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HOLDING ON/LETTING GO
SITUATING TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN
THEATRICAL SPACES

by

CAROLINE TOBY GRAHAM

B.A. Theatre
University of New Mexico
2015

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
Dramatic Writing

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M.F.A. Dramatic Writing, University of New Mexico, 2018

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I review my development as a playwright in the MFA Dramatic Writing program and examine the shifting, overlapping goals of playwright-as-educator and playwright-as-entertainer. In Part One, I position my academic exploration of trauma in relation to ethics in journalism, embodied knowledge, and intersectional feminism and outline my creative experiments in staging trauma through the process of witnessing, retelling, and abstraction. In Part Two, I detail the artistic and personal roots of my dissertation play, *The Great Maverick Adventure of 2007*, and the structural and dramaturgical tools I employed to rebuild a sense of play and theatricality in my work.

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PART I: HOLDING ON

Mother says there are locked rooms inside all women; kitchen of lust,
bedroom of grief, bathroom of apathy.
Sometimes the men - they come with keys,
and sometimes, the men - they come with hammers.

-Warsan Shire

First Experiments

I entered the MFA program with two specific tasks in mind. One was to combine my academic and artistic pursuits through creative writing, and the other was to elevate marginalized voices through the medium of theatre. As an undergraduate playwright, I had begun to feel the “documentary impulse,” a term coined by theatre scholar Dr. Attilio Favorini to describe the urge to present recreations of real events for an audience. I was drawn to documentary and verbatim theatre, a simultaneously artistic and academic process of story creation: gathering information from interviews or historical documents, combing through and distilling it down to its essence, and presenting it to an audience through the medium of theatre. As a writer, I am deeply invested in telling the truth, and in elevating the voices of the unheard, but my focus on rigorous, almost clinical documentation and representation of trauma led to some creative stagnation as well as emotional self-wounding. A significant part of my journey in the MFA program has been a process of distinguishing “truth” from “fact,” and rediscovering a sense of play in the creative process.

As an undergraduate, the research for my departmental honors thesis took me to *The Investigation*, *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, *The Laramie Project*, *Talking to Terrorists*, and several other verbatim and documentary plays. All of these plays held a

megaphone for marginalized, unpopular, and at times unwanted voices to speak their truth in the form of first-person narrative strictly copied by the performer. The subject of my own verbatim experiment was an agonizingly painful, little-understood neuropathic condition called Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS). This is a condition that is close to my heart because it has profoundly affected my family. One of my oldest memories is sticking my four-year-old fingers out the backseat window to catch the rain, wondering why my dad was being wheeled away, and worrying I was in trouble when a police officer came by to tell me to roll up the window and stay dry. Later I would understand that our little white Toyota had just been rear-ended in standstill traffic by a fully-loaded utility truck moving at highway speed; that my father had sustained a severe brain and spinal injury over the driver's side headrest and subsequently the steering wheel; and that he woke up with a severe burning in his hands, feet, and half of his face that would, after two years without diagnosis or appropriate treatment, spread throughout his entire body. I named my project *Fiberglass Burning* after a description he had offered me in an attempt to explain the sensation to someone who had never experienced a chronic pain condition. In the script, these descriptions were placed in one conversation with the audience to underscore not only the severity of the condition, but the unique quality of the pain:

SUTTER: Saying it feels like someone's ripped your skin off, wrapped you in razor wire, and thrown you into high pH saltwater—without sounding melodramatic, how do you try and communicate that?

LOUIS: The bone pain feels... something like you might imagine experiencing if you went down to a thousand feet beneath the ocean... it's not something you can necessarily pinpoint; it's just this deep ache.

JULIE: I literally feel like I should be able to look down and see flames coming out of my foot. At the same time, though, it feels like my skin is being peeled back and salt is being rubbed in.

CALLIE: At times I have a pain like my toe is being amputated.

MOLLY: Someone in class, they were just trying to be nice and get, like, this fuzz off my leg, so they grabbed it. (...) I was like "...when you touched my leg to get that fuzz, it felt like you set a knife on fire and stabbed my leg."

GINA: I call it a demon spawn. That's definitely what it feels like. You get the burning, the cold... it feels like it's been lit on fire, or stuck in a bucket of ice water—y'know, throw gasoline on it... we're all good!

LOUIS: If you can imagine putting your hands on a four hundred degree cookie sheet—then slipping on a set of gloves made out of a combination of stinging nettles and fiberglass... that's pretty much what it feels like.

(9-10)

The undertaking of *Fiberglass Burning* was a research paper and a full-length script, similar in format to the graduate-level dissertation. My approach was similar as well: I had to split my research into two parts, with one half of the paper focused on CRPS and the other on ethics in trauma-based journalism and verbatim theatre. I wanted to explore the ethical balance of creating an engaging and pleasing theatrical spectacle while honoring the interviewees and their stories by remaining true to life in their representation. Their names were changed in the script to ensure anonymity, but some of the interviewees chose to disclose their identity during or after the production. With permission, I connected several of them with the actors performing their words to discuss their condition, learn about each other, and provide the actors with an even stronger sense

of their personality and mannerisms than interview text alone could provide. Some of the actors and interviewees have remained in contact.

For the thesis, I interviewed nine people with CRPS, combed through personal accounts by the Civil War doctor who first documented the condition, and distilled ten hours of recorded audio into a two-hour verbatim play in April of 2015. The single, free-admission performance was standing room only, and many left the theatre crying and making financial contributions toward research and treatment. To my mind, the production succeeded not just because people were moved by it, but because it amplified the voices of people with CRPS, many of whom are ignored or disbelieved by their families, friends, insurance companies, and doctors. Looking back, I can see the difference between fact and truth in the project and how they worked together. The facts of CRPS were laid out for context, but the truth of living with the condition was what generated empathy.

Recently, I re-read the letter of intent I wrote for my application to the MFA program. I was twenty years old, in my final undergraduate semester at UNM, in the middle of rehearsals for *Fiberglass Burning*, and fully aware that it was uncommon to enter a graduate writing program at such a young age. I applied anyway, because it was the right moment: I had uncovered an impulse in myself that demanded creative and academic immersion. In my letter of intent, I called it “theatre of the ignored”—the elevation of marginalized or forgotten voices in a theatrical space. I have always felt sharply the absence of certain voices on the stage, and along with it an urge to help fill those gaps. In my letter, I cited an upper-division playwriting course with Professor Caroline Prugh as the place where I first began to explore theatre as a tool specifically for

finding my own voice again; this was the moment in which I began to center trauma in my creative and academic work. “I wouldn’t accept being unable to look men in the eye for the rest of my life, so I poured my experiences... into a play dealing with sexual trauma and abuse,” I wrote. Trauma is not the only truth worth telling on the stage, but the stage felt like the only place where my truth might be heard.

Retelling Trauma: Impulse and Avoidance

I did not intend to center my trauma in so much of my research, nor in my creative and emotional labor, but trauma has a way of inserting itself into every aspect of the life of a person who experiences it. It becomes an unavoidable presence, intimately attached to work, play, sleep, research, creative efforts, and daily actions. At the same time, it self-minimizes in the mind of the person enduring it; there is a sense that it couldn’t possibly have been so terrible, or that this is all an overreaction, or that this is a punishment for some mistake. The American Psychological Association defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster” (“Trauma”). It is a complex phenomenon that often transcends the capacity for verbal description. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud suggests that the “common traumatic neurosis” is the result of an “extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli” when a person experiences an intense, shocking event which, as Freud notes, they do not expect and for which they are unprepared (25). Freud makes a point to distinguish “fright,” “fear,” and “anxiety” with relation to a person’s understanding of the object of fear, and their expectation of danger. He argues that since anxiety is “a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one,” anxiety protects against fright and thus against traumatic

neurosis. Fright, however, is defined by Freud as “the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it,” emphasizing the element of surprise in a negative and often extreme context (6-7). This combination of extreme, negative, and unexpected is what constitutes a trauma and triggers post-traumatic responses.

According to psychologists Kathleen Nader and Kenneth Fletcher, the common effects of trauma, which may be subclinical or severe enough to qualify for the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), include intrusive memories, avoidance of triggering stimuli, social withdrawal, a “flattening of affect that may lead to a sense of numbness,” hyperarousal and anxiety issues (477). Trauma is also shockingly widespread, as studies indicate that “approximately 70-80% of individuals in the United States are exposed to one or more traumatic events in their lifetimes” (492). Despite its prevalence, trauma has largely remained a taboo subject in public dialogue. As Roger Simpson notes in *Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting About Victims and Trauma*, trauma “is more central to human existence than most people like to acknowledge. Indeed, one of its most insidious characteristics is the way it encourages people to deny it” (5). In his essay “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub examines the role of “witness” in the face and wake of trauma and recounts something of a psychological contradiction he observed while acting as witness to fellow survivors’ testimonies for a historical archive. In their retellings of their experiences, Laub found an “imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one’s story...” (61, italics original). However, he found that “the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling” (64). Many survivors, feeling unable to adequately retell their experience or be

adequately heard, would resort to silence, leading to what Laub terms a “collapse of witnessing,” a gradual distortion of memory through which the victims ultimately come to feel personally responsible for the atrocities they witnessed and survived (65).

