also why are you so worried about college
you have the best grades out of anyone ever

BETH
the best grades here are different, though
people will see I’m from a one-stoplight town in Georgia
and either they’ll feel sorry for me
or think I’m like
a horse

RAELYNN
(laughing)
a horse?

IVY
my dad also said we’re getting another stoplight

NELL
that’ll help for sure

BETH
I don’t wanna get ahead of ourselves
it still might not get approved

NELL
fuck that
if it doesn’t get approved
we’re gonna go to like buzzfeed or something
make this ish go viral
“forbidden feminism in Appalachia – 1900s or now?”

IVY
“the answer might surprise you!”

BETH
I mean
we could start planning...
I have a lot of ideas already, but I would love to hear your suggestions

RAELYNN
I think we should read Twilight

BETH
no
IVY
why are you so obsessed with Twilight?
it came out when we were like seven

BETH
there are so many other books

RAELYNN
my cousin gave it to me because it used to be her favorite and I’m telling you guys
it’s really good!

BETH
it’s just not very feminist

RAELYNN
why not?

NELL
because Bella’s just obsessed with a guy, right?

RAELYNN
yeah but she does a lot of other stuff too
plus I mean Edward’s like a mega-feminist
which is so weird because he’s actually from like the gilded age or whatever

BETH
Victorian

RAELYNN
but like
can’t we be obsessed with guys and still be feminists?

IVY
I thought you were breaking up with him

RAELYNN
this is not about Lee like at all
this is about Twilight

NELL
I like The Craft

RAELYNN
I don't even know what that is

NELL
exactly
it's old enough to be vintage
plus it's actually cool

IVY
is that the one about witches?
isn't it like really dark?

NELL
I dunno
I guess
I like dark stuff
female rage

BETH
we could talk about Taylor Swift

NELL
jesus Beth

BETH
I'm telling you
there is a LOT to unpack!
we can fully address her problematic aspects
by like
talking about intersectional feminism and stuff

IVY
I liked her before her music got all sexual

RAELYN
you were just talking about Mr. Smith's feet, you perv

IVY
I'm not flaunting that to the world!

NELL
okay so Beth, let's also add sex positivity to the list

RAELYN
also speak now came out in 2010 and had very sexual lyrics
so it's not really a new thing for her

IVY
what
were the sexual lyrics in speak now

RAELYNN
"you touch me once and it's really something
you find I'm even better than you imagine I would be”

IVY
that could be interpreted a lot of different ways

NELL
I do kinda like that song she wrote about John Mayer

IVY
*(singing and clutching her heart)*
"I took your matches before fire could catch me”

IVY and RAELYNN
*(also singing)*
"so don't look now”

ALL
*(singing)*
"I'm shining like fireworks
OVER YOUR SAD EMPTY TOWN”

BETH
*(to Nell)*
I didn't think you'd know that song

NELL
why not?

BETH
I dunno
you just
I dunno

IVY
because you're from Atlanta
that's what she means
LEE
why
why are you saying that?
why are you acting like this?
I just / don't

RAELYNN
look
we've been together for what
six years?

LEE
seven
you know that

RAELYNN
Lee that's not normal
we're only seventeen
we've been dating since fifth grade
it's so weird

LEE
I don't think it's weird

RAELYNN
I like
I have no idea who I am without you
being your girlfriend has been
everything
I mean
that's not the way it should be

LEE
that used to be okay
you used to like that

RAELYNN
I don't know if I did
I think maybe I just didn't think about it

LEE
you don't have to think about every single thing
you know?
sometimes things can just be whatever they are
RAELYNN
I like thinking about things
I wanna think about more things
I wanna try more stuff

LEE
like what

RAELYNN
I don’t know

LEE
like kissing other guys?

RAELYNN
no!
I mean maybe
one day
but that’s not even in like
the top five

LEE
what is?

RAELYNN
I don’t know!
that’s the point
I don’t even know what I wanna try

LEE
you obviously have Something in mind
or Someone

RAELYNN
you’re not listening to me

LEE
you’re not telling the truth

RAELYNN
I don’t know!
I wanna dress different maybe!
LEE

to get attention from different guys?

