk about their secrets with anyone else than the player of the character who already knows about it before the larp. However, the secrets are supposed to come out during the larp so the players should start thinking about how/when/in what kind of situation they would reveal both their own secret and the other secret they know of.

Create relationships, one on one (15 minutes)

The players will now get to sit down in pairs and discuss their characters' relationships with each other. Tell them to talk a bit about the characters' general relationship, how they feel about each other, something they do together, etc. Also, tell them to come up with how their characters first met. Give them about 3-5 minutes, then tell them to change pairs, repeat and change again so everyone gets to talk to everyone else.

Create relationship, whole group (15 minutes)

Gather everyone again and discuss how the characters relate to each other as a group. Let the players discuss this freely, talking about whatever they feel is the most important parts, but as a GM you can help the discussion by asking questions like:

- What do you usually do together?
- Who is usually in-charge/has the highest status?
- How long has everyone been a part of the group?
- Are there differences between hanging out when the boyfriends are present and when they aren't?
- How do the characters feel about each other's boyfriends?

Do a memory exercise where the players, in character, create a few common memories they have. You as a GM can start each round by saying, "I remember XXX" (see the list

below) and then the players get to contribute to the story from their character's perspective. If they get stuck, you can help out by throwing in suggestions (see list for each memory below):

- **“I remember the last party we had...”**
 - Suggestions: Someone danced on the tables, someone broke something expensive, someone sang karaoke loudly
- **“I remember the funeral we went to...”**
 - Suggestions: Someone's boyfriend held a speech, you comforted the dead guy's girlfriend, you avoided his parents
- **“I remember when one of their jobs went really well and we all went to Monaco...”**
 - Suggestions: Flight in first-class, a suite at a luxurious hotel, dinner at a fancy restaurant on the beach

Techniques (15 minutes)

Memory wall

Tell the players to put their memories under their character's name on the memory wall and go through how the memory wall will work during the game:

At any time, the players can choose to do a monologue, based on one of the memories on the wall. To do this, they simply take one of the memory notes from the wall. When this happens, the music will stop and they can read the memory out loud. This will be done as a monologue and represents the character's thoughts, meaning that when someone is reading a memory, everyone else is just listening without any interaction. If it is one of their own memories, they can expand on what is written and improvise around it. They can also choose to read someone else's memory but then they are only allowed to read what is written. When they are done, they put the memory note back on the wall, the music starts playing again and the game continues as before.

Music volume

There will be music playing in the background during the larp. Most of the time the volume should be on a level where it's still possible for the players to talk to each other (and for the GM to hear the conversations). However, whenever the volume is turned up, the players have to stop talking about serious things and just partyyyy! Only shallow topics, dancing, etc. are allowed, until the volume is turned down again. You as a GM controls the volume and can turn it up whenever you feel like it, the players can also signal that they want the volume to be turned up by saying “Let's dance!”

Alcohol/Drugs

In the larp, there will be a lot of play on alcohol and some drug-use. The players are encouraged to play drunk and use that as a way to spill secrets and show cracks in their character's facades. They can play up and down how drunk the characters are as they see fit during the larp, but as a general rule they will start off tipsy and end up worn.

Drugs will come into play in the second part of the game. When it is time, the GM will give the drugs to Anna who is the one who brought them to the party and introduces them to the others. The drugs are represented by tic tacs (or something similar). It is not meant to be an actual representation of a specific, real drug but more of a stylistic "party drug". When a character takes a pill, she becomes ecstatic for a little while and it allows her to forget any negative feeling she might be experiencing.

Violence

During the larp, the characters might want to commit acts of violence. They can not kill each other, and probably shouldn't try to, but they can be violent towards each other. This should be done by slow escalation, where the aggressor clearly shows the intent of what they want to do, for example, push someone up against the wall or down on the floor, and the victim decides how harshly to play it up. When this happens the others can pick a side, join the aggressor or try to fight her off. Let the players discuss and decide what general level of physical contact/violence they are comfortable with.

Cellphones

The players can use their phones as a way to play on worrying about and waiting to hear from their boyfriend. We suggest that they use their own phones but maybe take them out of their case or switch with each other. We also recommend that they turn their phones off during the larp. If they decide to keep them on, tell them not to take any real pictures of the other players (unless everyone is ok with that), but they should feel free to do fake selfies or groupies.