The theatre can be a powerfully effective place to retell traumas for the levels of witnessing it offers: the audience, the director, the survivor-as-playwright or survivor-as-performer, and any other member of a theatrical production team could serve as an internal or external witness in what would ideally be a safe, supportive environment for a guided retelling. When it came to telling my own truth, however, I found two parts of myself at odds with one another: as someone who had undergone intimate partner violence, I felt the imperative to tell the story for a witness, but as a playwright, my truth didn't feel, to me, like a “good” story in the narrative sense. My trauma couldn't possibly be interesting or engaging or powerful enough to deserve a captive, paying audience, and yet, I continued to feel a compulsion to tell the story. I have found, through connecting with other survivors of intimate partner violence, and through speaking to survivors of generational, environmental, and intersecting quotidian traumas, that this painful imperative to retell one's story springs from a wide range of shocks and wounds. Every time I tried to write down my own story, I knew I wasn't telling it right, and yet I felt a change in the wound—not a complete healing, but rather like one stitch popped as two more were sewn. It was slow progress, but it was progress.

The sewing still isn't complete. I don't know how many stitches are required.

During my second semester in the MFA program, the writing workshop taught by Professor Gregory Moss centered on German Expressionism. Many of the plays we read dealt with various traumas, from war to sexual violence, but the emotional impact was

obfuscated by stylistic choices that allowed the reader (or audience) to dissociate from the emotional impact. I was profoundly influenced by our readings and took on an Expressionist style in my own writing. One of my short plays, *Dick-Bearing Fools*, utilized caricatures of male boardroom executives to call out toxic masculinity and workplace harassment in creative spaces; another, untitled piece emulated Georg Buchner's straightforward, clipped dialogue in a love triangle colored with homicidal ideations. My final play, *Reduction*, centered on a woman returning home to care for her aging parents, and her reckoning with her father, who abused her as a child and is now suffering from dementia. *Reduction* took on a more naturalistic style than the rest of my work from that semester, but employed Expressionist techniques of defamiliarization and exaggeration to cloud the trauma at the center of the plot:

A long silence. Gene nods off for a moment. He shrugs himself awake.

GENE: Who are you?

MAYA: ...

GENE: What are you doing in my in my in my in my

MAYA: Calm down. You're fine. You're at home.

GENE: ...Rosa?

MAYA: No.

GENE: Where's Rosa?

MAYA: Gardening.

GENE: Oh. (Beat.) I thought you were Rosa.

Silence.

MAYA: It would be so easy to drown you.

GENE: I wish you would.

MAYA: I wish I would too.

They sit, not looking at each other, for a while.

GENE: *(in a whisper)* Maya. Are you awake.

MAYA: What?

GENE: Shhh, you'll wake your mother.

MAYA: What are you-

GENE: I want to show you something.

(...)

MAYA: Stop it. Snap out of it, snap the fuck out of it.

GENE: No, no, if you cry, I'll have to ground you. you don't wanna be grounded, do you?

MAYA: STOP!

GENE: Good girl. Are you ready? One... two...

Maya screams. She grabs the back of Gene's head and brings it down to slam his face into the edge of the tub. At the last moment, she realizes what she's doing; she stops cold, inches from the porcelain. She lets him go. He squishes himself against the far corner of the tub, terrified.

MAYA: Oh god- oh my god- you sonofabitch-

Maya stumbles out of the bathroom, crying and retching. She bursts through the front door and vomits into the bushes. Rosa comes in through the kitchen door as quickly as her shuffling feet can bring her.

ROSA: Maya? Gene: What's going on in here?

Gene, still pressed against the porcelain, begins to emit a horrifying, shapeless yell. He continues yelling until he sees Rosa.

GENE: Why- why- why- the essence of a thing boiled down to its essence is the thing without which it would not be the thing boiled down to its essence is the thing without which it would not be the thing boiled down-

ROSA: Shhhhhhh.

GENE: Maya?

ROSA: Rosa.

GENE: Oh. (Beat.) I thought you were Maya.

While the nonsense language and almost cartoonish moments of extreme violence felt justified in the narrative for this play, I continued to utilize Expressionist devices to obscure the heart of the various traumas centered in my subsequent experiments, including *Jubilant*, a semi-autobiographical play that tracked a girl named Ollie (a surrogate for myself) as she navigates her relationship with her first love both before and after she experiences her first abuser. Writing this play after *Reduction*, and thinking about the process from the standpoint of the actors playing abuser and victim, I decided not to make the abuser an onstage character like Gene; *Jubilant* utilizes shadows in place of a performer, which also allows for a visual metaphor as the shadow expands and contracts according to how and to what degree Ollie is triggered. In spite of some anti-realist theatrical devices, the story of *Jubilant* remained deeply autobiographical, and so it was difficult to separate myself from my role as survivor/testifier in order to take on a more objective playwright's perspective. As I utilized the techniques I learned in the Expressionism course and my own history with verbatim theatre to develop the play, I strongly resisted changing my own narrative, favoring the facts over a more theatrically effective story.

Verbatim Theatre: In Praise of Facts

Verbatim theatre is the genre that has most often tackled the subjects of trauma and post-trauma, and is somewhat notorious for its commitment to telling stories of violence. Prominent verbatim artist Anna Deavere Smith explored the L.A. riots in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and the violent clashes between African-American and Jewish communities in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood in *Fires in the Mirror*. Moises Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre Project interviewed citizens of Laramie,

Wyoming, in the aftermath of a horrific hate crime for *The Laramie Project*, and Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner collected the writings of Rachel Corrie, a young American activist who was killed by an Israeli Army bulldozer, for *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Robin Soans and Out of Joint investigated “what makes ordinary people do extreme things,” interviewing people affected by or involved in terrorism—including a member of the I.R.A. and a Ugandan former child soldier—in *Talking to Terrorists*. These plays, and many other verbatim projects like them, are shocking and affecting, some of them dealing specifically with subjects ignored, or mis- or underrepresented in popular media.

While this form of theatre has the power to shed light on issues about which the public may not be aware, verbatim theatre is limited by significant ethical complications and artistic restraints when it comes to depicting the experience of trauma. Amanda Stuart Fisher, in an essay entitled “Trauma, Authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim,” challenges the notion put forth by many verbatim artists that the form can promise “a more direct and *authentic* access to actual lived experience” (112; italics Fisher’s). While she concedes the “validity in a journalistic verbatim theatre that draws attention to the factual truths of a situation that were hitherto hidden from us by the media,” she questions the capacity of verbatim—and theatre in general—to authentically and appropriately examine “the existential crisis of trauma” (113-14). In her introduction to *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, literary scholar Cathy Caruth suggests that “the crisis at the core of many traumatic narratives” is an “oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7, italics original). Caruth also points to a paradox of witnessing trauma—namely, that it is

both necessary and impossible, “an address that remains enigmatic yet demands a listening and a response” (9). Her understanding of this paradox of witnessing comes from literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory, but it is equally applicable to performance, and to the audience-as-witness in trauma-centered theatre.

In addition to the question of whether trauma can be effectively staged, there comes the question of whether trauma *should* be staged, at least in certain circumstances. Verbatim artists should be asking how the production process will impact the trauma victims giving testimony, which in many cases incites a reliving of the experience, and whether the playwright’s involvement in their lives does more harm than good. As Simpson writes in *Covering Violence*, “While some journalists are reporting on violence with extraordinary sensitivity, others do continue to treat victims as necessary props for stories about human cruelty but props without a chance to affect the way the stories are told” (2). Simpson notes an example from the field of journalism: Marguerite Higgins, the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize as a war correspondent, recalled that when interviewing newly liberated prisoners of the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945, she “questioned and cross-questioned the miserable inmates with a relentless insistence on detail that must have seemed morbid” (Higgins, quoted in Simpson and Coté 98). No doubt Higgins elicited in-depth, accurate accounts of what occurred in the concentration camp, but at the mental and emotional expense of the survivors.

