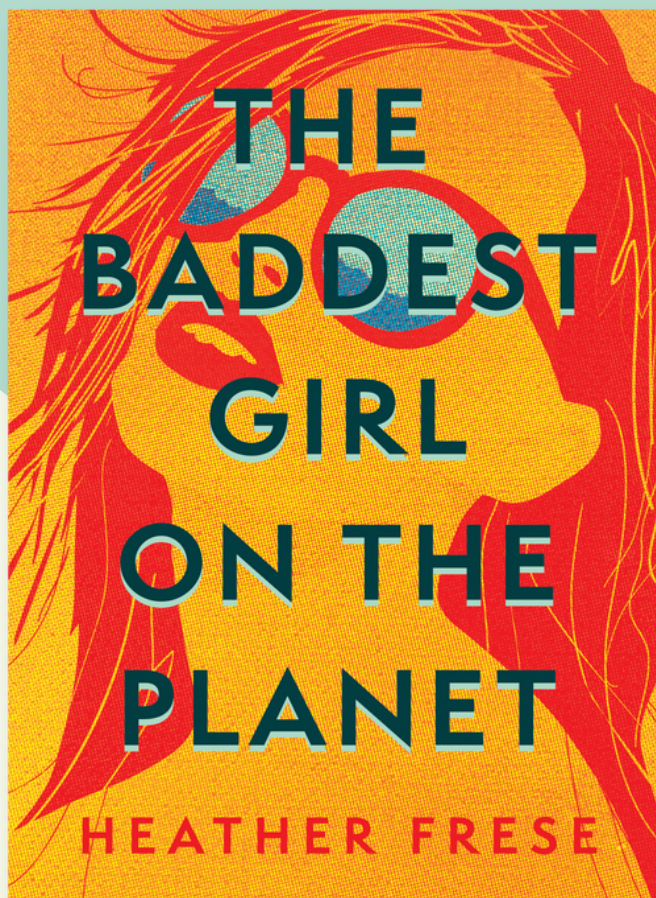


Book Club Kit



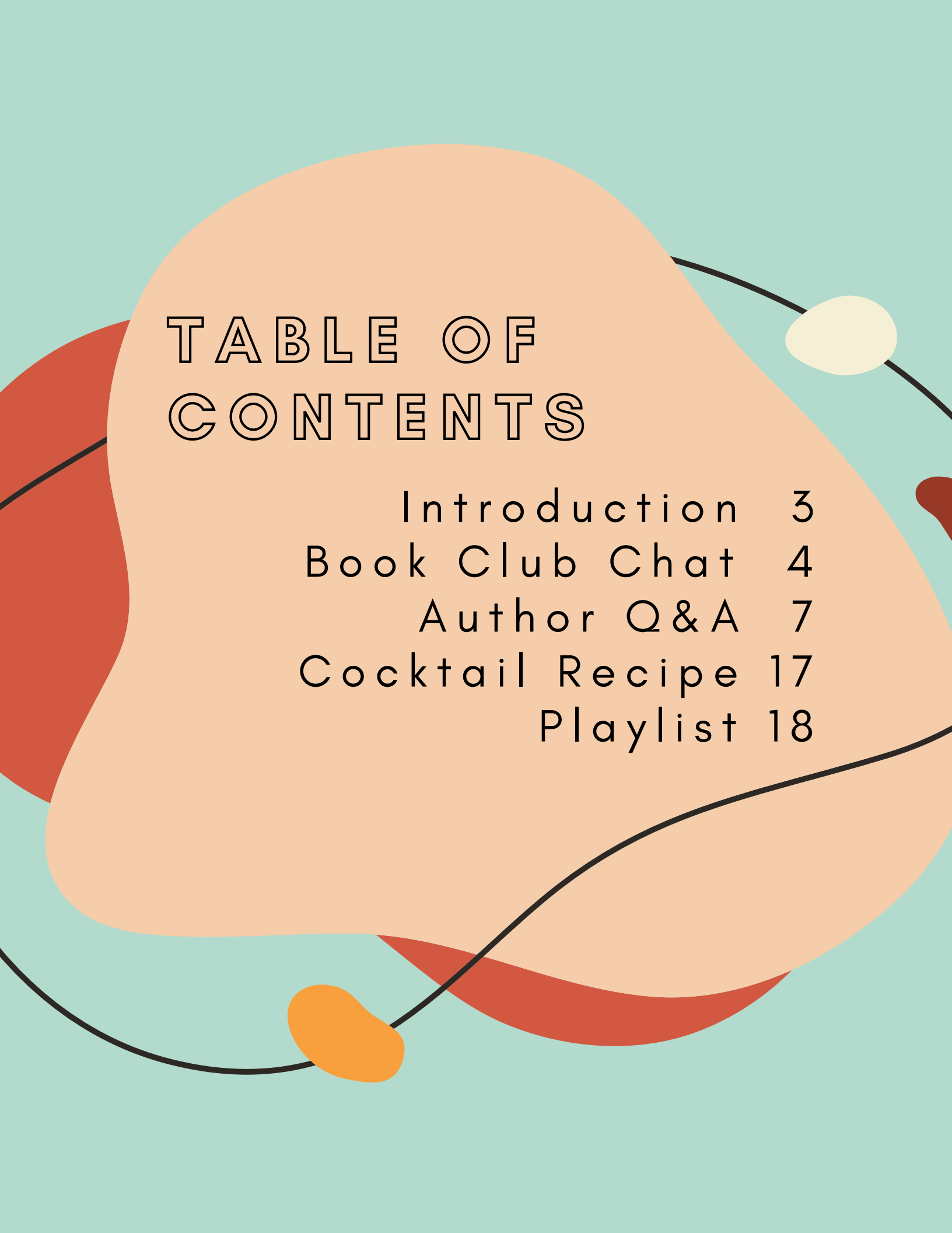


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INTRODUCTION

THE BADDEST GIRL ON THE PLANET, Evie Austin, has not lived her life in a straight line. There have been several detours—career snafus, bad romantic choices, a loved but unplanned child. Readers will want to jump in and advise this baddest girl—or at least just give her a shake or a hug—at every fascinating turn.

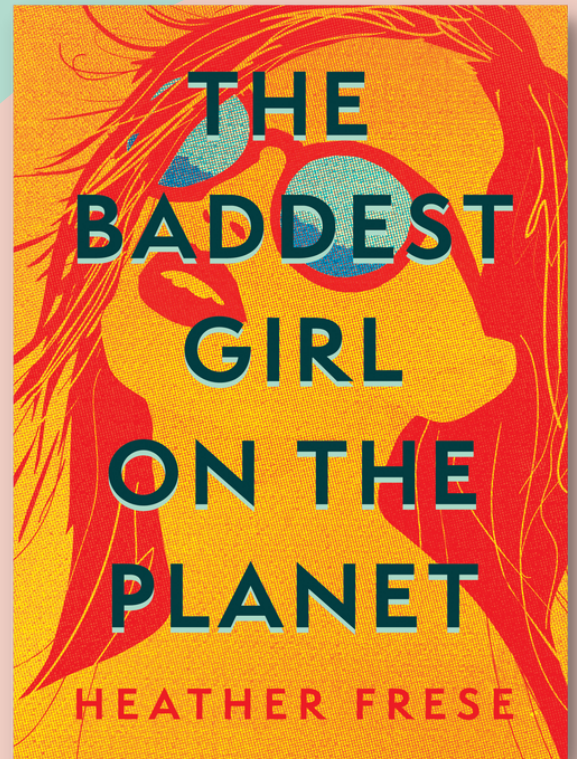


Photo by Jenilee Jordan

www.heatherfrese.com

Heather Frese's work has earned notable mention in the Pushcart Prize Anthology and Best American Essays. Coastal North Carolina is her longtime love and source of inspiration, her writing deeply influenced by the wild magic and history of the Outer Banks. She currently writes, edits, and wrangles three small children in Raleigh, North Carolina.

BOOK CLUB CHAT

1. Do you think Evie's parents' relationship had any effect on how Evie approaches romance? Why do you think Evie's mom reconciles with her husband?

2. Why does Evie latch on to Mike Tyson so readily? Why is she so disappointed in him when he goes into his downfall?

3. If Evie had actually gotten to meet Mike Tyson, what do you think she would have said to him? Would the resolution of her feelings toward him have been any different?

4. Female friendship plays a strong role in Evie's life. How do Evie's platonic relationships grow and evolve over the course of the book? Does she show the same growth in her romantic relationships? What are some of the things Evie holds dear in her friendship with Charlotte?

BOOK CLUB CHAT

5. Evie's family is also key to her character development. What is it about her relationship with Aunt Fay that's so important to Evie? With Nate? With Austin? What does Evie learn about herself through these relationships?

6. How does Evie's community play a role in her development? What is special about the setting for the book and how does it affect the characters who live there? Why are so many folks drawn to the Outer Banks?

7. How is the barrier island setting of the book working metaphorically throughout the story? (The lighthouse? The bridge? The island itself?)

8. Did Evie's character seem different when she ventured into the different settings? Does Hatteras Evie behave the same as Dominican Republic Evie or Las Vegas Evie, or even Evie up the beach in Corolla?

BOOK CLUB CHAT

9. How did you feel about the book starting with Evie as an adult and flipping back and forth through time? What does the reader gain by learning about the protagonist in a non-linear fashion?

