

# LATE BUS

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## CHARACTERS

NATALIE, a junior

LEA, a senior

JAMES, a sophomore

BELLA, a sophomore

JOE, a sophomore

REBECCA, a senior

ROY, a senior

KELLY, a first-year

LALA, a junior

TAYLOR, a junior

KARA, a sophomore

TWO PRINCIPALITIES played by the actors playing James and Kelly

PA SYSTEM voiced by a jaded faculty member

## NOTES

A slash (/) indicates where the next line of dialogue should begin.

Every instance of characters going to “smack” each other is completely playful at heart. When I think of a “smack,” it’s a smack on the arm, or some place where it wouldn’t hurt. What it definitely *isn’t* is a slap to the face.

Unless Bella and Joe are played by prodigies, I’d recommend that the magical musical effect be achieved with a neatly placed hidden speaker.

Bella, Joe, Lala, and Taylor may be played by actors of any gender. If any of them are played against the written gender, pronouns should be altered to reflect the actor’s preferred pronouns. Bella may become “Benny,” and Joe may become “Jo.”

Any instance of the word “sexy” may be replaced by the phrase “painfully handsome.”

The appearance of the Principalities in “Thursday” can be as dramatic as you’d like. What matters is the entrances should feel surprising.

The explosion sound cue in “Friday” can be as jarring as you want. If the suggestion of gunshots is too triggering, please use your discretion. They needn’t be loud (or even successive) sounds, just enough to make Roy and Natalie grapple with the reality that they inhabit. On the other hand, you may also feel free to make the implication incredibly explicit.

The play works best if the passage of time is evident to the audience. This can be accomplished with a school calendar on some part of the set, with projections, or with any number of creative solutions marking the days as we reach them.

The late bus is employed by the school for students with after-school activities or commitments who have no other means of getting home.

Students who use it include a breakfast club of sorts—athletes, kids in art programs, kids with detention, and others.

It departs every day at 6:30 P.M.

Or thereabouts.



# LATE BUS

## Monday

*The bus pickup area outside Saw Mill Public High School. Six P.M. Late-autumn sunlight cascades across the stage.*

*Natalie, a junior, enters. She sits and waits for the late bus to take her home. She wears DIY jean shorts, a vintage jacket, and mountains of mascara. She draws in a large sketchbook. She has headphones in.*

*A long beat as Natalie sketches.*

*Lea, a senior, top of her class, enters with a backpack over her shoulder and her phone in her hand. She's beautiful, and carries herself with an air of assurance. She sees Natalie, but deliberately walks by her without acknowledging her. Natalie clocks this.*

*A beat. Then Natalie speaks.*

**NATALIE.** Hey Lea.

**LEA.** (*Perfunctorily, cold.*) Hey Natalie... How was your day?

**NATALIE.** It was good, you?

**LEA.** Yeah, good.

*Beat. Lea looks up.*

Where's Emily?

**NATALIE.** She's working on a science project with Kevin that's due Thursday.

**LEA.** Oh. Wow. Okay. I bet they're really "working."

**NATALIE.** Gross.

**LEA.** Gross.

*Lea puts down her bag. She takes a tripod out, and sets it up with her phone.*

*Natalie goes back to her sketching, unbothered.*

*Lea marks through some choreography.*

*Then she begins to film a dance video for social media.*

*A beat, as Lea does a take or two of her dance.*

*James, a sophomore, enters. James is small and gangly, oozing “nerd.” He’s dressed in some oversized clothes, which accompany an awkward demeanor and carriage. He has a stack of books under his arms and his phone in his hand. He’s a little on edge.*

*Lea immediately stops dancing and pretends to be stretching.*

*James saw her dancing, but is too busy with what’s on his phone to call her out right away, or to care.*

*Lea, as inconspicuously as she can, goes to break down her tripod.*

**JAMES.** You don’t have to do that.

**LEA.** What?

**JAMES.** You don’t have to stop.

**LEA.** ...I was done.

**JAMES.** ...Okay.

*He sends a short text. He receives one back. He stifles a sob.*

*Beat.*

*Lea scrolls. James texts.*

*James moans a little. Lea looks up.*

*Lea scrolls. James texts.*

*James sobs.*

**LEA.** Are you good?

**JAMES.** What?

**LEA.** Are you good?

*James is not good.*

**JAMES.** Oh, yeah. Totally fine.

*Beat.*

Sorry, um, I'm / James.

LEA. James, yeah. I know.

JAMES. Oh.

LEA. Just...small school.

JAMES. Right.

*Beat.*

LEA. And you're like, the only new kid we've had in years.

JAMES. Uh huh.

LEA. I'm / Lea.

JAMES. Lea. (*Beat.*) Small school.

*Beat.*

*They go back to their phones.*

*James chokes back tears. He looks up.*

This is, this is where you get the late bus, right?

LEA. Yeah. Don't hold your breath, though. The driver can take a while. First time?

JAMES. Oh, yeah. (*Proudly.*) I'm sixteen so I usually drive, but / my—

LEA. She's seventeen and I'm eighteen. We don't usually drive.

JAMES. Oh. Weird... I mean yeah, I know. That you're old. I mean older. Like, than I am... (*Trying to save face.*) Why don't you drive?

LEA. My parents only have one car. I usually walk.

JAMES. Oh, but...

LEA. Didn't feel like walking today.

JAMES. Ah. Cool...

*James texts. Lea texts.*

*James snuffles. Lea gives him a look.*

*James chokes back a sob.*

LEA. Are you sure you're good?

JAMES. Yeah. Yeah totally fine. I mean... / um yeah.

**LEA.** 'Cause it doesn't seem like you're—

**JAMES.** I'm just basically dealing with some, like, I guess like bullying, you know?

**LEA.** Oh.

**JAMES.** Yeah. Someone just...on my channel like, someone just said something really dumb and I'm just...trying to—

**LEA.** No, it's okay. I get it.

**JAMES.** Thanks.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** I'm actually, like, sort of an influencer. So.

**JAMES.** Oh yeah?

**LEA.** I mean maybe you knew.

**JAMES.** I—

**LEA.** Like, I'm building toward that. I mean, you know what they say. You can't read reviews. Or comments. 'Cause, like, if you believe the worst they say about you, you have to believe the best they say about you too.

**JAMES.** Oh...

**LEA.** Wait, that came out twisted, or—

**JAMES.** No, I, I think I know what you're trying to say.

**LEA.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** I'm actually an influencer too.

**LEA.** ...uh huh.

**JAMES.** Yeah.

**LEA.** ...Totally.

**JAMES.** I...do you not believe—

*He goes to show her something on his phone.*

**LEA.** No no, don't worry, "influencer." I don't need to see your— Um...you have a million subscribers?

**JAMES.** One point one.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** I'm sorry but...just... What could you possibly be influencing?

**JAMES.** ...I—

**LEA.** Like, sorry, but—

**JAMES.** I do math.

**LEA.** ...math.

**JAMES.** Yes. Math.

**LEA.** You influence math.

**JAMES.** I... Yeah.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** What was the comment?

**JAMES.** Oh it was... Well, um...basically someone pointed out that one of my solutions was basically just a Fibonacci sequence—

**LEA.** That doesn't sound / too ba—

**JAMES.** And said I had no idea what I was doing and should “crawl in a hole and die because I had no hope of adding anything to mathematical discourse.”

**LEA.** Oh. Wow.

**JAMES.** Yeah. So...

*He stifles a sob.*

**LEA.** People suck.

**JAMES.** Yeah.

*Beat. Lea scrolls. James texts.*

*James sees another comment and sobs. Lea sees. She sighs.*

**LEA.** So, um, what are you taking the late bus for?

**JAMES.** Oh, my grandma is in the hospital.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** What?

**JAMES.** ...my grandma is in the hospital? So my parents needed both cars, for some reason.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** Your grandma is in the hospital.

**JAMES.** Yes...

**LEA.** And...wait and you're crying about a comment on your... mathfluencer channel.

**JAMES.** Well, I wasn't really crying, so—

**LEA.** James!

**JAMES.** No she's like, she's okay—

**LEA.** She's a grandma in the hospital!!

**JAMES.** No no! She broke a leg!

**LEA.** *Oh!* Nice. Okay totally that's *much* better, just a grandma in the hospital with a broken leg.

**JAMES.** No no, she's an actress. She broke a leg.

*Beat.*

*He giggles.*

**LEA.** (*Laughing, but hiding it.*) *OH.*

**JAMES.** Come on.

**LEA.** *Ohhh* you are...you are something.

**JAMES.** Thank you.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** But really, why are you here?

**JAMES.** Well, my grandma actually is in the hospital with a broken leg. But she'll be fine.

**LEA.** Oh. Oh okay got it.

*He checks his phone. He moans.*

Another comment?

**JAMES.** Yeah.

**LEA.** Why do you read them all?

**JAMES.** It's hard it's just...comments are where my subscribers post most of their questions, too, so, I sort of have to. Usually it's fine, but, today people are being sort of...