Dramatical curve

The larp doesn't have any real acts with breaks or time jumps, but there is a rough dramatical curve that the larp should follow:

- **Part 1: Party!** When the larp starts, all the characters have just arrived at the party at Karen's place. They have said hi to each other and received their first glass of wine. The intro song is the first song the characters dance to. For this part of the larp, the focus should be on the party, chit-chat and keeping a good party mood. They should avoid talking about what the boyfriends are doing and if someone tries to, the others should change the subject or turn up the music. In this part, the players are not allowed to reveal their or anyone else's secrets and they are not allowed to use violence.
- **Part 2: Escalation** The second part of the larp starts when the GM gives Anna the drugs and she introduces them to the others. When this happens, the players are

allowed to start playing more on their secrets and reveal them if they'd like, they are allowed to use violence and they are allowed to talk more about their boyfriends.

- **Part 3: Breaking point** There will be a clear breaking point, the music will stop and something will happen that changes the tone of the party (do not tell the players more than this)
- **Part 4: Fallout** The music does not come back on, the characters react to what just happened. This part will only last for a few minutes and during this time, the players can't use the memory wall/ do monologues.
- The game ends when the GM starts playing the outro song.

Break

Take a short break where everyone gets to go to the bathroom etc. Make sure that the room is in order and pour a glass of "wine" for each of the characters. Prepare the music, make sure that the playlist is **not set on shuffle** - this is both because there are some songs at the beginning of the playlist that are extra important and because the outro song is the last song in the playlist and shouldn't be played before the larp ends.

Larp

Start and end

Before you start, quickly go through how the larp will start and end.

- **Start:** The intro song will start playing. The players should start to dance/move around a bit by themselves (they can have their eyes closed in the beginning, when getting into character, if they want to) and when they are ready move more towards the middle of the room and start interacting with each other (sort of dancing their way into the larp). Remind them that when the larp starts, the party has been going on for a little while and they have already said hi to each other.
- **End:** When the outro song starts, everyone is free to do whatever feels right for them but without any interaction with each other. When the song is over, the larp is over and they will get instructions on what comes next.

The larp (GM-instructions)

Start

Make sure that the room is in order and that the players are standing a little bit away from each other. Start playing the intro song *Lean On* by DJ Snake & Major Lazer. It is the first song in the Spotify playlist for the game. Play it loud! When the intro song is over, turn the volume down a bit.

General instructions

- Keep track of the music volume, turn it up whenever you want the players to stop talking about serious subjects or when someone says "Let's dance!" and turn it down again after a while so the players can have conversations without screaming.
- Turn the music off when someone picks up a memory note, turn it on again when they put it back

Breaking point

The breaking point will be a radio message about an armed robbery that just happened (most likely the one committed by the boyfriends). When it is time, turn off the music and read this to the players (sounding like a news reporter):

Breaking news: We have received reports that there has been an armed robbery and a guard has been killed. The police have confirmed that there were four perpetrators: one of them is in the hospital with life-threatening injuries, two are in custody and one is still on the loose. Anyone who has seen or heard anything that might be of use should contact the police immediately.

Rough time plan (feel free to adjust this depending on how the larp is going and how much time you have)

- **Party!:** ca 20-30 minutes
- After a maximum of 30 minutes, give Anna the drugs
- **Escalation:** 30-40 minutes
- **Breaking point (make sure there is at least 30 minutes left of the total time, including time for debrief).** Turn the music off and read the news-announcement above.
- **Fallout:** 5 minutes

End

After a few minutes of the players reacting to the news, turn on the outro song *Lean On* by Emma Heesters. It is the last song in the playlist.

Debrief

When the song is over, tell the players that the larp is over and gather everyone in a circle. Take a round where everyone gets to share whatever they want to share with the others, for example, what they felt or thought about during the larp or what they think happened to their character.