With regard to ethical conduct in verbatim theatre, the majority of playwrights seem to have treated interviewees with sensitivity and care, but there is documentation of some artists engaging in ethically questionable conduct for the sake of the production. In “To Witness Mimesis: Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics of Testimonial Theatre in *Through*

the Wire,” theatre scholar Caroline Wake breaks down the problematic interview tactics utilized by Australian playwright Ros Horin for her verbatim refugee play *Through the Wire*. Like Marguerite Higgins, Horin maintained an intense skepticism as she visited refugee detention centers, which had been the subject of furious debate and human rights concerns in Australia. In an interview, Horin said, “I went through the process of how do I know these people are telling the truth? I wasn’t like some bleeding heart automatically believing everything” (Morgan). However, like Higgins’s subjects, Horin’s skeptical investigation was conducted at the cost of her interviewees’ safety. “In the effort to be accurate,” Wake suggests, “her interviews became almost as aggressive as those conducted by immigration officials... In attempting to give ‘voice to the voiceless,’ the verbatim playwright also risks re-interrogating the always already interrogated” (114-15). Horin’s process took another problematic turn in the production stage, when she invited all four of her interviewees to audition, but only cast one, effectively implying to the other three that “their stories are of more value than they are” (116). Shahin Shafaei, the refugee who was cast as himself, had trained as a writer and actor, but in casting him, Horin imposed additional risk on him not only by placing a spotlight on a refugee who could still be deported, but by increasing the risk of “re-traumatization” through the constant repetition of his story in performance. In the context of verbatim processes, Wake defines re-traumatization as “the possibility that, by soliciting testimony from [a subject], the playwright will inadvertently re-injure her or him” (104).

Expressions of Trauma

In a course entitled Critical Issues in Performance, taught by Professor Amanda Hamp, the topic was Practice-as-Research (PaR) and Performance-Based Research

(PBR), with a particular focus on how artistic work can be proved its own form of academic labor without the requirement of an accompanying standard-format scholarly text. In my research for this class, I departed from verbatim theatre in search of a more spectacle-based mode of theatricalizing trauma. I encountered a wealth of artistic expressions of trauma and post-trauma in non-theatrical forms. Many painters and other visual artists have explored trauma and PTSD, particularly in the context of art therapy. Poetry, music, and cinema have also broached the subject in significant ways, from blockbuster films like *Saving Private Ryan* to the more modern work of “instapoet” Rupi Kaur. I was not able to find many theatrical works that tackled trauma from a sensory rather than narrative perspective, but I was particularly struck by the linguistic devices employed by playwright Caryl Churchill. I started exploring depictions of trauma and post-trauma in theatre, film, visual art and music in order to build a list of devices I might be able to use to effectively stage the sensation.

One of the most famous examples of trauma in art is Steven Spielberg’s World War II film *Saving Private Ryan*, which won Academy Awards for Best Director, Cinematography, Film Editing, Sound Mixing, and Sound Editing. Its most iconic and shocking scene is the opening “Omaha Beach” sequence, in which Allied soldiers storm the shores at Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The sequence has been hailed as one of the most accurate depictions of warfare in cinema, to the point where combat veterans were warned against seeing the film in theatres to avoid being severely triggered. In this sequence, Spielberg and Janusz Kamiński, the film’s cinematographer, take the viewer underwater to see bullets ripping through bodies and blood moving through seawater. When Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) temporarily loses his hearing from a nearby

explosion, his viewpoint slows down as a tinnitus-like whine overtakes the cacophony of the invasion. The auditory disruption clashes with the graphic visual imagery, creating a sense of the dissociation many victims of trauma experience as a defense mechanism.

Another powerful filmic expression, this time of post-trauma, is *The West Wing* S2E10: “Noël,” in which White House Deputy Chief of Staff, Joshua Lyman (Bradley Whitford, who won a Best Supporting Actor Emmy for this episode) is diagnosed with PTSD several months after he was shot in an attack on the president. Writer Aaron Sorkin, director Thomas Schlamme, and cinematographer Thomas Del Ruth (the latter two also earning awards for this episode) heavily utilized jump cuts throughout the episode, disorienting both the audience and Lyman’s character in time and space as a counselor helps him discover his subconscious triggers, the foremost of which is music, which transforms into the sound of sirens. The visual and auditory distortions clue us into his mental state, and once we have learned about his primary trigger, the camera focuses on his face as he attends a concert by renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma; even though we as the audience hear the music, we realize what his character is hearing instead, making the moment all the more heartbreaking.

One of my other primary sources for uncovering expressions of trauma was visual art. I explored websites of artists who were assault survivors, war veterans, first responders, or survivors of other personal traumas. Though the artists used a variety of digital and fixative media, their works shared characteristics in the tone and technique. Many of the pieces employed violent brush strokes; a shattering or other physical disruption of the central image; distortion of human forms, including facial disfigurement and twisting of limbs; and the presence of ghostly or skeletal figures. One of the artists

whose work I found most striking was Richard Russell Yohnka (1951-1997), a Vietnam veteran and art professor whose work has been displayed at the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago (NVAM). In an artist statement collected from notes and letters, Yohnka said of his work:

The figure I draw is the depersonalized soldier, the soldier within, who has suppressed the emotion of the community of war.... I have internalized the experience of the physical act of war and transformed it into the metaphorical gestures of the human form. The living form becomes a brutalized icon. (...) My drawings show lacerated, visceral images of exposed veins and muscles; through this kind of imagery I intend to show my figures as actual men, not heroes—men whose own bodies explode from within. (Yohnka, *Voices Education*)

In a particularly striking piece entitled *The Survivor*, the posture of the central figure evokes a sense of anguish, and Yohnka's use of pale, cool colors with highlights of red on the figure's skeletal facial features create a disturbing, ghostly tone that calls up dissociation and the feeling of dehumanization that comes with experiencing trauma. Yohnka's work is both explosive and repressed, anguished and detached; his figures, colors, and brush strokes encompass the many layers of a post-traumatic experience.

The expressions of trauma that I encountered in text-based arts were primarily situated in the realm of poetry. Sikh-Canadian poet Rupi Kaur, who accompanies her poems with pen illustrations ranging from rough sketches to fine line drawings, tackles sexual trauma and healing, internalized and externalized misogyny, and her journey toward self-love in her minimalist poetry. Sylvia Plath's poem *Cut* describes a minor accident chopping an onion, but her use of macabre imagery and a variety of metaphors to describe the wound suggests a deeper trauma than her wounded thumb:

A celebration, this is.
 Out of a gap
 A million soldiers run,
 Redcoats, every one.
 Whose side are they on?
 (202-203)

Finally, playwright Caryl Churchill offered some of the most exciting and disturbing theatrical text I have encountered in recent years. Her play *The Skriker* follows a malevolent creature of the same name, who transforms into various objects and people to seduce and manipulate two teen mothers. Churchill is known for her use of wordplay, choppy sounds, nonsense language, and other linguistic devices, and *The Skriker* utilizes those techniques to create a simultaneously whimsical and foreboding tone: “Twigs and beetles and dead body. Water and blood. You’ll never get back” (Churchill).

Some of the questions I asked myself as I engaged with other artists included:

- How does it feel? What are the adjectives and verbs?
- What are the common themes in the art?
- What does blood pulsing through veins sound like?
- What do electrical nerve impulses sound like?
- What design elements can I utilize to emulate these works?
- What do I want to tell the audience about the actual traumatic event?
- Does it matter if it makes sense?

From these works, I pulled together a “toolkit” of visual, auditory, and linguistic devices I might employ to express trauma in a theatrical way. These devices included repetition and fragmentation; visual distortions such as blurring, cracking, closing edges, and the

warped visual image of a fish-eye lens; muted sounds and silence; auditory distortions such as deadening, dulling, and changes in speed or pitch; arrhythmic percussion; amplification of unpleasant sounds; jarring associations, dissociations and sudden relocations; messiness, chaos, scratching; closeness, claustrophobia, and suffocation, or the struggle to emerge; violent gestures such as slashing, pressing, beating, crushing, compressing, and tearing; blinding light or total darkness; a sense of inescapable heat or cold; and distortions of shape and scale, such as a figure becoming very small, something else growing very large, or disfiguring human and semi-human figures.

The other key component of my research for this course was an intensive study of “embodied knowledge,” a form of practice-as-research that is “not simply a demonstration of a pre-theorized intellectual position but an explication of its own internal discourse” (Bacon & Middelw 12). Embodied knowledge is most easily explained as riding a bicycle: one cannot learn how to do it simply by being told. Embodied knowledge comes from the practice itself, not from the theory: “it is difficult to transform the experiential into something that can appear on a printed page” (13). In addition to examining how artists conveyed the experience of trauma through various forms and media, I began to document my own physical and mental reactions to post-traumatic triggers:

I pass by an open door and smell his laundry detergent. I've made it five years without smelling his laundry detergent.

My lungs stop moving.

I climb the stairs and unlock my door through blackening vision, with the clumsiness of frostbitten hands and feet.

I close the door behind me as the last pinspot of my vision closes up.

I curl up on the floor.

I do not get up for half an hour.

The initial triggers occurred naturally, after a period of absence; I believe they started to occur more frequently as a result of the re-traumatization I inflicted on myself during *Our Glass Figures*. My post-traumatic responses became more frequent as a result of my conscious engagement with them for my academic research, and the project ultimately led to a state of hypervigilance that was difficult to shake. If I couldn't verbalize trauma in a way that translated to an audience, perhaps there were other theatrical tools that would communicate what a traditional play couldn't. In my written work, I began to explore plasticity of the page, spattering inkblots over academic assignments and supplementing language with line breaks, empty spaces, and sketches. I started writing with my left (non-dominant) hand, partly out of necessity due to a wrist injury and partly to lean into the messiness of my explorations.