**LEA.** Right.

*Beat. Lea scrolls. James texts.*

*Suddenly, James starts to breathe heavily. He begins to sweat a bit.*

Whoa. Whoa James are you—hello? Hey, hey you okay?

*He calms down.*

**JAMES.** Sorry I...I honestly think too much, um...too much caffeine.

**LEA.** Too much caffeine?

**JAMES.** Yeah just between homework and the channel and a new school... I haven't been sleeping and my family and...

**LEA.** Got it. You're okay?

**JAMES.** Yeah I'm okay. Thanks.

*He puts his phone away.*

*For the first time, he notices that she's beautiful.*

What's your favorite number?

**LEA.** What?

**JAMES.** What's your...what's your favorite number? You can tell a lot about a person by their favorite number.

**LEA.** Um, I don't really care... I wore the number twelve in sports when I used to play?

**JAMES.** Oh nice. My favorite number is the number four. Four is a perfect number. It's the first integer with a square root. It's the basis for the quadratic equation, which is beautiful. It's the smallest semiprime and composite number. There are four dimensions we exist in. There are Four Noble Truths. I have three siblings.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** I—

**JAMES.** Actually, four is considered unlucky in some East Asian cultures. But I still like it.

*Beat.*

I'm the youngest of the four children in my family. I basically wish that people were like math. You'd probably be something like a six.

**LEA.** Oh. Wow.

**JAMES.** No I—I don't mean that like...that. No, six is a really good... I'm sorry. I'm just... I really just...

**LEA.** No, it's fine, I—

**JAMES.** I just like math because it's perfect. It makes sense. No matter how you try to reason your way out of it, two plus two will never equal five. It's like, the same reason people like baking. Or puzzles. If you spend the time and do things in the right order, the answer, the cake, the picture comes out right.

**LEA.** Uh huh. I guess I'm just more of a humanities person.

**JAMES.** (*Scoffs.*) Why do you like humanities?

**LEA.** ...Why do I like humanities.

**JAMES.** Yeah.

**LEA.** Because...I like ancient stuff. I like stories. I like that...that like we're still staging plays and reading books from centuries ago, trying to figure out what they mean, and how they might speak to us now?

**JAMES.** (*Unconvinced.*) Yeah.

**LEA.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** But like, math is ancient stuff too. Like maybe *more* ancient. And more like, forward-thinking. I guess, like, with those books and plays and stuff. We don't really know anything more about life than Shakespeare did, right? We don't know any better than he did what makes us happy or sad or what the whole like, "love" thing is. But we definitely know a lot more about math than Euclid did.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** Okay.

**JAMES.** I—

**LEA.** I guess I just like to think a little more creatively.

**JAMES.** Oh, well just because math is perfect and predictable doesn't mean you don't need to be creative. You have to problem solve with creativity. With math or with, like, coding you have to be creative. You have the tools, you have the equations, which are perfect, at your disposal, but you / have to *use* them beautifully.

**LEA.** Look, James, I'm glad that you're good at math, and that you have a math channel, and that it's definitely made you prioritize the right things, like your grandma's health—

**JAMES.** Um—

**LEA.** But I have to tell you that I just don't really care about this stuff.

**JAMES.** Okay.

**LEA.** Okay. So please—

**JAMES.** Well...don't ask *me* when you need help on your calc homework.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** If you'd been around this place long enough, *Jimmy*, you'd know that I am at the top of my class, aced calc last year, and I've done just fine so far without your help.

*Beat.*

**JAMES.** I—

**LEA.** So don't *you* come crawling to me for help when you need help with anything other than math! Like, I don't know, how to maybe be an adult.

**JAMES.** How to be an adult?

**LEA.** Mmhmm.

**JAMES.** Seems pretty mathematical to me.

**LEA.** Oh, shut up.

**JAMES.** "Adulthood." Linear equation. Series of checked boxes. Get good grades box. Check. Do extracurriculars box. Have online following that makes me feel good box. Check. Get into good school, get good job, get paid, become a part of the consumerist machine, die, check check check check check.

**LEA.** Oh nice. You just gonna check boxes and die?

**JAMES.** Aren't we all?

**LEA.** No, we—why am I even talking to you?

**JAMES.** Because you think I'm sexy.

*Beat.*

At least a little...

**LEA.** James. Let me say this clearly. I think you are many things. Sexy is not one of them.

*Beat.*

**JAMES.** That...that is clear.

**LEA.** Have fun checking your boxes.

**JAMES.** I—

**LEA.** And I'm not here to check boxes. I'm here to draw them.

*She goes to leave.*

**JAMES.** Wait, sorry, please / don't leave—

**LEA.** I'm just gonna walk home, this isn't worth / it to—

**JAMES.** I just really need someone to talk to!

*Beat.*

I just... I've been here for two weeks and I haven't really...talked to anyone. Please.

*Beat.*

*He is breathing heavily. She groans. Then she comes back.*

*A long beat. His breathing eases.*

**LEA.** Well?

**JAMES.** What?

**LEA.** You want someone to talk to? This is how conversation works, James. You ask question. I answer question. I maybe respond with new question based on / what you asked.

**JAMES.** Okay okay!

**LEA.** It's like you're related to Rebecca Fuller / or something.

**JAMES.** Okay! Um... Where do you wanna go to college?

**LEA.** Low hanging fruit, Jimmy. Low hanging fruit.

**JAMES.** I—okay...

**LEA.** I don't know if I want to go to college.

*Beat.*

**JAMES.** Wait...really?

**LEA.** Yeah. Really.

**JAMES.** But you're...gonna be the valedictorian? Top of the class?

**LEA.** Evil dictator right at the top.

**JAMES.** But...

*She sighs.*

**LEA.** I'm not walking home because...I um...I failed a test. First time in my life. Got a fat ol' F. And...I don't want to go home because my mom will smell it, and I'll get yelled at and...it's not like I didn't know the material. I just, I didn't care about it. At. All. I couldn't bring myself to care.

**JAMES.** Oh. Wow.

**LEA.** I just... I'm not really, like, sold on your whole linear equation. I know what I'm *supposed* to want. I'm *supposed* to want to go to a good college and get a job and make lots of money and live in a big house and make the world a better place. But I sort of like...I'm sort of like accidentally good at school?

Like I haven't really ever tried super hard, but I do well...and then everyone just like *projects* these big futures for me and like, I sort of just don't care. And...I want to do things that I *like* to do, like...I like dancing. I like...I want to *draw* the boxes. Not check the ones that are handed to me. I'm figuring it out.

**JAMES.** Right.

*Beat.*

**LEA.** Last weekend I took my parents' car and just drove around. And I drove by my parents' first house here, the house I was born in, and where we lived in till I was eight or nine. It's for sale again, so I thought I would just like, drive by it, but I ended up going into the driveway and... I saw no one was there so I was like...well I came this far, I might as well take a look around. And so I like, walked around the backyard, and I went inside and...

And it made me like, really sad? This place that had felt like the whole world to me, so giant... I saw it for what it really was. The counters that I used to hit my head on were at my hips. The willow tree in our backyard was like, it was this *mountain* when I was young...and yesterday it was gone. It had been cut down. Or it fell down during a storm. Or it never existed. I don't know.

I started crying... Here was this place and like, every corner of it had a memory. And it was like my heart broke. And I realized that like, suddenly...I've just gotten really old.

And it was the first time I really felt like...like an adult. Like...I wasn't sad because something happened but like...because I was... mourning a memory. I think only adults can do that. And I know it seems silly, because I feel like my parents had to "be adults" when they were so much younger than we were, and their parents even earlier than that, and everyone's always telling us how our generation is all this and all that but...yesterday was the first time I felt like... And that's scary. And I guess like it should also be exciting, and great, but...it just feels like...a lot...

"Adulthood."

Do you know what I mean?

**JAMES.** I...

*Beat.*

*James buries his face in his hands.*

**LEA.** James, you okay?

*James nods vigorously into his hands.*

*His breathing quickens.*

**JAMES.** I think just, what you said just made me miss home and... just too much caffeine—

**LEA.** Okay, just—

*James is having a panic attack.*

Oh man—James? James! Are you...oh man.

*Lea doesn't know what to do.*

*James is on the ground.*

Help! Um, uhhh—someone—

*Natalie sees what's happening. She jumps up and runs over to James. She sits down on the ground with him and puts an arm over him. She whispers something in his ear. She holds him.*

*After a moment, James begins to settle. His breathing returns to normal. He laughs. Maybe he wipes away a tear. He hugs Natalie.*

**JAMES.** *(To Natalie, softly.)* Thank you.

*Natalie stands up. She goes back to her sketchbook.*

Um, sorry about that.

**LEA.** No, don't apologize. You okay?

**JAMES.** Yeah. I...you didn't do anything. Sometimes that just... sometimes it sort of just happens. It's not always for like, a reason. I think the caffeine and um...

*Beat.*

**LEA.** Pretty selfish of you.

**JAMES.** What?

**LEA.** Here I am spilling my life and *you* have the panic attack.

*She grins.*

*He grins.*

So what'd she say to like...to help you?