10. Do you think the label "baddest girl" is a good or a bad thing for a young girl right now? Has this term been transformed? Does Evie in some way transform it for herself?

11. Do you think Evie chooses to stay or to go at the end of the book? Why? Do you think she made the right choice?

1. What was your inspiration for the book? Was there a particular moment when the story, or a line, or a character came to you?

The Hatteras Island setting was hugely inspirational for *The Baddest Girl on the Planet*. I first wrote these characters years ago during an exercise in setting, and so much of Evie's development is intertwined with the island and the nature of life there. The Outer Banks are a wild, magical place full of stories—lost colonies, pirates, shipwrecks, wild ponies, hurricanes, sea rescues—and natural beauty, as well as metaphorical opportunities. It's a place where the changing nature of life is visible daily. On Hatteras, the beach is different every single day, the road on and off the island washes out with storms, inlets open and close, and a hurricane can push a motel sideways into the highway like it's a toy. (CONT'D)

(Answer 1 continued)

Even the lighthouse, this beacon of safety and stability, was plucked up and moved when the land eroded around it. I used that incident as a touchpoint in chapter 3 for both a plot point and the metaphorical connotations of Evie's family being in this state of destabilization. Beyond all that, Hatteras Island as a community is a place I never get tired of writing about. The island is literally a sandbar in the middle of the ocean, and the community who live there year-round necessarily take care of each other like no place I've ever seen. It really is like one big family. The other side to that coin is that, like a family, everyone in the community knows everything about you going generations back. I wanted Evie to grow into her sense of self while dealing with the pressures of living in a place that doesn't let you forget your past, a place where who you were and who you interlock in its shared memory.

2. Are there autobiographical elements to the book? What are they? Are you like Evie at all? Are you obsessed with Mike Tyson?

I do not harbor a Mike Tyson obsession! That came from an anecdote a friend told me about meeting him when she was a little girl. I just thought it was so funny and interesting and the idea of boxing and fighting and conflict fit in with the chapter I was writing about Evie blowing up her bad marriage, as well as the disappointment she feels when a man she trusted turns out to be not worthy of that trust. As for other similarities, I think Evie and I share a sense of quirk and humor, but otherwise she's much braver and more interesting than me. Evie says and does things that I would only think of days after the fact. (CONT'D)

(Answer 2 continued)

I also did not grow up on Hatteras Island, which is very important to Evie's character development. As a child, my family and I went camping for two weeks every summer at the Frisco National Seashore campground on Hatteras. We'd fill the camper bench with books and spend all day on the beach playing and reading. It was magical. As I got older, I started to wonder what it would be like to live on Hatteras year-round and got small tastes when I'd visit in the off-season. I did eventually move to the island and lived there for a year. I wrote for a long time from the perspective of a visitor, but Evie captivated my imagination as I began to really dig into what I thought it would be like to grow up on Hatteras in a family that had lived there for generations.

3. Which character did you most enjoy creating? Why? And, which character gave you the most trouble, and why?

I just loved creating Evie. Her voice was so feisty and sharp and compelling that I didn't want to stop writing her. I originally just wanted to tell the story of how Evie came to leave Stephen. I knew she wasn't going to sit around and let that relationship taper out on its own, and I also knew she wasn't going to make the most psychologically healthy choices when it came to ending it! As I fell into Evie's narration, I'd often find myself laughing out loud, and when I had another idea for something I wanted to write about, a disastrous Las Vegas trip, my friend suggested that it would be really funny if that had happened to Evie. And it was. As I wrote that, I found out that Aunt Fay died and knew that was a story I needed to tell, and then I wanted to go back and write from the perspective of Evie as a child. (CONT'D)

(Answer 3 continued)

At that point I realized this was a big project and from then on wrote to a larger coming-of-age story. But all along, Evie's voice and my love of writing her was driving the book.

As for characters that gave me trouble, I struggled with writing Stephen, Evie's ex. My challenge was in figuring out his character, so he wasn't just this jerk who didn't treat Evie right, and to see why she fell for him in the first place. When I started to dig into their story it began to click for me that Stephen was just a kid and wasn't deliberately trying to hurt Evie, just like Evie wasn't setting out to hurt him. And that, like her, he might come to realize his missteps as he comes of age.

4. Tell us a bit about the highs and lows of your book's road to publication.

It was a bit of a ride! I had some close calls early on with bigger presses. Then I lost traction for a few years while having my kids. Winning the Lee Smith Novel Prize felt like a welcome back to the literary world. And then right about when we were starting edits in earnest, the pandemic hit. That was challenging. It also pushed the publication date back a couple times. But it all worked out in the end and I've loved working with everyone at Blair. Their kindness and supportiveness have been a definite high point.