The final presentation of my work incorporated my academic research with embodied knowledge of my own trauma. My reading program was scattered across the stage floor for voluntary investigation by the audience, and I scrawled the above toolkit on a chalkboard with my left hand. The academic information was delivered through a self-recorded voiceover interrupted by auditory disruptions from the theatrical toolkit, and interspersed with personal narrative:

The record is messy. I sketch. I scribble. I scratch. I repeat. I repeat. I repeat. Where do the blank spaces go? where does the text scrawl over itself? I distance myself from the work. I write like a cold theoretician. I write too much. I can't write enough. I write with my left hand because that's how it feels.

There is a sense of always being left behind. When you learn something new, something else escapes your knowledge. When you overcome a trigger, something else takes its place.

One of the most important conclusions I drew from my research within the Critical Issues course was that intellectual understanding is not a prerequisite for emotional understanding. In fact, knowing the statistics of a crisis or the facts of an individual experience can sometimes lessen one's ability to respond emotionally. In some ways, trauma is like the monster under the bed: the less we know about it, the more it both frightens and intrigues us, and as we come to understand its shape and mode of operation, that feeling does not dissipate entirely, but it certainly dulls. In this sense, for the sake of healing and personal growth, it can be helpful to confront the nature and source of one's trauma; however, from a theatrical perspective, clinging too closely to the facts of a traumatic event may end up hindering the artistic potential of the project.

Rediscovering Theatricality

My focus in the MFA program has felt connected on multiple levels to the cultural shift taking place in the United States with regard to harassment, rape culture, sexual violence and abuse. After the presidential primaries and 2016 general election—a year-long barrage of sexist remarks, degrading imagery and unpunished admissions of sexual violence by powerful men—I co-wrote, edited, and performed in *Our Glass Figures*, a play I developed with eleven other women that centered on deep traumas and their impact in personal and political spheres. We were furious, hurt, and filled with a need to be heard; at the same time, we all wondered whether our own stories were worthy of being staged, and relived our own traumas through monologues narrating what we had

been through, as if somehow the details would make strangers better understand what we were feeling—or at least acknowledge that we weren't overreacting:

- L: Things you don't tell anyone.
 K: My rapists do not know that they are rapists.
 F: I couldn't even cry.
 H: I didn't know. I was ten.
 I: Some unremembered age, under six
 G: Something must be wrong with me
 J: Remember to breathe / is it supposed to feel like this?
 D: My face is pressed to the cool metal hood
 A: I still feel like I owe them
 E: I am so embarrassed. I am so ashamed.
 C: "Skank," "slut," "whore," "bitch"
 B: What. Else.

As the main editor of the production text, I was struck by how deeply the rationalization and self-shame surrounding these traumas were still buried within our individual stories; even though we were writing and performing them as survivors, we framed ourselves almost as accomplices. It pointed to the insidious nature of victim-blaming and internalized misogyny: I must have done something to deserve this. I am at fault, because everyone else seems to think so.

In addition to the monologues, *Our Glass Figures* included several movement scores and more poetic, abstracted language written primarily by me and Stephanie Grilo, one of the writer-performers and my peer in the MFA program, with some contributions from our director. These pieces commented on topics ranging from female/femme sexuality to menstruation to intersecting oppressions, both personal and systemic:

We are the First Nations, the Native Americans, the Indian Misnomer,
 indígenas pushed to desolate plots of land when you claimed a birthright to
 this earth.

.....

We are the hair you touch without permission
 We are the skin you revile, the shapes you fetishize, the bodies you
 dehumanize to punish our civil disobedience
 We are the confounding shades of brown and white that pull the words
What Are You? from your mouth

.....

We are eyes red from tear gas
 We are flesh bruised and torn by bullets rubber and lead
 We are bodies wrapped in punctured lifeboats
 And you close your eyes tight, wish us away like a bad dream
 Deny us medical care / Deny us work / Deny us security
 Deny us our dignity / Deny us our basic human rights / Deny our existence
 and yet
 We are here
 Here
 We Are.

I wrote this monologue to be featured as a sound piece; one of our actor-collaborators recorded the poem over slow, unsettling music, and the recording served as the sound score for a two-woman modern dance piece. This monologue in particular was inspired by the embodied knowledge-based scholarship of women writers of color like Cherríe Moraga and Audre Lorde, who presented their own experience as their simultaneously academic and anti-academic theories in intersectional and queer feminism.

These moments, more theatrical than the anecdotes, resonated more strongly with women and femme-identified folks who already knew what the monologues were going

to say. In general, the women in the audience were unsurprised by the content of the show but felt a strong connection to it. In contrast, several men approached us after performances to tell us how the show illuminated some of the many intersectional oppressions faced by women and made them consider some of their own actions and attitudes that perpetuated misogyny. After one performance, I overheard two male audience members discussing their intentions to encourage more men to see the show. We were making an impact on the community at a time we desperately needed it, and it felt good to see a spark of change in our audiences, but that change came at a steep price for the performers.

One of the main issues from the beginning of the process was that the production was directed by a man, and the female assistant director was often left out of the decision-making process. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with this male director on multiple projects—including *Fiberglass Burning*—but there were certain elements of our stories that he couldn't ever understand. Combined with our accelerated development process, imposed by the availability of performance spaces, that lack of understanding led to some cutting of corners that compromised the sense of trust and safety within the group, from rushing through script development to some insensitive and potentially damaging direction. As a co-developer of the project, I was able to install some safety mechanisms for the actors, including anonymizing the stories; offering the option to trade monologues so each actor wouldn't have to perform her own trauma; and insisting on the universal allowance to opt out of performing one's monologue at any performance. Even though these options were in place for the full run, as performers, we all seemed to feel a

self-imposed obligation to push through any discomfort, and many if not all of us compromised our mental and emotional wellbeing for the sake of the artistic whole.

Working on *Our Glass Figures* while conducting independent research for Professor Hamp's course on PaR, I realized that no matter how much detail I included, no matter how strictly I adhered to the facts of what had happened, and no matter how many times I re-traumatized myself, it would be impossible for someone to understand the *truth* of trauma unless they had experienced a trauma of their own, and even with a large percentage of the population experiencing traumatic events, each person's trauma is a unique wound. The men in the audience of *Our Glass Figures* found specific moments in the text that related directly to their own experience, but other anecdotes seemed to be impactful only by their explicit nature. As Leanh Nguyen, Ph.D., notes in "The Ethics of Trauma: Re-traumatization in Society's Approach to the Traumatized Subject," in addition to wounding the mind and body, trauma "inflicts a wound to meaning" (28). Caruth asks what it means to analyze and share "a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness," and reiterates that something in the very nature of trauma "resists simple comprehension" (5-6). The sensation defies language, its impact is unquantifiable, and the brain is unequipped to process the experience like it would process an ordinary event. How could I successfully broach the subject through theatre, a medium that depends so heavily on language, when by definition it cannot be verbalized—and how could I do that in a way that didn't require a performer to re-traumatize herself by retelling the details?

One answer to this quandary lay in Paula Vogel's newest play, *Indecent*, which I had the pleasure of seeing with the MFA cohort during its run at the Vineyard Theatre in

New York City. The play is based on true events, and follows the original production of Sholem Asch's 1907 Yiddish play *God of Vengeance*, controversial for its depiction of a lesbian romance, from its European debut to the heavily-censored Broadway production to its return to Poland, where what remains of the cast re-mounts the original play in an attic during the Holocaust. Vogel's play is narrated by the stage manager of *God of Vengeance*, who is the play's fiercest advocate.

As we entered the theatre, the cast was already seated onstage, acknowledging the artifice of the theatre-space; as the lights went down, the performers approached the audience and opened their hands in a beginning gesture of a solemn dance—releasing a river of ashes from their coat sleeves. This simple, theatrical action elicited an audible gasp from the audience and let us know the beauty and tragedy that was to come. Throughout the play, the characters struggle with protests, censorship, puritanical American laws and, ultimately, their own demise. Vogel and her director, Rebecca Taichman, expertly weaved dance, humor, beauty, and bare-bones theatricality—the actors and musicians almost never left the stage, and the costume changes took place in view of the audience—to create a love letter to a piece of queer Jewish theatre that was nearly lost in the atrocity of the Holocaust. In the final scene, the stage manager re-imagines the final scene of *God of Vengeance*, and the two actresses who played the young lovers emerge as their characters to depict a Romeo and Juliet-like love scene, in the original Yiddish, in the rain—rain that actually poured down from overhead, drenching the actresses and splashing across the stage. Understanding where the stage manager is as he imagines this in a “very long line” of Jewish people waiting,

supposedly, for rations—and understanding where he is about to go—made the scene all the more beautiful and painful.