**JAMES.** Um... Well. She just whispered, really gently, and honestly... "you're sexy."

*Lea winds up to smack him.*

Kidding! Kidding! She honestly just said, um...actually she didn't say anything.

**LEA.** Oh.

*Beat.*

**JAMES.** Thanks. For um...talking.

**LEA.** Oh yeah. Sure.

**JAMES.** Um. Are you, like, dating anyone?

**LEA.** No, I'm not.

**JAMES.** Oh. Interesting.

*Beat.*

Would you want to—

**LEA.** No.

**JAMES.** Okay.

*Beat.*

*Then Lea gets the tripod out of her bag. She sets it up. She puts her phone up.*

*She goes to James and pulls him to his feet.*

What're you—

**LEA.** Follow along Jimmy. First step.

*She demonstrates.*

*He gives her a look.*

*Then he does it.*

*She goes on teaching him a dance. They laugh.*

*The lights fade.*

## Tuesday

*Partly cloudy.*

*Natalie, headphones in, waits for the late bus. She sketches.*

*Bella, a sophomore, enters carrying a tenor saxophone case. She tries to avoid Natalie.*

**NATALIE.** Hey Bella.

**BELLA.** Oh, hey Natalie. Um, how was your day?

**NATALIE.** It was good, you?

**BELLA.** It was really nice, thanks! It's beautiful out tonight, huh?

**NATALIE.** Yeah.

*A beat.*

*Bella sits, deliberately distant from Natalie. She takes out her saxophone and starts wetting the reed.*

*Joe, a sophomore, enters carrying a trumpet case. He sees Natalie, and moves to avoid saying hello to her.*

**JOE.** Hey Bella.

**BELLA.** Hi Joey.

**JOE.** (*Reddening.*) Joey?

**BELLA.** Oh, sorry, I didn't / mean—

**JOE.** No, no. I kind of like that.

**BELLA.** Oh.

*She smiles.*

**JOE.** Hey, isn't that...?

**BELLA.** Natalie? Yeah.

**JOE.** Isn't she the girl who...?

**BELLA.** Yeah.

**JOE.** Whoa.

**BELLA.** Yeah.

**JOE.** (*Whispering.*) I heard that—

**BELLA.** You don't have to whisper, she always has her headphones in.

**JOE.** Oh, I—

*Roy, a senior, captain of the football team, enters.*

*He sports a hoodie and, conspicuously, has no phone or headphones. He stops and waits on the opposite side of the stage from Natalie.*

*A beat.*

**BELLA.** Isn't that?

**JOE.** Roy Hardgrove, yeah. Apparently he recently got in an accident while—

*Roy clears his throat loudly.*

*Joe and Bella busy themselves with their instruments and cases.*

*Bella sets up her saxophone and begins to play, softly. She's pretty good, but there are enough squeaky notes in her playing to betray her as a high school amateur.*

*Joe looks on with admiration.*

**JOE.** Bella?

*She stops playing.*

**BELLA.** Yeah?

**JOE.** I just wanna say... I think it's amazing that after three hours of rehearsal you still wanna practice.

**BELLA.** Oh, I... I can stop—

**JOE.** No, no. I mean it. I admire you.

**BELLA.** *(Shy.)* Oh. Yeah. I just hope like, if I keep practicing...one day I'll just...I'll be able to play anything.

*In the background, there's a hint of beautiful music. Just a slight hint. But it's there.*

**JOE.** Yeah. I just feel like after three hours I could hardly do anything at all with my lips.

**BELLA.** Oh...

**JOE.** I mean, after all that trumpet playing I mean.

**BELLA.** Yeah definitely.

*A shy beat. Then she musters up the courage to ask Joe out.*

Joe, I've been meaning to ask—

*Rebecca, a senior, enters in a state, cutting Bella off. Everything about her carriage and dress is a little performative. She holds her phone in one hand and car keys in the other.*

**REBECCA.** Hey band geeks.

*Bella and Joe share a moment, deciding whether or not they should be offended.*

*They land on not offended.*

**BELLA.** Hey Rebecca.

**JOE.** Hey.

**REBECCA.** Have you seen Roy?

**BELLA.** He's right over there.

**REBECCA.** Roy! Why haven't you been responding?

**BELLA.** *(To herself.)* You're welcome...

**ROY.** Oh, hey Rebecca.

**REBECCA.** I texted you like a hundred times, why are they coming up green!

**ROY.** I don't know, I don't have my phone.

**REBECCA.** Why on *earth* would you not have your phone.

**ROY.** My dad took it away.

**REBECCA.** Oh. Well, whatever.

*A small beat.*

*(Seductively)* Hey.

*Rebecca kisses Roy. Roy basically doesn't reciprocate. Again, it's a little performative on her part.*

*Bella and Joe share a giggle over Roy's rigidity.*

*Rebecca pulls away. She gives the band geeks a look that could kill.*

**ROY.** *(Responding to Rebecca.)* ...Hey.

**REBECCA.** Do you want a ride home or what?

**ROY.** Oh, I was just gonna take the late bus—

**REBECCA.** Yeah I can see that, but like, I'm here...do you want to come with me or like, you could even, like, come over for a bit if you want.

**ROY.** I mean, sure, yeah. Thanks.

**REBECCA.** Cool.

*She starts to drag Roy off.*

Bye band geeks.

**BELLA and JOE.** Bye.

**NATALIE.** Wait! Rebecca—

*Rebecca snaps her head around.*

You dropped your keys.

**REBECCA.** Oh...um, thank you.

**NATALIE.** Of course.

*A beat as Rebecca and Natalie stand face to face. It's clear there's history here. An uncomfortable moment.*

**REBECCA.** Um, bye.

*Then Rebecca and Roy exit, hand in hand. Or rather, her hand in his.*

**NATALIE.** (To herself.) Bye.

*A beat. Natalie goes back to her comfortable solitude.*

*Once Joe's sure Rebecca's gone, he turns to Bella.*

**JOE.** She's so—*uggghh.*

*Joe strikes a pose to finish his sentence.*

**BELLA.** Yes! She's so—*blahh.*

*Bella strikes a pose. Then, imitating Rebecca:*

“Why haven't you been responding!!! I called you like a million times and I need your *attention!!!*”

**JOE.** (Playing along.) “I didn't have my phone!”

**BELLA.** “WHY NOT!!!!”

**JOE.** “It got dropped into a volcano by an eagle that snatched it out of my hand while I was playing *sports!!!*”

**BELLA.** “That’s like not even an *excuse!*! Why are your texts *GREEN* are you some sort of *peasant??*”

**JOE.** “The lava got into the microchip and melted the blue away and now my texts and heart are green and growing with love for only you!!”

**BELLA.** “Oh. Well, *whatever.*”

*The make-believe imitation falls away, a bit.*

Hey.

*They stand just as Roy and Rebecca did, before their kiss.  
Short Beat.*

**JOE.** Hey.

**BELLA.** Do you want...a ride home?

**JOE.** Oh. I was gonna take the late bus...

**BELLA.** Yeah...I can see that...but if you wanted to come over...

*A beat.*

*Will they kiss...?*

**JOE.** I—

**BELLA.** Hey look!

*She picks something up. As she bends over to get it, her head hits Joe on the nose.*

**JOE.** ANGH!

*The fantasy is over.*

**BELLA.** Oh no! Oh I’m so sorry!

**JOE.** (*Holding his nose.*) No, no it’s okay.

**BELLA.** Are you sure??

*He’s okay.*

**JOE.** Yeah. Yes, barely a scratch.

**BELLA.** Let me see.

*She holds his nose...it’s intimate, in a cute way. Joe blushes.  
Bella goes to pocket the coin.*

**JOE.** No, no, let me see that! Lucky penny!

**BELLA.** It doesn’t matter—

**JOE.** No no! You gotta make a wish on that.

**BELLA.** Oh yeah!

*She closes her eyes tightly and takes a deep breath. She wishes.*

**JOE.** Whadya wish for?

**BELLA.** I...can't tell you.

**JOE.** Come on!

**BELLA.** I can't!

**JOE.** Alright, alright. I can respect that.

*A long beat.*

*They check their phones.*

*Bella takes the penny and offers it to Joe.*

**BELLA.** For your thoughts?

**JOE.** Huh?

**BELLA.** Penny? For your...

**JOE.** Oh...oh! Yeah. Right. Um. Nothin', nothin' doin' here.

**BELLA.** Oh. Yeah.

*Beat.*

**JOE.** Hey, what was that you were playing earlier?

**BELLA.** Oh.

**JOE.** It sounded so good.

**BELLA.** Oh, thanks! It was just a jazz riff I've been working on.

**JOE.** Will you...play some more?

**BELLA.** Oh, really? Yeah sure!

*She goes to her saxophone and begins to play a bit. It's okay.*

**JOE.** Wow.

**BELLA.** If I just practice enough, I know I'll play like John Coltrane one day.

**JOE.** Whoa.

**BELLA.** Yeah. He practiced like, twelve hours a day.

**JOE.** Didn't he also die when he was like forty?

**BELLA.** Well yeah...but he was the best musician, like, of all time. He was able to just like, purely *feel* through his music. He could play anything. And if I just practice enough...I'm sure if I just practice... I sort of think...that's what grown-ups do. Like, being a grown-up is about mastery, it's about becoming an expert, a specialist, so that you can do something at its highest level. I want to be able to do that. I want to be an expert. To forget about notes, to have all the theory just become second nature, like an extension of my brain, so that way, when I play, it isn't about "right notes" at all. It's just about what I feel. The music will be like a mirror into my soul.