RAELYNN

no!
god!

why are You mad at Me for hypothetically wanting to kiss other guys
when you did way more than kiss my BEST FRIEND
and you’re not even acknowledging it
and you’re acting like this is My Fault

LEE

I made a mistake
and
god
I
I wanna make up for it
but you’re not letting me
and like
this isn’t you
all this stuff you’re saying
it’s like
fuckin Beth
and that new girl
and that club

RAELYNN

we only started the club like
last week
and it's / not like

LEE

look
I was frustrated
I mean like
it’s different for guys
it’s really hard

RAELYNN

no I get that

LEE

we’d been together for
seven years
SHELBY
I mean
I don't know what else I'm supposed to be sorry for
but I'm probably sorry for that too

MR. SMITH
if you have something to say to me
you need to find a time outside of class to say it

SHELBY
I'm not
I didn't
I wasn't trying to –
I really do think Abigail is awesome

MR. SMITH
you're a very smart girl, Shelby
you know what you're doing

SHELBY
you're the only person who ever told me that
called me smart

MR. SMITH
well it's the truth

half beat

SHELBY
(flirting)
what else am I?
besides smart?

MR. SMITH
Shelby...
no
it's over
I thought you understood that

SHELBY
I was just asking you a question
MR. SMITH
it's the way you asked it

SHELBY
so you keep asking me to stay after class because...

MR. SMITH
I asked you to stay after at the beginning of the week
to make sure you're settling back in okay
because I'm worried about you
you seem a little unstable and I
I want to make sure you're okay
to make sure we're on the same page

SHELBY
what page is that?

MR. SMITH
a lot of
things
are going on right now
and I just want to be clear
that you know
that we both know

SHELBY
you want to make sure I won't say anything

beat

MR. SMITH
I want to make sure you're thinking of the long-term consequences
for both of us

SHELBY
I missed you

MR. SMITH
stop it

SHELBY
you didn't miss me?

MR. SMITH
enough

SHELBY
that’s not what you said last time
last time you couldn’t get enough

MR. SMITH
Shelby

SHELBY
I heard you were in Atlanta
I was too
I wish I had known

MR. SMITH
you’re making this unnecessarily difficult

SHELBY
you’re right
I’m being so rude
I haven’t even asked how your wife is

beat

MR. SMITH
she’s fine

SHELBY
she’s feelin okay?

MR. SMITH
let’s not talk about my wife

SHELBY
I’m just being polite
I’m only a little Georgia peach
that’s all
just a sweetheart
you know
you remember the way I taste
so
sweet

pause.
NELL
I don't know yet
that's why we're meeting
that's the point of projects
you figure it out

MASON
oh
okay

pause

wait
the yellow bird was supposed to be the devil??

NELL
yep

MASON
is that like
a thing?
my sister's room is yellow

NELL
not all yellow things are the devil
that's just what it means here

MASON
oh
okay
thanks

beat

you're really smart

NELL
I know

MASON
damn
humble too
NELL
I mean
I'm not going to pretend I don't know something
if I already know it
that's part of what makes me smart

beat

MASON
hmm
yeah
I guess that's a good point

NELL
"we teach girls to shrink themselves
to make themselves smaller
we say to girls
'you can have ambition
but not too much
you should aim to be successful
but not too successful
otherwise you will threaten the man"

MASON
that sounds familiar

NELL
it's in a Beyoncé song

MASON
yes!!

NELL
but it's from this talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

MASON
oh
do pe

NELL
we watched it at the first feminist club meeting
before your time
MASON
we could use it as one of our outside source things
if you think it’d be good

NELL
it could be good
I mean I don’t know exactly how it’ll fit in

MASON
yeah but
“that’s the point of projects” right?
we’ll figure it out

  Nell smiles

NELL
yeah
we’ll figure it out

      they smile at each other
      they go back to their books
    Mason looks up at Nell
    he smiles at her while she reads
    beat

MASON
hey Nell?

NELL
(not looking up from her book)
yeah

MASON
do you wanna like
hang out sometime?

      Nell looks up but doesn’t say anything

like
outside of class and feminist club?
I just
I’m really into how smart you are?
and I think you’re really funny and cool and pretty too?
and I mean
I dunno
it's okay if you don't want to

be

NELL
yeah okay

Nell goes back to reading, but she can't stop smiling

MASON
yeah?