I feel deeply when I go to the theatre, but rarely do I cry; *Indecent* is one of the only plays I have seen that caused me to weep for how beautiful, awe-inspiring, and heartbreaking it was. Recalling the details of this play to write about them here, I am close to weeping again. Vogel successfully engaged with the traumas of homophobia, anti-Semitism, and genocide while maintaining a strong voice, a sense of bittersweet humor and infallible hope, and a pure, simple, yet breathtakingly gorgeous theatrical spectacle. This play was one of the biggest and most succinct answers to my question of situating trauma onstage.

PART II: LETTING GO

*She holds a giant stuffed frog to which she is too old to be talking,
but she does just that.*

*- Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them,
A. Rey Pamatmat*

Moving Beyond Trauma

The concept of “re-traumatization” has stuck with me since I read Caroline Wake’s article, and the term has proven a vital consideration in my work both within and adjacent to the MFA program. My early creative work in the program shied away from re-traumatization through abstraction or broad, expressionistic generalization; as a collaborator in *Our Glass Figures*, I attempted to find ways to minimize the risk of re-traumatization among the writer-performers; and in my scholarly work, I intentionally engaged with my own re-traumatization in order to build a working artistic vocabulary with which to communicate trauma onstage.

After nearly two years exploring trauma and post-trauma—in both my academic and creative work, both inside and outside the MFA program—I finally exhausted myself. The re-traumatization that came along with my immersive research process took a mental, emotional, and physical toll on me, and I needed to step away from the subject for my own health. I needed to write something that came from a place of joy rather than pain, from creative exploration rather than obligation. I began writing *The Great Maverick Adventure of 2007* not as the focus of my dissertation, but as an intentional and necessary break from the immersive trauma-based work I had been conducting for at least three semesters. The seemingly natural creative culmination of my work in the MFA program might have been a play employing the theatrical toolkit I built for expressing

trauma and post-trauma, and I am not finished with my work in situating trauma on the stage, but for the time being, I am taking a hiatus from the research.

In writing this paper, I encountered some difficulty addressing the academic and artistic lineage of *Maverick*, because it is removed by design from the bulk of my academic work in the MFA program. I should clarify, however, that I do not see my more lighthearted writing as being inherently less serious or valuable than my work in trauma and theatre. The concerns surrounding practice-as-research and performance-based research remain relevant to theatre-based academia: how can theatrical performance and other artistic disciplines be seen as academically rigorous by their very nature—the embodied knowledge of performance and creation—without requiring an accompanying academic text explicating the process and its scholarly value? I have worked harder on *Maverick* than I have worked on any other project in the program. I pushed past my resistance to revision to redraft the play countless times, engaged in extensive dramaturgical research, and picked apart each character arc with more thoroughness than I've put into any play before this. In situating *Maverick* as a break from my theoretical research. I'd like to contextualize my use of the word “break” by underlining the insidious nature of trauma. As Laub notes in “Truth and Testimony”:

This imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech*. (61, italics original)

When allowed, trauma will insert itself into every aspect of a person's life, and after a series of projects engaging with it directly, I had difficulty *not* centering it in my work. I am proud of myself for being able to break away from my research—though I believe it is valuable as well—and set trauma aside to work on this play.

Remembering How to Play

While the need for *Maverick* was specific when I began writing, the inspiration came from many sources, including sports plays, a class on disrupting realism in theatre, and my own childhood and adolescence in the 2000s. Over the last three years, I have seen and read numerous plays centering on sports: *The Wolves*, a play by Sarah Delappe about a girls' indoor soccer team; *The Royale*, by Marco Ramirez, which explores the racial and sociocultural implications of the first integrated heavyweight boxing championship; and *The Great Leap*, an imagining by Lauren Yee of a Chinese-American basketball player discovering his roots in a 1989 exhibition game in Beijing. Several of my peers in the MFA program have also written plays featuring soccer, basketball, tennis, and more. I admire the way these plays bring together two fields that are often portrayed as somehow being at odds. I also have been struck by how these plays make new room for physical action. The movement and sound can punctuate language, offer a different type of spectacle from what we usually see, and create an underlying rhythm for the piece, regardless of whether all the physicality is directly related to the dialogue or plot. Many of these works have inspired and invigorated me as both an audience member and a playwright.

Another source of inspiration was a dramatic writing workshop entitled “Breaking from Realism,” which I took with Professor Gregory Moss in my second year of the

MFA program. The course explored different techniques and theatrical devices to help break away from the constraints of naturalistic theatre. Some of the techniques included division or multiplication of character, through which one actor plays multiple roles or several actors split one character; the inclusion of supernatural elements; using an Aristotelian element of drama other than plot as the engine of the play; and the use of chance or choice (by the actors, directors, or audience) to create diverging narratives. This class helped me break out of the semiautobiographical, trauma-centered, textually overt theatre I had been exploring for several semesters, and refocus my energy on exploring pure theatricality. It was a welcome reminder that plays are meant to be seen, not just read; regardless of the moral, message, lesson, or vocabulary, it is ultimately a spectacle, not an essay.

The exercise that ushered in the idea for *Maverick* was an exploration of “borrowed structures,” or non-theatrical ways of organizing the action of a play. Organizing structures could include the zodiac, innings of a baseball game, tarot cards, and so on. The short exercise I wrote for the class, which I intend to turn into a full-length play, was structured as a menstrual cycle. The concept of borrowed structures has become an integral tool for jump-starting the writing process and finding ways to fine-tune the organization of action in my work. In *Maverick*, the scenes are structured as a set of swimming drills, beginning with a warm-up and ending with a cool-down. Some of the scenes reflect their titles in a literal way, as the team practices those specific drills, and some are connected metaphorically, as an argument between best friends mirrors the frantic speed of a sprint drill and pulling a sincere apology out of a fourteen-year-old requires the same endurance and pain tolerance as 400 meters of butterfly. The

“underwater kick drills” of one scene are both literal and metaphorical: the team practices underwater drills at a moment in the play when the conflict has deepened to the point where using the silent treatment is the only way to peacefully attend practice together.

When I started thinking about writing my own sports play, I wanted to draw from my own experience rather than conceptual research in order to write as organically as possible—but the only sport in which I had ever participated was competitive swimming. My team, also called the Mavericks, held an abundance of inspiration, but writing a play about them would lead to the inevitable question of how a water-based sport could possibly be represented onstage. I have seen plenty of productions involving water—sometimes copious amounts—utilized in creative ways, such as the rainstorm in Paula Vogel’s *Indecent* or the shallow pool required by Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses*. I have also encountered several theatrical abstractions of water, including lighting and projection effects, harnesses, dance choreography, and gestural work behind plastic sheeting. In the New York Theatre Workshop’s production of Lucas Hnath’s play “Red Speedo,” scenic designer Riccardo Hernandez built a fully functional, Plexiglas-fronted, single-lane pool between the end of the stage and the audience. For my own play, I decided to leave the technical conceit to the discretion of each production team; it felt stifling to demand a specific interpretation of the swimming, particularly when so many theatres are already constrained by budget and space. Personally, I think an abstraction of the swimming will be more effective for this piece; Hnath’s protagonist hardly speaks, which is conducive to the quiet spectacle of a swimmer literally gliding underwater, but, well, my characters are teenagers.

As this play was forming, I noticed an interesting structural parallel that had developed almost subconsciously. Swimming is unique from other competitive sports in that it is simultaneously a team effort and an individual sport. The combinations of events are seemingly endless: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle, or individual medley; sprint or long-distance; individual or relay. Each swimmer has one or several specialized events that they race, and their goal is to win those individual events, but their time improvement and placement in each event contributes to the overall ranking of the team. The dramatic structure of *Maverick* parallels swimming in a much stronger way than I had intended with the drill-based scene organization: it is a six-character ensemble piece, but the characters' individual story arcs hold far more weight than the overarching "main plot" of the play. At the 2018 KCACTF Region 6 Festival, to which my two fellow third-year MFA students and I were invited to present full-length readings of our dissertation plays, I had the pleasure of receiving feedback on *Maverick* from playwright Jacqueline Goldfinger and theatre scholar Dr. Norman A. Bert. In his critique, Dr. Bert noted that the structure of this play was something he hadn't seen before, with major changes taking place for individuals but not for the group as a whole; later in the feedback session, he amended his previous statement to offer that the main "group change" was that the characters grew up.