*She closes her eyes and goes to play again.*

*Suddenly, magically, she sounds exactly like Coltrane. It's astonishing. She plays for only a short while before she hears how good she sounds.*

*She stares at her saxophone in wonder.*

*Joe stares at her in wonder.*

**JOE.** Whoa.

**BELLA.** Whoa.

**JOE.** Wait do that...Bella do that again.

**BELLA.** Okay...

*She goes to play.*

*It sounds amazing. Coltrane's rich, cascading lines flow out of her instrument.*

*She stops.*

*She and Joe stare at each other.*

**JOE.** *How* are you doing that?

**BELLA.** I...I honestly don't know. I just...

**JOE.** Wait, let me try.

*Joe gets his trumpet out of his case.*

*They both hold their breath before he begins to play.*

*It sounds mediocre. He stops.*

**BELLA.** Oh.

**JOE.** (*Embarrassed.*) Well. I guess, I think my lips are just tired... I just need to practice more. Like you.

**BELLA.** Yeah...

*He goes to put his instrument away.*

Wait wait , what were you playing?

**JOE.** What?

**BELLA.** Just...just trust me. Do you trust me? Forget notes. Forget the notes and try playing...what you feel.

**JOE.** What I feel?

**BELLA.** Yeah. Like Coltrane or Miles Davis. Like Bill Evans and Bird and Dizzy and Billie and Sarah.

**JOE.** Whoa... You know a lot of jazz.

**BELLA.** *I was just playing what I feel. Play what you feel...Joey.*

*Joe looks at her, skeptical.*

*Then he really sees her.*

*Then he lets his feelings lead.*

*He puts the horn to his lips, and a wild, burning bebop line explodes out of his trumpet. He and Bella gape at each other.*

Holy—

*Joe cuts her off, as he starts to play again.*

*Bella grabs her saxophone, and begins to play something too.*

*At first, the music isn't coherent. They're both playing beautifully, but not together.*

**JOE.** This is amazing!!!!

*Natalie, forgotten, off to the side, leans forward. She takes off her headphones. As she does, we hear what she hears... The music is mediocre.*

*High school horn players, blowing away at each other. She shrugs, and puts her headphones back in.*

*When she does, the music transforms immediately back into the sounds of the legends that Bella and Joe were channeling before.*

*Bella cuts them off.*

**BELLA.** Wait, wait. Play with me. Just follow me. Just listen, and follow me. And feel.

*Joe nods.*

*She begins.*

*He recognizes the song and follows her. Haltingly at first.*

*Then, the two coalesce.*

*The music is beautiful.*

*Joe and Bella move closer together, winding together through their music.*

*They face each other, desperately near.*

*Their instruments fall away from their mouths. The music pauses.*

*They move toward each other.*

*Joe takes a coin out of his pocket.*

**JOE.** For your thoughts?

**BELLA.** You remember that wish?

**JOE.** Yeah...

**BELLA.** Well...

**JOE.** Yeah?

**BELLA.** Can I ask...

**JOE.** Yeah?

**BELLA.** Are your lips okay?

**JOE.** What?

**BELLA.** I mean, they're not tired from too much playing?

*Beat.*

**JOE.** I have Miles Davis's lip strength right now.

**BELLA.** Good.

*They move to kiss each other.*

*Blackout.*

## Wednesday

*Late-autumn sun. Natalie, headphones in, waits for the late bus. She sketches.*

*After a beat, Kelly, a first-year, enters. She is young but brazen, tiny but larger than life. (The scene works best if there's a marked difference in size between Kelly and her older counterparts.) She proudly wears a plaid skirt and a beret. She holds her phone and a book.*

**KELLY.** Hey again Natalie.

**NATALIE.** Hey, Kelly.

**KELLY.** How are you?

**NATALIE.** Pretty good, thanks. You?

**KELLY.** Yeah good! Good meeting, good classes today, good future tomorrow!

**NATALIE.** Sure, Kelly.

*Kelly stands tall, beaming at her future.*

*After a moment, Taylor and Lala, juniors, enter. Taylor is a bit downcast. Lala holds a heating pad against her face.*

**KELLY.** Hello.

*Kelly politely waits for them to say hello.*

*They don't. They scroll through their phones.*

...hello!

*Taylor and Lala look around for the person whom Kelly is greeting. They don't find anyone.*

*They go back to their phones.*

*Beat.*

**LALA.** *(Lala and Taylor are texting each other.)* Shut up.

**TAYLOR.** No you shut up.

**LALA.** Shut *upp*.

**TAYLOR.** Stop it.

*Kelly takes out her phone. She takes a photo of Lala and Taylor. She taps a bit on her screen.*

*Lala and Taylor receive notifications.*

**LALA.** Are you airdropping me something?

**TAYLOR.** Are you airdropping me something?

*They open the airdropped message.*

*It's a photo of them.*

*They look up.*

**KELLY.** I'm talking to you! I'm Kelly.

*Taylor and Lala share a moment. Then—*

**TAYLOR.** Hi, "Kelly."

**KELLY.** Wait...why would...my name is actually Kelly.

**TAYLOR.** ...Mmhmm.

**KELLY.** Um...how was your day?

*Taylor and Lala share a look. They go back to ignoring Kelly.*

*A beat.*

What are you taking the late bus for?

**LALA.** Not interested, thanks. (*Re: her mouth.*) Ow.

**KELLY.** I've just never seen you two take the late bus!

**LALA.** Well, that's because we've never taken the late bus / before  
ow ow.

**TAYLOR.** We had detention. Now, scurry away.

**KELLY.** Oh. (*Small beat.*) Oh cool!

*Taylor and Lala share a look.*

**LALA.** ...cool?

**KELLY.** Yeah? That's like, you must have done some cool stuff. To get detention.

**LALA.** (*Proud, but playing it cool.*) ...yeah...okay, we did.

**TAYLOR.** Uh—

**LALA.** Yeah, you know what? We did. We're cool. Ow.

**KELLY.** What happened to your mouth?

**LALA.** I had my wisdom teeth out.

**KELLY.** Wow.

**LALA.** Yesterday.

**KELLY.** Wow. Why are you even here today?

**LALA.** I do what the adults tell me to do... Until today.

**TAYLOR.** Ha.

**KELLY.** ...Until today?

**LALA.** Yeah. Now I'm a subverter. *That's* why I was in detention.

**TAYLOR.** Psh.

**KELLY.** What'd you do?

**LALA.** ...You don't wanna hear.

**KELLY.** Um. Yes I do.

**LALA.** I'm not gonna tell you if you don't wanna hear.

**KELLY.** Stop it I wanna hear!

**LALA.** Well...okay...like I said, I'm tired of doing what these adults tell me to do.

**KELLY.** And?

**LALA.** And...I was looking for a way to like, get back at the system ow, you know?

**KELLY.** And?

**LALA.** And so, I decided to call Ms. Stevens by her first name.

*A beat.*

**KELLY.** (*This isn't that radical?*) And...?

**LALA.** And...she...did not like that!!

**KELLY.** (*Suddenly in awe.*) ...You called her by her first name?

**LALA.** Yes Kelly. Because you know what? It shouldn't just be me. We should *all* be tired of these, like, vertical structures, these power dynamics meant to keep us *down*, like, right? Like, here I am, junior in high school, like, I'm not preparing for a life as a *student*, am I? I am prepping for a life as a *colleague*. As a *coworker*. As someone's *boss*. So let me prep for that, am I right? *Ow ow*. Because that's what being grown is. It's about stepping into your power.

**KELLY.** Wait yes you're so right!

**LALA.** And you try to do *one* little thing to disrupt the system, like I just want to be seen as someone who can speak to you with your *name* in place of some militaristic officer rank and *title* “Ms. Stevens,” and, you know what? You try to do that and what does the system do? Throws you behind bars! *Ow* this mouth I swear to—

*Taylor scoffs.*

**TAYLOR.** Come on Lala.

**KELLY.** What?

**TAYLOR.** That’s not why she got detention.

**LALA.** Oh no?

**TAYLOR.** No, Lala. You were being belligerent and kept talking without being called on and interrupting class and screaming “*ow*” out of nowhere. And then you went to the front of the class and called Ms. Stevens a terrorist for not letting you get more Tylenol from the nurse.

**LALA.** Yeah, but I called her *Alice* while I did and she didn’t like that either.

*Kelly is amazed.*

**TAYLOR.** I’m just saying. You didn’t get detention ’cause you had some sort of radical point of view you were acting on.