5. What's your favorite piece of writing advice?

"Always be sure you get your moon in the right part of the sky," said Eudora Welty via a literary critic of hers. I've taken that to heart and work hard to get the small details right.

6. How did you find the title of your book?

As I was writing I kept trying to title a chapter “The Baddest Girl on the Planet” because I thought it was funny as a nod to Mike Tyson’s nickname and played on the theme of Evie getting a “bad” reputation, but I could never figure out how to make it work as a chapter title. Then one day my dear friend and writing partner suggested that it could be the title for the whole book, and suddenly everything made perfect sense.

7. Are you working on anything at the present you would like to share?

I’m working on a revision of my next book now and also have a new, big, messy, unformed project that’s trying to push its way through. I’m not done with writing about Hatteras yet.

8. Who is your favorite author and why?

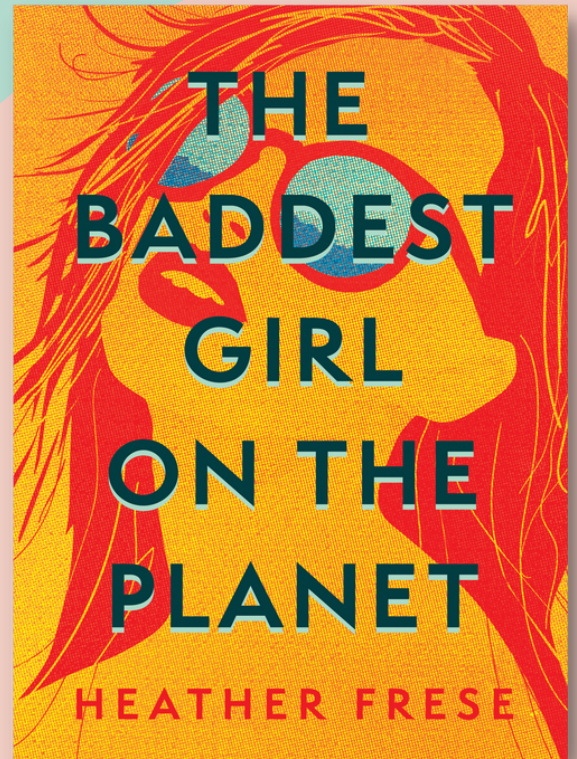
I can honestly say that long before I ever heard of the Lee Smith Novel Prize, Lee Smith was my all-time favorite! As an MFA student, you get asked a lot about the tradition in which you're writing. I'd always answer that I was writing in the tradition of Lee Smith. I discovered her books through *The Last Girls*, which captivated me with its precise descriptions, vivid setting, distinct voice, and literary prowess—and it managed to do all this while also being funny. That's my favorite sort of book to read and what I strive to create. Next, I fell in love with *Fair and Tender Ladies*, which uses the epistolary form and is just a tour de force in voice. Across all her work, I love Smith's versatility in tackling historical and contemporary time frames and using different structures, and I love how strong each book is in capturing voice and place.

9. What are a couple of books that you love and return to again and again?

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a lush, gorgeous book that I return to over and over and find something new to love each time. When the world feels particularly brutal, I find it so comforting to return to the books I loved as a child. Madeleine L'Engle has influenced my writing on such a deep and almost subconscious level that rereading her books is both a homecoming and a surprise. *Taffy of Torpedo Junction* is another of those childhood books that are practically written into my DNA; I loved the Hatteras Island setting, and I still reread that book today. Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster* is a little gem I turn to when I want to fall into a first-person voice. And *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are my go-to classic rereads.

Presenting The Baddest Girl on the Planet, named for the novel by @heatherkfrese that inspired it. It's sweet, indulgent, and a little over the top, the perfect drink for bad girls everywhere.

**RECIPE BY
@PICKYOURPOTIONS**



INGREDIENTS:

- Spiced rum**
- Pineapple juice**
- Heavy cream**
- Blue curaçao**
- Saffron syrup**
- Cardamom bitters**

PLAYLIST

Heather Frese's Playlist *for*

THE BADDEST GIRL ON THE PLANET

1. So What - PINK
2. Just a Girl - No Doubt
3. Beautiful Stranger - Madonna
4. Muchachita Linda - Juan Luis Guerra
5. Ain't No Sunshine - Bill Withers
6. Bad to the Bone - George Thorogood and the Destroyers
7. Phantom Limb - The Shins
8. Simple Song - The Shins
9. Good as Hell - Lizzo
10. Look What You Made Me Do - Taylor Swift
11. Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard - Paul Simon
12. Simple Gifts - Joseph Brackett
13. Home is Wherever I'm with You - Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2mbv6S57aqE0zWUS8ldgTC?si=37815accb9964866>

Heather's notes for each song can be found at
largeheartedboy.com

http://www.largeheartedboy.com/blog/archive/2021/05/heather_freses.html