The monologues are another element of the structure paralleling swimming—not so much in the action or sport as in the sensation of being in the water. Each character delivers a monologue in abstracted pool-space outside of the action of the play, in complete isolation. Though I struggled throughout the revision process to give these monologues the weight they seemed to demand, these are moments in which the

characters can reveal insecurities and desires to the audience that they wouldn't dare reveal to their friends. Larissa Lury, a director and professor at New Mexico State University who attended the festival, noted an important distinction between loneliness and "alone-ness" in the monologues: the characters are alone, but they are not lonely; in some respects, the water is the place where they feel most like themselves. Lupe and Kerry struggle with body image for different reasons, but both feel respect for what their bodies can accomplish in the water; Quinn and Kel, both of whom put on a cool and collected façade, allow their deepest insecurities to emerge and can acknowledge their emotions when they are alone; Joey, petrified of failure, is able to relive one of her most humiliating memories for the sake of underscoring Morgan's unwavering support and friendship; and Morgan, despite her frustration and fear of physical weakness and mortality, relives her best race in a second-person narrative, bringing the audience into the water with her in what Jacqueline Goldfinger termed a healing affirmation or an "incantation" to will herself back to life, to beat both the race against her competitors and the race against leukemia. Particularly in the modern technological era, teenagers are often stereotyped as unable to cope with being alone, but there is comfort in the isolation of the water, and I wanted to convey that the monologues were a space in which the characters could take a full breath and stop worrying for a moment what their peers might think of them.

Maverick provided many opportunities to experiment and play, well beyond uncovering a unique dramatic structure. The two plays that most heavily influenced my artistic choices were Delappe's play *The Wolves* and *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them* by A. Rey Pamatmat. *The Wolves* is the play to which *Maverick* is most frequently

compared, as a sports-based ensemble play that tracks a group of teenagers through a somewhat extended period of time (in *Maverick*, a semester; in *The Wolves*, an indoor soccer season). *The Wolves* is a particularly exciting play because of the sheer number of women—nine teenagers and one adult—it places together onstage. I also wanted to heavily feature young female characters, but I decided to make the Mavericks a co-ed team as a nod to my own experience as a high school swimmer. I also reduced the number of characters—initially I had eight, which is still much fewer than a regular swim team—to six, in order to more diligently follow their individual storylines. I wanted to explore issues of sexuality, body image, race and ethnicity, and disparities in privilege, while still maintaining a sense of banter and play, and I felt unable to give those subjects the attention and care they deserved with so many characters fighting for stage time.

The place where I intentionally separated myself most from *The Wolves* was in the plasticity of the page. Delappe utilizes separate columns on each page to indicate where conversations are happening simultaneously. It is exciting to see onstage, but was difficult for me to read on the page, particularly since the characters are identified by jersey number instead of by name. Having *Maverick* in mind for the Linnell Festival, and knowing that we would be afforded very little rehearsal time for the staged readings and a condensed process for the full production, I wanted to make my script as easy as possible for an actor to read cold. I plasticized the page through interruptions, capitalization and parentheses to indicate volume and/or tone, and other small textual devices (including a few emoticons) to provide a sense of pace and mood to the actors without being prescriptive or using “wryly’s.”

For a brief moment in the first draft, I considered including the swim coach as a character, but quickly decided against it. In order for me to discover how these characters struggle to mature and claim a place in their world, there couldn't be any adults. Delappe successfully introduces an adult character in a heartbreaking scene at the end of *The Wolves*, as the mother of one of the players approaches the team after her daughter's death. As powerful as that moment is, however, their male coach is all but absent even from their discussion, and the bulk of the characters' self-discoveries occur without any adult presence. In *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them*, the children are left to their own devices in a state of independence that is at once delightful and alarming, for both the characters and the audience. Pamatmat explicitly forbids the appearance of any adult characters onstage, although the children are to be played by young-looking adult actors. In the moments where adults do appear, they are to be depicted by shadows made by "puppets, projections, or something else non-human. Please do not use actual people – NO GROWN UPS!" (Pamatmat) In *Maverick*, the swim coach is depicted by an athletic whistle; Quinn's mother appears in the form of a car horn honking from the parking lot. Like in *Edith*, the adults are an imposition on the kids' world, nonhuman and nearly absent, but still ultimately controlling their lives.

Truth Over Fact

In locating this play in time and space, I was drawn to the year 2007 for several reasons, the one I offer jokingly (but with a grain of truth) being that it gave the title a nicer ring than any other year. My primary inspiration, however, lay in my own experiences as a young swimmer in the new millennium, and the bizarre culture of modern America in which my generation emerged. 2007 was the year I completed 8th

grade and entered my freshman year of high school, young for my grade and only a year into “womanhood” as defined by arbitrary uterine standards. Reflecting on the cultural moment of that year, on the cusp of a presidential election and a devastating financial collapse, it seemed like the nation was going through a painful, awkward puberty at the same time we were. I recall a lurking cognitive dissonance that at times became vicious, growing up in a state of heightened innocence—with the emergence of wholesome internet memes and a surge in ’80s and ’90s nostalgia—and a simultaneous amplification of social and global awareness, with widening access to news sources, “viral” videos documenting natural disasters and social injustices, and a new understanding that, particularly in the wake of the mass shooting at Virginia Tech, school was no longer a guaranteed place of safety.

I also recall, however, the joy of growing up in a small but diverse rural community, traveling to the nearest (small) city for the extracurricular activities my hometown couldn’t offer: theatre, music, and swimming. I swam on a team (also called the Mavericks) that was made up of a blend of students from the high school where the pool was located and students from other schools that didn’t have the same resources. The characters in *Maverick* are a blending and reimagining of many of my teammates—including my sister, our mutual best friend, a girl who really did fight and beat leukemia, that one kid who never shut up and always got the whole team in trouble, the workhorse who was already competing in the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz swim challenges in high school, the hot guy who never talked, and a serving of my own persona throughout.

My previous efforts in the program to write from direct personal experience had all centered on personal traumatic experiences. As a result, I felt a strong resistance to

revising or adjusting any of the text, because I felt worried that it would distort both my own memory and others' perception of the events that had occurred—something that survivors of interpersonal trauma have often already undergone in the form of gaslighting or victim-blaming. It seemed impossible to reconcile the facts of my experience with an enjoyable theatrical experience; either the medium was failing me, or I was failing the medium. However, in the process of writing *Maverick*, I found myself caring less about keeping the details straight when remembering a given scenario, and caring more about the authenticity of the characters and the dynamics of the unfolding scene. By allowing myself to write something less “serious,” I was more willing to let go of specific facts about people, places, and who said what, and to pay attention to the *truth* of the characters that were emerging as I wrote them. I had been coming at my creative work with the needs and intentions of a trauma survivor trying to document what had happened so that the facts could never be manipulated or forgotten. In doing so, I had left behind my intentions as a playwright: to create delightful, engaging, thought-provoking theatre. I recall a phrase mentioned by Professor Amanda Hamp in our course on practice-as-research, which I repeated to myself on a few occasions as I wrote the first draft and several revisions of this play: “What is actually happening is more important than what you think should be happening.”

Weird Dramaturgy

The dramaturgical research I conducted for this play was drastically different from the research I've conducted for any other theatrical work. I had the benefit of direct memory to develop many of the idiosyncrasies of the characters and the general world,

but my search for terminology, pop culture milieu and swimming icons took me to places that I don't imagine appear in academic papers particularly often.

An early element of my dramaturgical process was building the world of the play through internet applications. One of our assignments in a course taught by Gregory Moss was to build a “box” containing the essence of our play—it could either be a literal box filled with photographs and clippings, or a digital box of images and tonal references. Since my play centers on teens engaged in internet culture, I chose to build a Pinterest board for the *Maverick* world—although for more chronological accuracy, I should have perhaps chosen a pre-2007 platform like Tumblr—and collected images of the fashion, top celebrities, films, books, and devices of the year, as well as swimming memes and mid-2000's milieu. I also had a strange moment of self-awareness when I realized that Know Your Meme, a chronological database of every bizarre image- and phrase-based internet trend, would end up being a cited source in my dissertation. One of the simultaneous joys and pitfalls of internet culture is how rapidly it evolves; there is a bizarre, frantic excitement in discovering and sharing new memes, but it also makes it more difficult to pinpoint the origin of slang and references in a dramaturgical context. Know Your Meme was a vital resource to me in this respect, and led to the inclusion of the custom pizza order “None Pizza With Left Beef” and a reference to the embarrassing moment at the Sony E3 Conference in 2006, in which the videogame *Genji: Days of the Blade* was touted as being based on real battles from Japanese history while the demo footage displayed a “mid-level boss known as a ‘giant enemy crab’” (E3).

It was also important to me that the characters had role models in the sport. Even though some of them are less serious about swimming, they idolize or relate to specific

professional swimmers for various reasons. For Lupe, Dara Torres is an icon not only as a fellow freestyle racer with Hispanic heritage, but as a woman who defies expectations of who can be strong. In August of 2007, at the age of 40 and less than two years after giving birth to her daughter, Torres broke the American women's record for the 50-meter freestyle, a feat she accomplished several times throughout her career. She is the oldest swimmer to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic team for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and at 41 years old, she became the oldest swimming medalist when the American team took silver for the 4x100 medley relay (Weil). For Lupe, who struggles with her body image and self-esteem, Torres represents the power of breaking stereotypes. Kel, in the meantime, wants to emulate Michael Phelps, but finds himself empathizing with Ryan Lochte, who was coached by his own father as a young swimmer and who, always just falling short of Phelps's achievements, took on a carefree attitude about competition, despite his hatred of losing (Salter). And although this moment is no longer present in the production draft of the script, Kerry, who deals with body issues throughout the play, finds comfort and inspiration in Natalie Coughlin, whose strong arms and long build helped her win five medals at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, and become the first woman to swim the 100-meter backstroke in under a minute (Zaccardi).