**LALA.** No, but I was in *pain* and an adult was gaslighting me, surprise surprise, so I flipped the script on her.

**TAYLOR.** Oh, you were in pain?

**LALA.** Yes I was in *pain* I am in pain!!

**TAYLOR.** Okay but last I checked, being in pain doesn’t come with a side effect of stupid.

**LALA.** Oh no?

**TAYLOR.** No.

*Lala smacks Taylor in the arm.*

Ow!

**LALA.** Well, you could have fooled me.

*Taylor goes to smack Lala back, but she anticipates it:*

*Ow ow ow ow ow! Pain! Surgery!*

*Taylor backs off, begrudgingly.*

*Over the school's PA system, a jaded teacher makes an announcement.*

**PA SYSTEM VOICE.** *Paging Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson, if you're still in the building, Principal Lewis would like to see you. Apparently you're supposed to "bring the thing," if you have it. If you don't have the thing, I am told that is also okay. I am told that you know what "the thing" is. If you don't know what the thing is, don't ask me, I don't know either, and I don't wanna know. I'm just the messenger.*

*During the announcement, Lala and Taylor have gone back to their phones. But Kelly is persistent.*

**KELLY.** Lala?

**LALA.** What?

**KELLY.** They call you Lala?

**LALA.** They tend to.

**KELLY.** Why?

**TAYLOR.** 'Cause she's got her head in the clouds, like "la la la la."

*Lala smacks Taylor.*

If you smack me again I'm gonna spontaneously forget you had surgery yesterday.

**LALA.** They call me that because it's my name, "Kelly."

**KELLY.** That's cool. Who are you named after?

**LALA.** I'm not named.... My parents liked opera.

**KELLY.** Really?

**LALA.** Yes, really.

**KELLY.** Were you named after a character?

**LALA.** What? No baby, like "la la" like singing, like opera, are you dumb?

**KELLY.** No, I'm—right, sorry.

*A beat. Kelly turns to Taylor.*

So...why did you get detention?

**TAYLOR.** So...why are you so nosy? I don't see you asking Natalie why she had detention.

**KELLY.** Natalie didn't have detention...it's Wednesday, she had Eco Club.

*Natalie sees them all looking at her. She gives them a shy thumbs up.*

*Kelly gives an enthusiastic thumbs up back.*

**LALA.** Whoa whoa. Why are you all friendly with Art Girl?

**KELLY.** What?

**TAYLOR.** Don't you know about her?

**KELLY.** Know what...?

**LALA.** Oh baby.

**KELLY.** What's wrong with Natalie?

**LALA.** Well, nothing's *wrong* with her but...

**TAYLOR.** Should we tell her?

**LALA.** I don't know...

**KELLY.** Guys, tell me.

**TAYLOR.** I don't think we should tell her.

**KELLY.** No, you should.

**TAYLOR.** Ask your friends your own age.

**KELLY.** I...come on that's not fair.

**TAYLOR.** Kelly—

**LALA.** I mean maybe she should know...Natalie spent the summer after first year in rehab.

*Beat.*

**KELLY.** I...no way.

**TAYLOR.** Knew she wouldn't wanna hear it.

**KELLY.** That's just...why would she have...

**TAYLOR.** I mean, it was clear she had a drug problem. So they took her there.

**KELLY.** Really?

**LALA.** Why else do you think she has to take the late bus every day?

**KELLY.** I know her, she's really nice. She keeps to herself.

**LALA.** I'd keep to myself too, if I was in recovery.

**KELLY.** Well, even if that's...like she's doing really well, right?

**TAYLOR.** As well as a kid who spends all her time alone, no one to talk to, being all weird I guess.

**KELLY.** I don't... That's like...that's just not her deal.

**TAYLOR.** Okay, believe what you wanna believe.

*Beat.*

*Lala and Taylor are bored.*

**LALA.** Ugh *where* is this late bus?

**TAYLOR.** Typical late bus being late.

*They scroll.*

**KELLY.** I just promise you, Natalie isn't like that...like—

**LALA.** Like what?

**TAYLOR.** What do you think recovery looks like?

**KELLY.** I just know that isn't her deal!

**TAYLOR.** Well...what's *your* deal?

**KELLY.** ...what?

**TAYLOR.** Where's this bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, "I wanna know about you and your detention and I have faith in humanity" thing come from? Who are *you* ?

**KELLY.** I'm, I told you I'm Ke—

**LALA.** Yes, Kelly, we know your name is Kelly.

**TAYLOR.** ...but who are you...*really*?

*Kelly gets a bit intimidated. Two juniors (who had detention.) want to know who she really is? She thinks fast. And maybe not so clearly.*

**KELLY.** I'm... My... I'm a first-year. And, um, my parents like barely have time for me...and when I try to engage with them like, they just roll sort of their eyes at me... I mean... Well I mean, they sort of roll their eyes a lot. Like anytime I use a new word I learned from a book or something they just like roll their eyes and assume I'm trying to annoy them or something I guess. So to like, avoid that I joined a bunch of after-school activities, like I

even started doing freaking *theatre* so I could stay like, extra late for rehearsals? And I even like, go to the football game and cheer on those meatheads Chase Turner and Roy Hardgrove and I don't even *care* about football, but at least if I'm at the football game I'll be out of my house and then my parents won't be rolling their eyes at me.

*Beat.*

**LALA.** So you hate your parents. Original.

**KELLY.** I—

**TAYLOR.** Shut up Lala.

**LALA.** Sorry pain surgery.

**KELLY.** No, like, don't you see? Lala? I'm tired of listening to adults too! I'm tired of these perpendicular structures!

**LALA.** Vertical structures.

**KELLY.** Vertical structures! So...I'm sticking it to my parents!

**LALA.** By doing theatre?

**KELLY.** ...yeah!

*Beat.*

**LALA.** Okay, go off Kelly.

**TAYLOR.** But, she has a point...that's not who you *really* are.

**KELLY.** What do you mean?

**TAYLOR.** Besides your parents sounding belittling and annoying, what do *you* want, Kelly Jelly?

**LALA.** Smelly.

**TAYLOR.** Belly.

**LALA.** Deli.

**TAYLOR.** Botticelli.

**LALA.** (*Searching.*) Orwelli-an.

**TAYLOR.** Oh good one.

**LALA.** Thanks. Ow.

**KELLY.** Um, I guess...I guess...

*Kelly realizes something.*

I guess...maybe... I don't know? Maybe I just spend my time sort of...mad at my parents. And maybe I should be spending time... figuring that out instead. Figuring out what I want. I think I want to just like, grow up and get out of here. I'm ready to just be a grown-up. I want to eat what I want and do what I want when I want and like, just feel free...like you can do when you're a grown-up. Because...because I guess all I've wanted for a while...is to get away from them. From this? From...my mind...

*Beat.*

**LALA.** Trust me, we get it.

**KELLY.** Yeah.

**TAYLOR.** Do you know what you need, Kelly?

**KELLY.** What?

*Taylor looks at Lala.*

**LALA.** Oh. Oh I don't know...

**TAYLOR.** I think you need to get a little mean, Kelly.

**KELLY.** ...what?

**TAYLOR.** I think you might have a little bit of “good girl” syndrome going on.

**KELLY.** No I don't— Wait, is that...is that a bad thing?

**LALA.** Can be.

**TAYLOR.** I think you could learn a thing or two from two detention-heads like us.

**LALA.** You need to free yourself, Kelly. You can't wait to grow up for that. Gotta be able to cut through the noise in this world. You gotta want *hard*.

**KELLY.** I—

**TAYLOR.** Stop waiting for the world to come to you, Kelly.

**KELLY.** I'm no—

**TAYLOR.** Get *mean*, Kelly!

*Kelly begins to breathe rapidly.*

*Taylor and Lala are enjoying this. They take out their phones and start to film her.*

**LALA.** You're probably just another kid who's gonna disappear into the void.

**TAYLOR.** Just another kid mad at her parents.

**LALA.** Just another kid lost in the noise.

**TAYLOR.** Just another kid tired of being a kid.

*A switch flips in Kelly.*

*She walks, slowly, up to Taylor.*

*She smacks the phone out of Taylor's hand.*

*(Again, this all works best if Kelly is quite small or otherwise physically nonthreatening, and we understand that the possibility of her inflicting actual harm on Taylor or Lala is very low.)*

**TAYLOR.** Whoa, / alright...

**LALA.** Yeah!!

*Kelly turns to Lala. She walks up to her. She smacks the phone out of Lala's hand.*

I mean, okay, okay...

*Kelly turns to Taylor.*

**KELLY.** You're pathetic.

**TAYLOR.** Oh. Okay, we're getting somewhere.

**KELLY.** You're gonna wake up in forty years and realize you lost half your life in your phone and the other half being friends with this loser.

**LALA.** Wow. Okay, take it easy.

**KELLY.** Yeah *you*. "Lala." You think you're hard? Calling a teacher by a first name make you feel big? You wouldn't know what a revolutionary act looked like if you got guillotined.