Karen

“Nothing scares me anymore. Kiss me hard before you go. I just wanted you to know that baby, you’re the best”

Boyfriend: John, The Leader

Relationship: You live together, in the house he bought for you. One day, he said he had a surprise for you, he brought you to this wonderful neighborhood, walked up to the front door of a gorgeous house, and gave you a key. “It’s yours” he said. Just like that. No other guy could ever do that for you, but you are with John, and he can. There is nothing he can’t do. You kissed him so hard, and he picked you up and carried you inside. Shortly after you got engaged. You don’t even have to work anymore, he provides for both of you. You don’t know exactly what he does, and you don’t want to. He doesn’t tell you anything, and you don’t ask. There is a deep respect between the two of you, he values your intelligence, your opinions and your sense of humor, and even after years together the passion is still intense. When you have sex he still looks at you like you are a miracle.

Of course, your daily lives have to follow the demands of his work, and the nature of it means that you have to make some sacrifices. When John comes home, he needs you to be there for him. In the beginning of your relationship he said that if you were to leave him, he would kill you. He didn’t mean it of course. It just proves how much he loves you. He can be distant sometimes, but remembering that there is nothing he wouldn’t do to keep you together makes you feel desired. And now John wants to start a family together.

Background: You grew up in an apartment with your mother and your sisters, and saw your father every other weekend. Everyone expected you to go to university, so you did, but you never cared for it. There had to be more to life, you were sure of it, so you made the right kind of friends, traveled to exciting places, did a little modeling and in Ibiza you met John.

Future: People are obsessed with change. You don’t get it. If you like your life, why would you want things to change? You don’t like to think about the future. Whenever you do, you realize that you don’t know what you want it to look like. A small part of you wants John to quit, get a normal job, but if he did, he would not be the person you fell in love with.

Drugs and alcohol: You need to feel in control. Drinking is a stress-relief, but getting too drunk makes you disgusted with yourself. And John doesn’t want you to use drugs. His eyes get dark when he talks about it. You are pretty sure he makes most of his money from drugs, and maybe because of that using can feel exhilarating, like an act of defiance.

Secrets: You are on the pill. When John said he wanted to start trying for children you were hesitant. He didn't let it go though, and eventually, you told him you'd stop to take contraceptives. It was easier to lie than to keep fighting about it. It's not that you never want children, it's just that everything would get so complicated. You are judging Linda and Anna for their kids. It's irresponsible to bring a child into this kind of life. But you can't tell John that. You don't know what your decision means for the future, and you don't know what John would do if he found out. You are very careful, but in a moment of weakness, you told **Tess**. She has never used it against you, but you still wish you hadn't done it.

You know **Anna's** secret. She called you in hysterics, her five-year-old daughter had found pills and eaten them, thinking they were candy. You drove her to the hospital and covered for Anna, who was high as a kite.

You haven't told anyone, because you like Anna, and wouldn't want her to potentially lose custody of her children. You would tell the others if you felt attacked, or if you had to justify why you don't want children of your own.

Intention for tonight: Keep yourself distracted. Don't think about what could happen. You are hosting the evening and revel in knowing that the others come to you. Your place is better than theirs, and deep down you know that you are better than them. John choose you. He would never be with any of them. As you wait for him you will keep your cool.

Memories - Karen

When we fell in love: I was just about to get into a taxi on a busy street in Ibiza when I met John. I was instantly attracted to him. He was unlike anyone else I had ever met: elegant, confident and very clearly a man who knew what he wanted, and how to get it. He took me to expensive restaurants and on weekend-long hikes, but it was that time I had the flu that I realized the two of us had something special. I was in a miserable state of fever and snot and didn't want him to see me like that, but he came over, made me soup, watched trashy reality tv on the couch with me all day, and said there were nowhere else he'd rather be.

When he scared me: It was a new year's celebration, and John found out that one of his oldest friends had betrayed him in some way. I don't know what happened, but his face transformed into someone I barely recognized. He went out and when he came back there was blood on his shirt. We have never talked about it, and I never saw that friend again.

Last time we saw each other: We always spend the nights before he leaves for a big job the same way, it's like a ritual by now. He cooks a nice dinner, we share a bottle of wine and play monopoly. The sex is incredible on those nights. The next morning when I wake up, there is a note saying "I love you" and a burner phone on the nightstand.