I included some specific pop culture references in the script, particularly to clue in to Kerry's semi-emo tendencies with bands like Evanescence and My Chemical Romance, and the dark surrealist cartoon character Salad Fingers. 2007 was also the year that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* came out in hardback, and the film version of *Order of the Phoenix* was released—and as most millennials are, Lupe is a die-hard Potterhead. My only explicitly-requested song cue in the script is Akon's hit R&B song

“Don’t Matter,” to which everyone my age awkwardly slow-danced at some point, while looking back over our shoulder to avoid making eye contact with our dance partner. For further inspiration, I built a Spotify playlist of hit songs from 2007 and up to a few years earlier, and during the rehearsal process for the Linnell Festival, I made the playlist collaborative so that Kate, my director, and the cast could contribute anything they felt was missing.

From the perspective of a playwright acting as my own dramaturg, building the world of *Maverick* was a delight I had denied myself throughout most of my time in the MFA program. Working with the Linnell Festival fall reading cast, the actors from the Kennedy Center Region 6 Festival, and my current cast for the full Linnell Festival production, I have been pleased and surprised by the eagerness of the performers to take on the script, the ease with which they have engaged with the language, and the thoughtful questions they have brought me that have helped me clarify characters’ intentions and circumstances. I have been particularly impressed by the innovation in staging by my Linnell Festival director, Kate Clarke. During the rehearsal process, I discovered moments in the script where I can clarify the physical action, particularly with regard to abstracting the “swimming,” to avoid complex choreography conflicting with the rapid banter between characters. I am proud of the work I have done on this play up to the point of this production, and I am excited to begin the next phase of revisions after the festival.

PART III: MOVING FORWARD

When I learned to swim I spent a lot of time holding on to the edge, then I learned how to let go and move forward.

- Mom

After the MFA Program

I cannot overstate how fun, challenging, and useful the MFA Dramatic Writing program has been for me, as a playwright, a general practitioner of theatre, and a human. I went into the program afraid of my own history and resistant to self-challenge, and I feel I have emerged with a new understanding of myself, my flaws, my abilities, and my agency.

I do intend to continue my work in combining art and activism, passing the megaphone to folks with less privilege than I have, and utilizing my skills and resources to elevate marginalized voices. I strongly believe in the power of theatre to elicit understanding, empathy, and change, and through my journey in the program I've acquired a multitude of tools to accomplish that goal. I also intend to resume, at some point, my work in situating trauma in theatrical spaces; this will never stop being important to me, but based on the moderate hypervigilance and re-traumatization I experienced writing this dissertation alone, I know the time isn't quite right yet.

I will continue working as a playwright—ideally, as a *working* playwright—and I also have some interest in exploring the film world a little more deeply. Co-writing and producing a season of a web series was a unique, frustrating, and ultimately rewarding challenge, and I could see myself trying out something even bigger. After a break from academia, I would love to return to college to teach playwriting as well. My current class of undergraduates is a group of some of the most insightful, sensitive, and creative

students I've ever encountered, as an instructor or as a peer; I know not every class will be one hundred percent gems, but if even one student in future classes turns out like these kids, I'll be a satisfied professor.

I will also continue to push myself in terms of overcoming my resistance to revision. Although working on *Maverick* over the past year has taken me far past my previous comfort zone, I know I will need to take measures to ensure that I keep revising, rewriting, and developing my other first- and second-draft plays. After being a student for nineteen consecutive years, I have very little understanding of how it must feel to *not* be immersed in an academic environment, and I will endeavor to build a schedule and work to meet fellowship and workshop application deadlines in order to keep myself writing.

At the moment, I'm working on a full-length version of my menstrual cycle play. It's a femme-punk explosion of red glitter, uterus-punching, and lady-kissing. Stay tuned.

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APPENDIX: *THE GREAT MAVERICK ADVENTURE OF 2007*

MFA Dissertation Play

Linnell Festival of New Plays, University of New Mexico

April 6-14, 2018

Second Place Winner, National Partners of the American Theatre Playwriting Award,

2018 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival

Production Draft: March 28, 2018

the great maverick adventure of 2007

a series of drills for strength & endurance

by
caroline toby graham



Draft 28.Mar.2018
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CHARACTERS

Kerry – 13. Japanese-American. Lowkey emo. Not ready to grow up. Best event: 50 back.

Lupe – 14. Latina/Chicana. Awkward, innocent; there's a queer badass hiding in there somewhere. Best event: 50 free.

Quinn – 14. Any ethnicity. Kerry's bestie. Kinda slutty. Hangs out in the girls' locker room because he can. Best event: 200 IM.

Joey – 15. Any ethnicity. Young for her grade. Perfectionist. Best event: 100 breast.

Morgan – 16. African-American/mixed race. Focused, driven, has like nine extracurricular projects. Best event: 400 IM.

Kel – 17. Any ethnicity. The new guy. Hot and rich, but a pretty good dude. Best event: 100 fly.

Coach – represented by a deck clock, a sandwich board-style whiteboard, and a loud whistle.

Please adhere to ethnic/racial casting where described. The actors may be the approximate ages of these characters, or a little older (but not so much older that the play becomes a parody of adolescence.)

Body type: Swimmers come in all shapes and sizes! Incredible athletes can be fat, thin, wiry, muscular, tall, short, or anything in between. It's about technique and training, not build or BMI.

SETTING

A diverse, more or less middle-class town, with some noticeable disparities.

Fall/Winter 2007:

YouTube was two years old.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were in full swing.

32 people were killed and 17 others wounded in a mass shooting at Virginia Tech.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows was published, and *Order of the Phoenix* came out in theatres.

Illinois senator Barack Obama declared his candidacy for President.

A crisis in the subprime mortgage market led to what would later be named the Great Recession.

Oreo-O's and Chocolate Chex could be found at your local grocery store.

Olympic hopefuls were training for the qualifiers before Beijing.

The fashion, music, and art haven't yet been distilled by history [Mary J. Blige, Carrie Underwood, The Flaming Lips, and Ludacris won some Grammys]; the text has a few specifics, but play around!

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Typeface Key: SaRcAsM; Inter/ruption; (...)beat; (whisper); (LOUD WHISPER)

Any **act break/intermission** can be placed at the discretion of the director.

The space:

*An outdoor short-course (25-meter) pool and the surrounding deck/benches.
There is also a girls' bathroom/locker room: stalls, sink, bench.*

On the pool deck:

*A rolling metal cart full of cheap yoga mats. Kickboards, pull buoys, stretch bands.
One of those big-ass deck clocks that might only have a second hand.
A sandwich-board-style whiteboard on which the drills are written. (Projections are cool too.)*

WARM-UP

The end of summer.

*Lupe, Kerry, Quinn, Morgan, and Joey stand at the end of their respective lanes.
One-piece swimsuits, practical design. Quinn in a speedo. Swim caps secure.
They adjust their goggles onto their faces and press out the air.*

They warm up.

*This is a good time to show whatever convention you're using for the swimming—unless
someone lets you use their pool, abstracted is better. Do what you want!*

They finish warming up.

They get out of the pool and exit the space.

800 i.m. (WHO EVEN DOES THAT?)

Mid-August. A new school year. Bright afternoon.

Kel enters in a fastskin and goggles. He gets in the pool and starts doing fly.

Kerry enters in her one-piece swimsuit and a pair of scribbled-on jeans.

She's wearing a faded wristband from summer camp.

She tosses her net bag in a corner, sits on a diving block and takes in the space.

She starts tracking Kel's progress, back and forth.

From off:

QUINN

KEEEEEERRRRYYYYGOOOOLD BUTTAAAAAAHHH—

KERRY

QUINNIFEEEEERRRRRRRR!

*Quinn jogs in like the end of a slo-mo victory lap. He's in his speedo
and a sweatshirt. He also has a summer camp wristband.*

*Kerry leaps to her feet and they perform an elaborate secret handshake.
(Don't make it long, but make it weird.)*

QUINN

Dude I haven't seen you in like a WEEK AND A HALF

KERRY

You still have your wristband?

QUINN
Uhh, dur?

KERRY
Yisssss—

QUINN
Ah man, look at this space! Look at this pool!

KERRY
It's the same pool.

QUINN
Yeah but this year it's ours. Suck it, eighth graders!

KERRY
They're still gonna use it. It's not like the middle school suddenly built its own pool.

QUINN
Would they *build* a pool or *dig* a pool?

KERRY
Doesn't matter cuz they're using this one.