**TAYLOR.** Okay, easy now, Kelly...

**KELLY.** Easy now? *Easy?*

*A beat.*

*Then Kelly explodes.*

**AAHHHHH!!!**

**LALA and TAYLOR.** **AAHHH!!!**

*A chase ensues. Lots of screaming and shoving and nonsense while Kelly chases Lala and Taylor around the stage. This should last at least a full minute. There can be elements of hiding and Lala and Taylor sacrificing each other to Kelly's madness. It should be utterly ridiculous that they're afraid of this small human.*

*Natalie notices, of course. She takes out her headphones and watches for awhile, amused. Then she comfortably goes back to her sketchbook, unfazed.*

*Finally, Lala and Taylor give themselves up. They're backed against a wall. They cower as Kelly approaches.*

*She wraps them up in an embrace.*

**TAYLOR.** ...What?!

*Kelly steps back.*

**KELLY.** That felt awesome.

**LALA.** You had us going, Kelly!

**KELLY.** That felt *awesome*.

**TAYLOR.** Yeah, totally. Totally awesome. Yeah. Knew it was a game. For sure. Awesome.

**KELLY.** You know, my therapist says I am overruled by the Civilized Self and need to explore my anger.

**TAYLOR.** Uh huh.

**LALA.** Well, your therapist should've seen that.

*Beat.*

**KELLY.** I... Thanks. Thank you both.

**LALA.** Mmhmm.

**TAYLOR.** Happy to help.

**KELLY.** Are your, uh...are your phones okay?

**TAYLOR.** Oh yeah, / totally.

**LALA.** Got a thick case on this one, baby.

*Beat.*

**KELLY.** So...do you guys wanna... Maybe we could hang? Like, Wednesdays after school work?

*Beat.*

**LALA.** Absolutely not.

**TAYLOR.** No chance.

**KELLY.** Yeah, no I was just kidding like, totally.

**LALA.** But just to be clear, love you Kelly.

**TAYLOR.** Definitely a fan.

**LALA.** Ow.

*Beat.*

**KELLY.** *(To Taylor.)* So...why did you get the ol' D.

*A short beat.*

I mean, I mean / detention.

**TAYLOR.** Didn't forget huh?

**KELLY.** No.

**TAYLOR.** I killed a guy.

*Beat.*

*A long beat.*

*Too long.*

*Lala looks at Taylor.*

*Did Taylor...?*

No I'm kidding. But I did throw a stapler at Chris Morehouse.

**LALA.** You *really* did (ow).

**KELLY.** Oh wow. Nice expression of anger. Why?

**TAYLOR.** Felt like it.

**KELLY.** Oh come on.

**TAYLOR.** He was complicit in vertical structures.

**KELLY.** With...Alice?

**LALA.** Yes Kelly, absolutely.

**KELLY.** But what'd he really do?

**TAYLOR.** *(Shyly.)* He just...he called me a name.

**KELLY.** ...what? What did he call you?

**TAYLOR.** I, uh, I wouldn't dare sully your little ears with the word.

**KELLY.** Oh come on, what?

**TAYLOR.** You don't want to hear it.

**KELLY.** Lala, what'd he call—

**LALA.** Kelly come on, don't you see we don't want to repeat it out loud?

**KELLY.** Oh. (*Short beat.*) I'm sorry.

**TAYLOR.** It's all good.

**KELLY.** I'm really sorry.

**TAYLOR.** It's all good.

*Beat.*

**KELLY.** Did Chris Morehouse get detention too?

**TAYLOR.** No.

**KELLY.** Oh.

**TAYLOR.** Unfortunately, in this world, it's the throwing of staplers that gets you in trouble. Not the reasons you did.

**LALA.** Mmm.

*Beat.*

**TAYLOR.** So, what'd you have detention for?

**KELLY.** ...I killed a guy.

*Beat.*

I'm just... I didn't have detention. I had Eco Club.

*Blackout.*

## Thursday

*Cool, late-autumn rain falls.*

*Natalie, headphones in, waits for the late bus. She is in her usual spot, but under an umbrella. She sketches.*

*She waits for a beat.*

*She pokes her head out from under the umbrella. She sticks out her tongue and tastes the rain.*

*She laughs. Then she sees someone approaching and assumes her previous, stoic position.*

*Kara, a sophomore sporting baggy jeans and a “don’t mess with me” attitude, hastily approaches.*

**NATALIE.** Hey Kara.

**KARA.** You okay out in the rain?

**NATALIE.** Oh, yeah I’m fine. Thanks.

*Kara runs under an overhang that lets her stand safely out of the rain. She shakes off her slightly wet clothes.*

*A moment.*

*Rebecca enters, distraught. She looks around, avoids Natalie, then heads under the overhang with Kara.*

**REBECCA.** Have you seen Roy?

**KARA.** What?

**REBECCA.** *(Almost screaming.)* Have you seen Roy? I can’t find him anywhere.

**KARA.** Oh, no, I haven’t. Sorry.

*A beat. Kara notices that the moisture running down Rebecca’s face isn’t just rain.*

Are you okay?

**REBECCA.** No!

**KARA.** Oh!

*Rebecca drapes herself around Kara. Kara awkwardly hugs back. Beat.*

What's wrong?

**REBECCA.** We...we broke up!

**KARA.** You and Roy?

**REBECCA.** Yes!

*She sobs.*

**KARA.** Oh. I'm so sorry.

**REBECCA.** It's just...it's just, like it's just...it's really hard, you know?

*Kara doesn't know.*

**KARA.** I know.

*Beat.*

Do you wanna talk about / it—

**REBECCA.** Yes thank you it was just so out of the *blue*. It just feels like the whole world is *broken*. And we've been dating for, for like an entire...for like a whole *month*!! I just don't understand!

**KARA.** Oh Rebecca, that's...that is so long.

**REBECCA.** *I know.*

*She sobs.*

*Natalie has noticed the commotion. She stands up and takes a step to come over. Rebecca sees this.*

No, Natalie, please.

**NATALIE.** Are you okay?

**REBECCA.** *No, I'm not okay / but—*

**NATALIE.** Do you want / to—

**REBECCA.** I don't. No thank you. No. I just...I can't do this. Not with you. Not with you.

*Beat.*

**NATALIE.** Okay.

**REBECCA.** I'm...I'm sorry.

*Beat.*

**NATALIE.** Yeah, me too.

*Natalie sits back down. Kara's not sure what to make of the exchange, but gently puts her hand on Rebecca's back.*

*Rebecca's sobs subside. She speaks to Kara.*

**REBECCA.** Wait... How do you know my name?

**KARA.** Well, you were in homeroom with my sister.

**REBECCA.** Oh.

**KARA.** In seventh grade.

**REBECCA.** Oh.

**KARA.** And we played soccer together.

**REBECCA.** Are you like, new here?

*Beat.*

**KARA.** I'm...no. I've been...we played... You know, this school isn't that big.

*Rebecca is bewildered.*

Never mind it doesn't matter.

*Rebecca wails.*

I'm Kara.

**REBECCA.** Oh. Right. Hi Kara. I'm Rebecca.

**KARA.** Yes I kn... *(Not worth it.)* Hi Rebecca.

*Kara doesn't really care. Beat.*

**REBECCA.** I'm sorry.

**KARA.** Why?

**REBECCA.** I just...I know, I should know that...what your...I just— *(Small beat.)* I know what people say about me. I know what people think of me.

**KARA.** What do you mean?

**REBECCA.** I know what they say, and they're right. That I'm *mean*. I'm stupid...I...

**KARA.** Rebecca, stop—

**REBECCA.** No, they're *right*, I should just—

**KARA.** Rebecca, people don't say that about you.

**REBECCA.** Yes they do! And they have reason to! But people don't know about my, like, *circumstance* but...I've lied and...I've told some lies and, and—

**KARA.** You've lied? What lies...?

*Rebecca gazes toward Natalie. A beat.*

*She stops, suddenly. She starts to gather herself.*

**REBECCA.** Oh my god I'm so...I'm so sorry I'm being like a total mess and / I don't—

**KARA.** No, no it's okay—

**REBECCA.** (*Continuous from above.*) I mean, we don't know each other I shouldn't just / let all this out on—

**KARA.** It's totally okay I'm—thanks.

**REBECCA.** What?

**KARA.** Thank you, for being vulnerable with me.

*A beat.*

*Rebecca sobs.*

**REBECCA.** Oh god my mom is gonna be so mad.

**KARA.** Why?

**REBECCA.** Just, like, I'm all wet, I'm gonna get the car all wet.

**KARA.** I'm sure she'll understand.

**REBECCA.** No, she won't. My mom's like, a drill sergeant.

**KARA.** She'll understand when you explain what happened.

**REBECCA.** No, like my mom is literally a drill sergeant. My parents met in the navy.

**KARA.** Oh. Wow.

**REBECCA.** Yeah. My dad was one of her trainees. But then my dad left, and when he left she like, became even stricter.

**KARA.** Oh. Okay wow, let's go there yeah.

**REBECCA.** Yeah. She retired and she wanted him to retire too but he was all like, "I love the sea, it's my real calling, and if you make me choose between the sea and you I have to pick the sea" ... which is of course like, super manipulative and messed up and everything, but she's a drill sergeant so she's pretty stubborn too,

and like, also a Taurus so like it's serious... anyway then he left... so now it's just me and my mom.