A dream I had before I met John:

Someone who was important to me before I met John:

Tess

"Party girls don't get hurt. Can't feel anything, when will I learn. I push it down, push it down"

Boyfriend: Alex, The Right Hand Man

Relationship: Alex is your best friend. You have so much fun together, and often go on spontaneous trips to cool places. Somehow he got you an apartment and he stays there with you most of the time, but he also has his own place somewhere. You've never been there. Most nights you drink, and have sex. He sleeps with others too, but it's fine. As long as you are his number one you don't give a fuck what he does when he's not around. And as long as you don't have to meet the other girls. You used to fight about this a lot, but after you told him that you are bisexual you've reached a sort of truce. You can sleep with women as much as you want, it's a turn on for him and doesn't get in the way of your relationship, so if you stay away from men and don't talk about who he is seeing everything works out.

You've had boyfriends before, but Alex is the first person who really wanted to know you. The real you. So you told him, and he stayed. And he tells you the real things about himself too. Things you know he doesn't tell anyone else, things about his job, rough and violent things he's done, things that you are pretty sure he's not allowed to tell you. You don't give a shit. You have his back and you know that he has yours.

Background: Your father's job made your family move around the world, you'd lived in six different countries by the time you were fifteen. You had no siblings and often felt lonely and out of place. Then your parents got a really messy divorce, and you have barely seen your father since. Last you heard he lived in Bangkok. You stayed with your mother, but she met a new man and now she has three new kids and lives in Italy. You are very used to taking care of yourself, and your job as a stylist pays the bills.

Future: You long to have a family of your own. A place to call home, stability and something to give life true meaning. You imagine what it would be like raising a child, be part of something that's real. But Alex doesn't want kids. He says he never has and never will, and you believe him. You are torn between wanting to stay with him, the joy and comfort that you share, and try to start over and find someone who also wants a family. Whenever you try to picture leaving him your heart breaks. He'd be lost without you.

Alcohol and drugs: You can stop drinking whenever you want to. Totally. Except you would no longer dare to try, because if you are honest with yourself you suspect that might not be true anymore. You drink every day, but you only do drugs occasionally, and

only take uppers. You are careful to avoid the heavier stuff, that's too slippery of a slope, but you don't consider alcohol to be dangerous.

Secret: You've had an affair with Anna's boyfriend Patrick. And you are still in love with him. If things were different you could see yourself making a life with him. He is warm and caring, he makes you feel safe and he is a good father. You feel guilty, both towards Alex and Anna, and don't quite know how to handle the situation. You couldn't keep all of it to yourself without going crazy, so you told **Linda**.

You know **Karen's** secret. Late one night when you were both drunk and hanging out on her couch she told you that she is on the pill, and lies about it to John.

You haven't told anyone, that is Karen's business, and also Karen is not a person you want to cross. But it does provoke you when Karen is being a judgmental bitch, you've always had a temper and if things get heated it could slip out.

Intention: Have a good time, and make sure that everyone else does too. You don't want to talk about the reason that you are here tonight, there is nothing any of you can do and it doesn't help the guys if you sit around and worry. It's probably easier for you since you know more about what they are doing, and you can ask Alex when he gets back, but still. Get it together.

Memories - Tess

When we fell in love: Alex and I started out as friends, friends with benefits. One night we ended up on a balcony with a bottle of whiskey, and he started telling me about his life. Not just the things I already knew, the heavy stuff too. And I started talking about mine. I told him about my family, how empty everything felt, my loneliness. He looked me in the eyes, drunken and honest, and told me that I'd never be alone again.

When he scared me: He came home in the middle of the night shaking, couldn't get a word out, started hyperventilating, and almost passed out. He refused to leave the apartment for days afterwards. When I asked about it he just shook his head and said that it was better if I didn't know. I think that was when I realized how serious this whole thing actually is. Before that, his job had felt like a game, a cool story that wasn't real, but now I know better.

Last time we saw each other: It was a such a silly thing. We'd been out clubbing. Alex knows most of the bouncers in town so we always get in everywhere, and we had a great time. But as we were heading home Alex insisted on getting chicken nuggets, even though it would take forever. My feet hurt, I was tired and the only thing I wanted was to get home, so we had a stupid fight and I went home by myself. When I woke up he hadn't followed, and just a few hours later I got a text saying that the job had started.