NELL
(still reading)
yeah

Mason smiles times a billion and can't stop looking at her
Nell looks up and sees him

NELL
find your examples, Mason

MASON
(immediately going back to his book)
on it

NELL
ey every reference to the devil

MASON
yep

NELL
I'm not gonna do it for you

MASON
no no yeah for sure

he grins at her one last time, then goes back to reading
Nell watches him for a minute
she smiles
go back to reading too
you know

MISS GALLAGHER
I think um
you know a lot of people –
mental health is a big thing
it doesn’t mean
just because someone got help

MR. SMITH
look
she had a crush on me
and you know
I saw it
and I didn’t shut it down
maybe I should have
maybe I should have seen this coming
I just
had no idea she would –
I like to think the best of people
especially my students

beat

MISS GALLAGHER
you know
I’m a tri delt

MR. SMITH
...
okay
nice
I’m delta tau delta
what does this / have to do with –

MISS GALLAGHER
cool
yeah
so
my little was Lorin Kerr
do you know her?

MR. SMITH
Lorin Kerr...
you know, I can’t say that I do

MISS GALLAGHER
she’s a year younger than me
and apparently she was in your first class?
when you were student teaching?
over at Pickens County?

MR. SMITH
wow
that’s crazy
ya know, it’s been so long
I’m terrible with names

MISS GALLAGHER
yeah
I’m the same way
it’s funny, though
she remembered you real well

              beat

MR. SMITH
Bailey, I’m sorry to force my hand here
but can we stay focused on what’s going on?

MISS GALLAGHER
my grand-big knew you too
Tiffany Mueller?
she was a freshman when you were a senior
she met you at a party

MR. SMITH
can’t say I remember her either

MISS GALLAGHER
and I knew Ellen
I mean just a little
through Fran
but I heard about all the
yeah

MR. SMITH
Ellen and I had a very
complicated relationship
and it was a long time ago

MISS GALLAGHER
I didn’t believe them
any of them
because you were you
because I knew you
my brother knew you
everybody knew you
you were always so nice to me
...
so there must have been a misunderstanding, right?
they all must have just gotten confused?
they were all crazy?
18.

*Shelby and Raelynn*

they're skipping school
they drink slurpees

SHELBY
I don't know
I didn't know how to tell you
but I also didn't know
how to not tell you
you know?
it just
fuck
I don't know
so anyway yeah so I
I didn't like Plan it
with Lee
but I think I kinda subconsciously knew
like
if I did this
you wouldn't talk to me anymore?
and then I wouldn't have to tell you?
and plus I mean yeah
I think I was also
I mean I was feeling really messed up?
like
I had been

she gestures around wildly, can't quite say "sleeping" or "having sex"

with our teacher
which is insane
and I felt like
I dunno
I think I felt really gross and weird and sad
and like
boning Lee would make me feel grosser and weirder and sadder
and you know how sometimes you just need to like
dig yourself a deeper and deeper hole?
I dunno
obviously none of this was in my head at that exact moment
I just did it
you know how it is
when later you look back and you’re like “ohhhh”
that's what it was
that's why
I'm just gonna stop talking now

beat
Raelynn laughs

RAELYNN
I can’t believe
you just said “boning”
in the middle of this like really serious conversation

Shelby starts laughing too

SHELBY
shut up

RAELYNN
you’re such an idiot

they both laugh

I'm still
I
I'm still really mad at you

SHELBY
okay

RAELYNN
like about Lee a little
but it’s not really that
I'm more just mad that you didn't talk to me
like you’re my ride or die
how dare you

SHELBY
do you believe me?

beat

RAELYNN
yeah
I do
Shelby nods

pause

Shelby does it count if I rehearsed a bunch of ways to tell you?

Raelynn

like

out loud?

like actually rehearsing?

Shelby

no

just in my head

Raelynn

that's not rehearsing

that's just thinking

Shelby

it felt like rehearsing

beat

Raelynn

are you

okay?

I mean

I know the answer is probably “no”

but

Shelby

yeah the answer is definitely no

but it's fine

beat

Raelynn

what are you gonna do?

do you even know?