*Beat.*

**KARA.** That sounds... that must have been really hard. When / I was—

**REBECCA.** Yeah well... I mean my mom was pretty sad. I mean like honestly... now with Roy and everything, I mean I get it. Like, I've basically been through the same thing now. But I guess like... that's what being an adult is, you know? Dealing with heartbreak. Or whatever.

**KARA.** ...Right...

*A long beat. Kara wants Rebecca to leave. She gently rubs Rebecca's back. When she's sure Rebecca isn't gonna interrupt her, Kara starts:*

My parents—

**REBECCA.** Please don't tell anyone that, about me and like my family, I just don't want people to like, look at me differently, you know?

**KARA.** ...You just said you don't like how people look at / you—

**REBECCA.** No but like, like with *pity*, you know? "There goes that girl Rebecca whose mom is a drill sergeant and whose dad left 'cause he loved the sea more than her."

*Beat.*

**KARA.** I'm pretty sure that's not / what—

**REBECCA.** No just, don't... You know what? See you later, crocodile.

**KARA.** ...What?

**REBECCA.** It's just, I am calling this a day.

*Rebecca starts to leave.*

**KARA.** Literally what are you saying.

**REBECCA.** *Dude* can you not see that I am *leaving*, I am *saying goodbye*. It has been a long day and you don't even *care*.

*Rebecca goes to leave.*

**KARA.** Are you serious?? Oh *nice*, Rebecca. Dump your feelings on me, don't let me get a word in, and leave!

**REBECCA.** *Bye.*

**KARA.** You want people to think differently about you? Maybe start by realizing the whole world isn't about you.

**REBECCA.** I...excuse me?

**KARA.** I'm just saying.

**REBECCA.** Excuse me?

**KARA.** I'm just saying.

**REBECCA.** Wait. You're serious? You think I'm always like this? You think this is how I just always walk around? Like, self-absorbed? I am in *grief*, Karla!

**KARA.** Kara.

**REBECCA.** *Ugh!!!*

**KARA.** Everything they say about you is true, Rebecca Fuller! You are selfish and mean and you are Rebecca Fuller / *sh—*

**REBECCA.** *Excuse me?*

**KARA.** Yeah.

**REBECCA.** Excuse me??

**KARA.** Yeah.

**REBECCA.** *Excuse me??*

**KARA.** Yes.

**REBECCA.** Are you *serious?*

**KARA.** Yeah.

**REBECCA.** You—

**KARA.** You are so basic, Rebecca. Oh, I'm sorry. A little boy breaks your heart and your entire world crumbles? What is this, *Grease* the musical? Grow up! Give me a break.

**REBECCA.** Are you kidding me?

**KARA.** Yeah.

**REBECCA.** ...Oh.

**KARA.** No, wait, I'm not kidding! You're basic.

**REBECCA.** Um okay *look* at yourself? What is your fashion from, *I'm A Moody Teenager Magazine??*

**KARA.** Oh nice, really good one.

**REBECCA.** Your entire personality is so performative like, you think you're all mysterious with your little bra strap sticking out and your hair / and—

**KARA.** *I'm* performative? Look at yourself! You're like a nineties movie's wet dream of a ditsy prom queen.

**REBECCA.** You're like, skater-girl chic!

**KARA.** Thank you!!

**REBECCA.** *It's not a compliment!!!*

*BOOM.*

*Suddenly, a great CLAP OF THUNDER shakes the stage! The clouds part, and from the break in the rain, through a blinding light, a Principality (in the form of James??) dressed in robes and sporting terrific wings, descends from on high!!! It is terrifying and wonderful to see. Awesome celestial music accompanies his entrance. Kara and Rebecca tremble!*

*(Note: this needn't be expensive at all. For example, the effect can be achieved with a blackout and a sound effect or some heightened music before the lights come back up. You're encouraged to take liberties with lighting, costuming, and sound. The main point is that it feels grand and mystical and ultimately super weird. This can happen any way you find effective.)*

*Somehow, in all of this, Natalie has disappeared from the stage.*

**KARA and REBECCA.** AAAHHHH!!!!

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** BEHOLD, DIMINUTIVE CREATURES!! I I I I I am come unto you to mediate this scuffle, to moderate your puny disputations, to arbitrate your mortal claims on truth and love! I I I am Leonitus, Principality of the fifth order / of—

**REBECCA.** The Principal??

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I...

*The music cuts.*

What?

**REBECCA.** You said you're a Principal?!

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** What? No, no, I I I I am a *Principality*!! Which is an angel, basically, / but—

**REBECCA.** Why didn't you say that!

**KARA.** Rebecca *shut up*!

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I I did... Basically, well, uh... BE AFRAID, TINY BEING! Principality is just another class of angel!

**REBECCA.** (*Annoyed.*) Oh *man*.

**KARA.** What??

**REBECCA.** They sent us a second-class angel!! Couldn't even give me a real angel. *This is my / life!!!*

**KARA.** Rebecca—

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** SILENCE!!! THERE IS NOTHING SECOND-CLASS ABOUT ME!

*Kara quivers. Rebecca stands with her hands on her hips, annoyed.*

**REBECCA.** Okay then “angel,” what're your like, celestial plans to help us out?

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Behold, minuscule things! You will be visited by three *ghosts* tonight!

**KARA.** *What?!* Three ghosts?! Why??

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Because you have led a life of... Oh, wait... Sorry, give me...

*The Principality pulls out some note cards.*

Sorry, um...oh. Wrong card uh... (*Reading from a pile of cards.*) “Every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings,” no, that's not it either... Um...

**REBECCA.** (*To Kara.*) Do you see what my life is?

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I I I promise you, nanoscopic nitwit, that when this—

**REBECCA.** And what's the deal with this size thing? Everything is "tiny this," "minuscule that," "nanoscopic this."

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Size thing??

**REBECCA.** I'm just saying. You clearly have some / issues you need to deal with.

**KARA.** Rebecca I *swear* if I end up turned into a frog or something because of you I'm gonna / kill you.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Size issues?? I I I I I—

**REBECCA.** Did I *stutter*??

**KARA.** Oh no.

**REBECCA.** 'Cause *you* did! We want a new angel!!!!

**KARA.** We do??

**REBECCA.** Yeah!!

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I I I I—

**REBECCA.** We want a lady angel!!

**KARA.** Yeah!! We do!!

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I / I—

**REBECCA.** We want a *first-class* lady angel without ego!

**KARA.** And a dope sense of style!!

**REBECCA.** (*To Kara.*) / Really?

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** BE STILL!

*The Principality beats his wings, blasting Kara and Rebecca to the ground.*

*Suddenly the Principality is a bit sad.*

If you really want another Principality... I I I understand. I I I I am sorry. This is a newer job for me. They—

**REBECCA.** Leonitus, or whatever your name is, we have our own problems that *you're* supposed to be solving I guess? So thanks for opening up, but no thanks.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Okay wow. (*To Kara.*) I I I see what you're dealing with.

**KARA.** Are we getting a new angel or not?

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Can't catch a break here... Okay um— (*To the heavens. Or wherever.*) Y'all? Can I I I get some relief here?

*BOOM.*

*Another blinding light! Terrific music!! And a second Principality (in the form of Kelly?!) appears. She seems hurried, and speaks down to the first Principality.*

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** What is it, Nathan.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** I I I seem to be having some trouble / here.

**REBECCA.** Nathan? You told us your name was Leonitus.

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** He's new.

**REBECCA.** Of course. New. They sent me *new* in my moment of need.

**KARA.** (*To Rebecca*) I wouldn't say she has a dope sense of style but—

*BOOM. Principality 2 flashes a look at Kara and a clap of thunder shocks her into deference.*

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** (*To Principality 1.*) Show me your charge sheet.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Okay, I I have it right here...

*A beat as she reviews the charge. Rebecca and Kara aren't sure what to do here, in the middle of an angelic negotiation. But they definitely respect Principality 2 more than Principality 1.*

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** Nathan.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** ...yes?

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** What does this say?

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Um...Saw Mill Heights.

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** Yes good. And where are we?

*He looks around.*

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Oh. Saw Mill High / School...

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** Saw Mill High School.

**PRINCIPALITY 1.** Honestly, that makes a lot of sense, 'cause these two—

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** Okay. What was it we were arguing about, ladies?

*Beat.*

**REBECCA.** Um...

**KARA.** I'm...I'm not really sure, actually...

**REBECCA.** Oh! She's mean and dumb.

**KARA.** No that was you.

**REBECCA.** Oh yeah.

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** Okay, well—

**REBECCA.** Wait—

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** I'm sure you can figure it out. I I I I'll be watching from afar and keeping my eye out, but just try to *listen* to each other, okay? You all forgot how to do that when the little hand computers took up all your time.

*Rebeca and Kara nod.*

**KARA.** ...okay.

**REBECCA.** Yes thank you, great Principal.

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** I I I...you're welcome. We'll be watching. Come on, Nathan.