A dream I had before I met Alex:



Someone who was important to me before I met Alex:

Linda

"So I don't look back. Still I'm dying with every step I take. But I don't look back"

Boyfriend: Danny, The Henchman

Relationship: Danny is the only father your daughter remembers. Her actual father got mean and eventually violent when he drank, and he left when she was a baby. Soon after you met Danny at a friend's birthday party and fell for him right away. He had the kind of rough charm that you are drawn to, and kind eyes to match. You never thought he'd be interested in having a relationship, especially since you just had someone else's child, but he just smiled and said that he loves kids. Since then he has been your rock, you moved in together and he takes care of your daughter while you are at work. For a long time, he managed to hide what he did for a living, and when you understood that he is a criminal you've tried everything to get him to clean up his act and get a real job. Something that's safe. Maybe you could move somewhere, start your lives over together? It always goes the same way, you argue, and fight, and then you cry, and make up and have sex and he promises that things will change. And they never do.

Background: You grew up in a cramped apartment with alcohol, arguments and little money. You were very young when your parents stopped pretending that they didn't hate each other, and you and your brother spent as much time away from home as you could. Most of your youth was spent dating shitty guys in an attempt to feel seen, and the last of them said he wanted to keep the baby before leaving you with nothing. You've always felt most comfortable taking care of others, and are working as a nurse.

Future: All you want is a normal life. You want to get married, live somewhere nice, never have to worry about money and focus on raising your family. Have another kid or two, get a dog, maybe a golden retriever, and make the kind of home that you dreamed about when you were a child.

Alcohol and drugs: You don't want to be like your parents. Your daughter deserves better, so you never drink when she is around. But you can afford to let loose when she isn't, and you always feel better after a couple of glasses of wine. Drugs don't agree with you, you often get bad trips and would prefer to never do any, but if there is peer pressure you do it rather than causing a scene.

Secret: You are leaving. You have finally admitted to yourself that Danny will never quit this life, and therefore you have to leave him. Sooner or later he will be killed, you just know it, and you can't be here when that happens. You are already terrified every time you see a stranger outside the house. Your daughter lives there too, and people shoot

through windows now. And when she gets older she will start asking about what Danny does at work, and what are you going to tell her? Everything is packed up in the car, first thing tomorrow you are picking your daughter up at your parents' place, and then you will disappear. You haven't told anyone, but **Anna** keeps looking at you like she has something to say.

You know **Tess'** secret. She has had an affair with Anna's boyfriend Patrick. She unloads on you when she feels sorry for herself, and you listen and do your best to make her feel better.

You haven't told anyone, it's not your place to tell. You don't want to start any conflicts, and you don't want to cause trouble for Anna and Patrick's family. The best thing for everyone would be if they just quietly moved on. But if Anna asked you about it you don't think you could lie to her face.

Intention for tonight: You are saying goodbye. You can't let the others know that is what you are doing, you are afraid of what they might do if they found out, but they have been your friends through thick and thin, you both love them and hate them and after tonight you won't ever see them again.

Memories - Linda

When we fell in love: I had to work late and no one could pick up my daughter. I had only been seeing Danny for a couple of weeks, but I was desperate so I called him anyway. He didn't just pick her up, he took her to the park, made her pancakes and when I came home he was reading her Winnie the Puh, making voices for every character. I thought "this is it".

When he scared me: I wasn't supposed to be there. I wasn't supposed to see that. But I did, and I will never forget it. There was no skin left at all, just red blood and pink flesh and Danny was holding the sander and the guy they were holding down and whose tattoo they were bloodily removing was screaming and screaming and screaming. It was a Danny I had never met. I looked him straight in the eyes and I had no idea who he was in that room

Last time we saw each other: He was stressed, he always is before a big job, pacing around the apartment, packing his bag. It felt surreal. When he came back I would be gone. I wanted to say goodbye, to scream, to beg him to leave everything and come with me, but every time he has talked me into staying and I can't go through that again. In the end, I just hugged him for far too long and cried into his shoulder.