Shelby

I mean
BETH
she was actually
it was great to have her
she had some good stuff to say

MR. SMITH
that's awesome

BETH
I mean obviously we missed you a ton

MR. SMITH
well thanks
that's sweet of you

BETH
how did it
I mean
I haven't really heard much news
everything kinda like went quiet for a while

MR. SMITH
you know
without saying too much
there just wasn't a lot of proof
and the school board called into question the
character
of uh

BETH
that's great

beat

MR. SMITH
gosh Beth
I'm just
I've been totally sick over this

beat

I need to know
I
no
I'm sorry
that's inappropriate

BETH
what?

MR. SMITH
I wanted to know if
if you believed me
but that's
I can't ask you that

BETH
oh

beat

MR. SMITH
I just don't know what I'm going to do
you know?
I don't see a way out of this

BETH
I think
maybe
it'll blow over

MR. SMITH
I don't want you to feel like I'm putting you in a bad position

BETH
no
I don't feel that way

MR. SMITH
it's just that
you're one of the only friends I've got left
I hope it's okay that I think of you as a friend
we've always had this
special thing
you and me
haven't we?
I mean
that's probably the last thing I should say now
but honestly you're more mature than most people my age
you're an old soul like me
I really miss our talks

BETH
I do too

\textit{beat}

MR. SMITH
my wife doesn't believe me

BETH
no

MR. SMITH
she says she does
but

\textit{beat}

BETH
I'm sure she'll come around
you two have such a special –
I'm so sorry

MR. SMITH
it really felt like
for a while
that my life was over
I thought
"this is it. I'm just going to kill myself. they'd all be better off"

BETH
no no no no don't say that please don't say that
I wouldn't be

\textit{Mr. Smith smiles at her}

MR. SMITH
it feels really good to be back
to see you
how's the Gatsby paper going?
being scary was even more fun than dancing

RAELYNN  
(as Elizabeth)  
I don’t know if I’ve ever been scary  
I don’t know if I know how  
maybe things would be different if I did

SHELBY  
yeah but  
it shouldn’t take being scary to make things different  
you know?  
they shouldn’t have to be scared into listening to us  
things should just be different  
they should just listen

RAELYNN  
(as Elizabeth)  
one day  
maybe  
the new world we were promised  
will be actually new  
one day  
maybe  
the men in charge  
won’t be in charge anymore  
one day we can dance in the forest  
and in the streets  
and with each other  
in our rooms that belong to us and only to us  
on our beds we share with no one  
under the moon  
under the sun  
under the shade of our favorite trees  
under a shower of the blood and brittle bones of supposedly strong men who failed us  
and when that day comes  
it won’t matter that we’re not supposed to dance  
it won’t matter that once upon a time  
I married a man who made me feel smaller than nothing  
and like his shame was my shortcoming  
it won’t matter that when you were sixteen and newly orphaned  
a married man two decades older than you made promises he had no intention to keep  
and said things in the dark that made you feel like you were made of fire  
it will matter that you took that fire and burned him down with it
because that same fire will spread
it will scorch the earth to make room for the new world we deserve
it won’t matter that he told you and told me it was all our fault
each of us
both of us
it won’t matter that we let him reclaim his goodness in the face of death
it won’t matter because that kind of currency has been out of date
for centuries in our new world
those feelings will be so far away from us by then
at first we won’t remember their names
and that will plague us
then their faces will become blurry
and we’ll feel the stirrings of peace
and then we won’t remember the faces of those feelings at all
we wouldn’t even recognize them if they passed us on the street
we’ll sleep soundly then
we’ll use our fire only for warmth

Shelby presses play on the music
Lorde’s “Green Light” starts to play
god that song is so good
during the first verse, they perform a series of small but precise synchronized movements
then during the pre-chorus key change –
when it’s like “I hear sounds in my mind” –
Shelby and Raelynn start to nod their heads a little to the beat
it escalates – nodding turns to shoulder movements turns to feet moving
their movements start to synchronize again
and by the time the chorus hits, they are dancing full-out
wild and free, chaotic
hair flying, limbs flailing
it starts to look less like a dance and more like an exorcism

the second verse comes
they keep dancing
they travel all over the classroom
when the second verse is halfway over and it’s clear they aren’t gonna stop dancing:

MR. SMITH
(we can probably barely hear him)
all right, that’s your time
five minutes is up