*BOOM.*

*The Principalities disappear, as magnificently as they arrived.*

*Natalie has somehow reassumed her position. A long moment.*

**KARA.** Do you think they're like...*always* always watching?

**REBECCA.** ...ew.

**KARA.** Yikes.

*Beat.*

**REBECCA.** The listening part is important.

*Kara laughs.*

What?

**KARA.** You know...this whole time you haven't asked a single question about me.

**REBECCA.** I...really?

**KARA.** I know you're sad, and I totally hear that, like you were in a long-term relationship with Roy and it's over and that's sad, but... I'm just saying.

**REBECCA.** I, um...why...I don't...

*Silence.*

*A long moment.*

*Slowly, Rebecca puts her hand gently on Kara's back.*

**KARA.** What are you doing.

**REBECCA.** This made me feel better when you did it to me.

**KARA.** But I don't feel bad.

*Beat.*

**REBECCA.** Are you sure?

**KARA.** Yes.

*Beat.*

*Rebecca takes her hand away.*

**REBECCA.** So um why...like, why are you taking the late bus?

**KARA.** Oh gee, how nice of you to ask.

**REBECCA.** Okay look you don't have to be a—

*BOOM.*

*Rebecca and Kara look around. No Principalities...*

**KARA.** I was working on the food drive.

**REBECCA.** ...There's a food drive?

**KARA.** Yeah.

**REBECCA.** That's nice.

**KARA.** Uh huh.

*Beat.*

**REBECCA.** Wait... If you can drive, why are you waiting for the late bus?

**KARA.** ...what?

**REBECCA.** If you were driving the food, like, why don't you drive home?

*Beat.*

**KARA.** No, um... Okay. I was volunteering to help *organize* the food for the food dr...for...the food that's being *collected* to give out to needy people in our community. I'm a sophomore, I can't drive yet.

**REBECCA.** Wait...that's so nice.

**KARA.** Yes. Thank you.

**REBECCA.** How long does that last?

**KARA.** Uh, we're meeting again on Monday... And then next Thursday again.

**REBECCA.** That sounds like a nice thing.

**KARA.** Yeah.

*Beat.*

**REBECCA.** Why'd you start doing that?

**KARA.** Look, Rebecca, I know you don't want to know.

**REBECCA.** Um, yes I do.

**KARA.** No, no you're just like, *performing* this empathy and like / I don't—

**REBECCA.** Okay *wow*. See? You try to do / one nice—

**KARA.** I don't care dude, like, go sob about your drunk boyfriend.

*BOOM.*

**REBECCA.** Okay even the Principal thinks you're being rude.

*Kara has an idea.*

**KARA.** (*Whispered.*) Wait... Do you think we can make the thunder happen?

**REBECCA.** (*Whispered back.*) What do you mean?

**KARA.** Let me try something. (*Then, loudly.*) You're dumb and tacky!

*BOOM.*

**REBECCA.** Okay what the heck Kara?

**KARA.** No no, just play along!

**REBECCA.** Oh I get it! Um... I hate you!

*BOOM.*

Oh my...

**KARA.** I respect your choices!

*Beat. Nothing.*

**REBECCA.** I think your choices are dumb!

*BOOM.*

**KARA.** Okay honestly it's simple but effective. Maybe a little pedantic?

*From the sky comes the booming voice of Principality 2:*

**PRINCIPALITY 2.** (*Offstage.*) *You're in high school.*

**KARA.** See?? Pedantic.

*A moment.*

**REBECCA.** So...tell me why you drive food.

**KARA.** *I don't drive* the—okay. This has been fun, if admittedly a little terrifying and ontologically eye-opening but...just go home Rebecca.

**REBECCA.** Not leaving till you tell me.

**KARA.** Seriously?

**REBECCA.** Seriously.

*Beat.*

**KARA.** You really wanna know?

**REBECCA.** Yeah, actually.

**KARA.** ...You're not just asking because / you—

**REBECCA.** I mean wow like you don't *have* to tell me I'm just trying to exercise this whole "listening" thing.

**KARA.** *Okay.* Um. It's not like, some big story. I was...I was sort of really anxious at the start of the year. And I know everyone talks about "anxiety" these days and blah blah blah... I don't know. It was just like, all the pressures of high school and like, having to start thinking about colleges and like am I doing enough extracurriculars and are my grades good enough and like, do I even have the right friends and blah blah... I just got really anxious. I started

having these like... I started having some little panic attacks. At first I didn't know what was happening.

It was just like, like suddenly all my senses would just go into over-drive. Everything got really loud, and I felt like I could feel every pore on my skin...

**REBECCA.** That sounds really scary.

**KARA.** Yeah, it was. It was yeah.

Anyway, my dad actually helped me out a lot. He was really...he was really, like...caring. He helped me see that like, I was just sort of like seeing things a little too small. I was just thinking about me, about my future, about everything that could go wrong, about all these apps I had to do and the jobs I needed to get and blah blah blah. So he suggested volunteering actually. Just like, as a way to help some people in real need...and like, get a little perspective. Not to like, try to show me that my problems aren't problems, or that my panic wasn't real, but just to try to like, *scale* it a little bit, I guess. That was his word. "Scale." And honestly, I'm grateful. I rolled my eyes at him at first. But...I've been trying to help other people out. And it's helped me out. A lot.

*Beat.*

*Rebecca puts her hand on Kara's back.*

*Kara puts her hand on Rebecca's back.*

*A long moment.*

**REBECCA.** Thanks for, um, telling me. Um...I guess I'm gonna go.

**KARA.** Yeah. Later crocodile.

*Rebecca nods. She gathers herself to go into the rain. She goes, but turns back before she exits.*

**REBECCA.** You want a ride home?

**KARA.** Really?

**REBECCA.** Yeah, it's nasty out, just come on.

**KARA.** ...okay! What about Natalie?

**REBECCA.** I can't, um...I only really have room for one.

*Kara looks back at Natalie, who still has her headphones in.*

**KARA.** Okay!

*Rebecca and Kara go. Natalie watches.*

*She stands up and walks a little bit in their direction.*

*She lowers her umbrella and tastes the rain.*

*She does not smile.*

*Lights fade.*

## Friday

*Mostly cloudy.*

*Natalie is standing at the edge of the stage, out of her seated position for the first time. Her sketchbook is under her arm. She takes her headphones out, and takes a moment to see the audience.*

*Then, without self-pity and without self-importance, she speaks.*

**NATALIE.** I've had to be an adult for a long time.

*Beat.*

I used to not like taking the late bus. I don't mind so much now. Most kids who take it take it one day or so. They maybe have a club or something one day a week.

I built my schedule up. Built in something to do after school every day. That way I don't have to go home right away.

Not that home is a bad place. There's just nothing there. No one is home after school. Not till late. I wish my parents were there to roll their eyes at me, like Kelly, or help me out with my anxiety like Kara. But they're not. Dad's gone. Mom works late, so I cook dinner and do my homework and watch foreign TV shows on Netflix.

*Beat.*

Sometimes I feel like I skipped high school, like I blinked and all the sudden I was an adult. 'Cause I had to be. Had to cook, and clean, pack my lunches, do my laundry. Someone had to. It was a necessity thing. I think most things happen in necessity. Not because they should or could but because they have to. I love my mom. I love my mom for how hard she works for me, and the time we get to spend together is precious and simple and I love her for it.

It's not that home is a bad place.

I like Arnie. The late bus driver. He's kind. He's a retired veteran. Safe. He likes to talk about the weather and the wars he fought in.

Earlier, I used to wait under the overhang when it was rainy, but then one day during a storm Arnie drove up and didn't see anyone waiting so he just drove on through without stopping. The next day I told him and he said it wouldn't happen again, but then it happened again, so now I wait in my spot no matter what the weather is, because I don't really have a way home if Arnie drives on through.

*Beat.*

It was fall of sophomore year kids started avoiding me. Like I was dirty, or something. Rebecca made sure of it. I mean it was unfair because, well, no one ever asked my side of the story... But being an outcast just meant I had to be self-sufficient. And I already knew how to do that at home, so making the jump to doing it at school too...wasn't that bad. I guess.

I don't know if I want to go to college or go to art school or go to New York City or move to a beach town and disappear. I just know that there's gotta be bigger things out there. Bigger than laundry and packing lunch and mom working three jobs so that I can get avoided at school and watch Netflix reruns at home.

Sometimes I wish I could run away. When I turned eighteen over the summer, I quietly ordered myself a passport. Just in case some vagabonds from Paris or Egypt or Mongolia whisked me away to join their revolutions. I can picture it. I would—

**ROY.** What are you drawing?

*Roy has entered, unseen. When he speaks, the spell is broken. Lights shift, and Natalie is back in her position, headphones back in, sketchpad in hand. Beat.*

Hey.

*Beat. Natalie doesn't move.*

Alright.

*Beat. Roy begins to go.*

**NATALIE.** Just some doodles. Nothing important.

**ROY.** Could I see?

# THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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