A dream I had before I met Danny:



Someone who was important to me before I met Danny:

Anna

"Been there, done that, messed around. I'm having fun, don't put me down. I'll never let you sweep me off my feet"

Boyfriend: Patrick, The Dealer

Relationship: In a way, you and Patrick are highschool sweethearts, though neither of you have ever been particularly sweet. But you have been together since you were teenagers, and know each other inside out. All of your best nights and worst days, your dentist appointments and your orgasms, your ugliest cries and silliest dance moves have been with him. Your kids are with him. He is in your entire history as an adult, your one constant.

You grew up shoplifting and dealing in the same small gang. When you got pregnant both of you made an effort to sort yourselves out, but then Patrick met Alex who recruited him to a gang you quickly realized was way more serious. The real deal. In the beginning, he was only going to do a couple of jobs. In and out, and make enough money on the way to provide for a baby until things settled down. Years later he was still a dealer, and expanding from drugs to weapons. That's what got him caught though, and he spent the better part of the last two years in prison. He'd made sure you and the kids were being taken care of while he was inside, but you stepped up and took over some of the dealings he had been running. Since he came back you have mostly been at each other's throats. You know that he is hiding something, and since he tells you all the other shit he does you have started to think he might be cheating on you. Which is making you fucking furious, you were faithful the entire time he was away, and it wasn't for a lack of opportunity. But that's not what you do. Neither of you are big on grand gestures or empty talk, but this you always agreed on. It's what you owe to each other.

Background: You never could sit still. And since your parents never cared much what you did as long as you made it through school with passing grades you had a lot of freedom to go seek out trouble, so you did. Your friends called you an adrenaline junkie, but you were just looking for a way to feel alive. Smoking, drinking and skipping school was a start, you found your way to the wildest parties and once there you found the wildest people.

Future: When Patrick went to prison you thought that you wouldn't know what to do with yourself without him. It turned out that you found quite a few things to do with yourself. So much so that it's a problem now that he is back. You got comfortable being independent, running your own life. You don't mind being a criminal, and want to keep running deals of your own, there is a fucked up kind of art to it that you enjoy, but Patrick wants you to stop. He calls it an unnecessary risk.

Alcohol and drugs: You love drugs. So what? They are objectively amazing. You've tried a little bit of everything since your early teens and you know you are an addict. Most days you can still convince yourself that isn't a problem.

Secrets: Your youngest daughter almost died once, and it's your fault. It was a blurry day and you had left pills where she could find them. You have no idea how many she had eaten when she came to you and asked if she could have more of mommy's candy. The white hot panic you felt still haunts you. The only thing you could think to do was call **Karen**, who took her to the hospital and somehow made the whole thing go away. Patrick never found out.

You know **Linda's** secret. She hasn't told you herself, but she had been acting strange and you were worried something was going on with her. You care for Linda, she is one of the few truly decent people you know, so you did the obvious thing and asked her daughter who told you: they are leaving. Kids are crap at keeping secrets.

You haven't told anyone. She is probably doing the right thing, and you have no intention of getting her in trouble. But you are going to miss her, and when you are under the influence things you don't mean to say have a tendency to slip out.

Memories - Anna

When we fell in love: I was barely sixteen, he was nineteen. He was unbelievably cool. I met him at a gigantic home party where I was out of my depth, and he found me. He introduced me to his friends, and I told jokes so dirty that he blushed. I dared him to climb onto the roof with me, and he did. We made out and it was freezing and we watched the sunrise.

When he scared me: I know exactly when he gave up on me. He was putting the kids to bed and I came home stoned, again, and he looked at me and nothing happened. He didn't say anything, didn't do anything. Didn't feel anything. And I sensed that something was slipping so I picked a fight and he didn't fight me. He just said, "one day I'll take the kids".

Last time we saw each other: He shouldn't be on a job like this. He basically just got back! So I reminded him that his kids might want to see their father outside the walls of an institution at some point before they graduate high school, and he lost it. Started screaming, and I started screaming, and he threw stuff and I broke stuff, and I couldn't tell him that I was scared. We are all just getting used to having him around again. What do I do if he dies today?

A dream I had before I met Patrick:



Someone who was important to me before I met Patrick:

KAREN

TESS

LINDA

ANNA