QUINN
Okay you're killing my vibe right now tho? Like don't you feel *different* at all?

KERRY
I guess. A little.

Quinn clocks Kel in the pool. Sizes him up.

QUINN
Who's the new guy?

KERRY
Transfer. GOD, he's so—

QUINN
Fast.

KERRY
I was gonna say hot.

QUINN
That too.

KERRY
Gaaaayyy.

QUINN
What's his event?

MORGAN
Hundred fly.

*Quinn screams a little.
There's Morgan, swimsuit and sweats, already stretching.*

QUINN

Were you there the whole time?!

MORGAN

How's your first week?

KERRY

It's aight. Geometry's lame.

QUINN

He probably sucks.

KERRY

Um he was on the SEA WOLVES.

QUINN

That doesn't mean anything.

MORGAN

Actually—

QUINN

I KNOW WHAT IT MEANS I'M JUST BROODING

KERRY

Why's he in so early?

MORGAN

Wanted to get used to the space.

QUINN

WOWWWWWW

MORGAN

What.

QUINN

He's probably like a

jerk

or something

Look at that fastskin. I bet his parents are rich. Look at those shiny-ass goggles.

KERRY

I bet he's cool.

QUINN

Why don't you marry him already?

KERRY

Oh man that would make your mom so mad

QUINN

Was that a your mom joke, or

KERRY

No, you dip, I'm saying cuz she wants us to get married

QUINN

Oh. Yeah. She really does.

KERRY

Does she hate Lilliana or what?

QUINN

Ohh yeah.

KERRY

Oh my god watch his turn

QUINN

I'm watching

KERRY

No you're not

QUINN

I'M WATCHING

Kel finishes his fly—and launches into backstroke.

KERRY

Holy—he's doing like a thousand IM!

QUINN

Dang, I gotta step it up.

KERRY

Yeah.

QUINN

Don't agree with me!

KERRY

I'm being supportive.

QUINN

No in this case agreeing with me is not being supportive

KERRY

I support your progress

QUINN

You don't even know your times

KERRY

No I do not

QUINN

See?

KERRY

We have different priorities.

QUINN

That's not a priority, that's just hating swim meets.

MORGAN

You should show up more.

KERRY

I HATE THEM

MORGAN

You're pretty fast. You could land us a few A-times.

QUINN

See, THAT'S being supportive.

KERRY

Tell Lilliana to stop plucking her eyebrows. That would be supportive.

QUINN

Dude!

KERRY

It's not my fault she has tadpoles on her face!

Joey enters. Overstuffed backpack plus her net bag.

JOEY

Sup nerds

QUINN

Where you been?

JOEY

SAT prep.

MORGAN

So you come in with "sup nerds"?

JOEY

Girl I saw you on the news doing the bridge!

KERRY

Whoa, you swam the bridge?

MORGAN

Oh man, barely. I thought I was gonna have to flag a rescue boat.

KERRY

Dangit I missed it!

MORGAN

My mom recorded it, but like, don't watch it.

JOEY

You were so good, oh my god. I could never do open water.

QUINN

Yeah, man, cuz like... sharks.

JOEY

...Also it's a 3K in opposing currents? In freezing water?

MORGAN

But yeah. Sharks.

JOEY

Who's that?

QUINN

New guy. He's a jerk

KERRY

He's not a jerk

QUINN

How do you know he's not a jerk?

KERRY

How do you know he is a jerk?

JOEY

Has he noticed you drooling into the pool?

KERRY

Um no he's really focused?

QUINN

You and your scandalous lusting.

KERRY

sCaNdALoUs LuStiNg!

QUINN

I said what I said!

JOEY

He's good.

MORGAN

Ranked in his old district. Good thing since Shauna and Georgie graduated.

KERRY

Oh come on, he's hot too!

JOEY

Quinn, your mom's gonna be mad when she hears there's competition.

QUINN

Okay you know what?

KERRY

Why does she love me so much?

QUINN

Cuz I'm not dating you.

KERRY

Oh.

QUINN

Also you're age-appropriate. Otherwise it'd be Joey a hundred percent.

JOEY
Oh, I'm too old for you?

QUINN
SO old.

JOEY
I mean I am ancient

KERRY
So close to death

JOEY
I can feel myself withering away

KERRY
Better write that last will and testament

QUINN
I'm sad now

Lupe enters at a run, out of breath and ecstatic.

LUPE
DARA TORRES!

Quinn screams a little.

QUINN
What?

LUPE
DARA. FREAKING. TORRES. JUST BROKE THE AMERICAN RECORD FOR THE 50 FREE—AGAIN!

MORGAN
What's her new time?!

LUPE
24.53 seconds. She's going to the Olympics, I can feel it!

MORGAN
Trials aren't until June.

KERRY
Didn't she like, just have a kid?

QUINN
Also isn't she like 40?

LUPE
YES IT MAKES HER MORE AMAZING I LOVE HER SO MUCH I'M GONNA DIE! whoa, who's that?

MORGAN
New teammate.

LUPE
He's hot

QUINN
Lupe, you don't even—

LUPE

What

QUINN

You're just
so gay

LUPE

Shut up no I'm not

QUINN

Like I'm a little gay, but you're really really gay

KERRY

for Dara Torres

LUPE

shut UP he's hot okay? I could
jump

...

that

QUINN

...

LUPE

Whatever, I'm not even interested in anyone.

KERRY

Guys he's about to turn GUYS HE'S DOING IT

Kel turns from backstroke and launches into breast.

JOEY

Dang, he just spanned like half the pool on his first push!

QUINN

It's not that impressive.

MORGAN

It's pretty impressive.

KERRY

Look at his butt.

LUPE

I am

KERRY

Quinn look at his butt

QUINN

Yeah I know

KERRY

It's a good butt, Quinn

LUPE
Shouldn't we be doing dryland?

MORGAN
You know what? Yes.

QUINN
Nark.

MORGAN
Get your butts off the diving blocks if y'all are done objectifying your new teammate.

KERRY
Not quite done

MORGAN
Jumping jacks!

KERRY
UGH

Kerry starts doing jumping jacks (still tracking Kel's progress)

MORGAN
Quinn

QUINN
Ya

MORGAN
Warm up

QUINN
Where's Coach

MORGAN
Running late. Did you do your warm-ups

QUINN
(Russian accent) IN SOVIET RUSSIA, WARM-UPS DO YOU

MORGAN
imma kick your ASS—

Quinn busts into jumping jacks. Morgan, Joey and Lupe unroll mats and stretch

KERRY
He's gonna do it! Oh never mind he's still going. Wait no!

QUINN
I bet he shaves his legs.

KERRY
You shave your legs.

QUINN
for the streamliiiiine~

KERRY
So it's cool when you do it but not when he does?

QUINN

Why do you care? You don't even shave.

KERRY

Bitch I have sensitive skin

QUINN

Ooooooh she said biiiitch—

KERRY

(I asked my mom if I could say it and she said as long as it's not at school)

QUINN

You... asked your mom... if you could swear

Kel launches into freestyle. Kerry punches the air and applauds.

KERRY

YEEEEEEAAAAHHH BRING IT HOME!

...or whatever

QUINN

You're such a sloop.

KERRY

You're a sloop!

QUINN

You wanna do breast drills in front of him!

KERRY

Shut UP

LUPE

um, I think he's probably faster than Kerry. (no offense)

QUINN

Lupe.

LUPE

What?

KERRY

You do breast drills in front of hot dudes...?

LUPE

Why?

KERRY

So when they look up to breathe you're in the middle of a kick? Give em a little preview of the—

Kerry does a breaststroke kick on one leg—putting her crotch in Lupe's face

LUPE

Ohhhh.

Wait, why?

QUINN

Lupe, stop making her explain it, it's ruining the joke.

LUPE

That's weird though!

JOEY

Yeah it's pretty weird.

MORGAN

If someone's behind me touching my toes and shit, I kick water in their face until they back off.

QUINN

It's true, she does.

LUPE

Look, I just don't get why you want the new guy to see your—you know...

KERRY

Um he has a name

JOEY

Your crotch has a name?

QUINN

Your crotch is a he?

KERRY

No, you dip. KEL. The new guy's name is KEL.

QUINN

tHe NeW GuY's nAMe iS kEL

KEL

Hey guys.

Quinn screams a little.

LUPE

Whoa.

Kel is dripping wet and honestly kinda ripped.

JOEY

...Hi.

KEL

Hey.

JOEY

...Uh. I'm Joey.

A look. But it's like, a LEWK.

KEL

So is it Joanne or...?

JOEY

Huh? Oh. Josephine.

KEL

That's pretty.

JOEY

Ha, thanks. Joey's fine though.

KEL

I like that too.

QUINN

...ummm

JOEY

Oh. This is uh, Quinn, Lupe, Kerry—

KEL

A coed team—that's new.

JOEY

Low enrollment.

KEL

Aaaand, Morgan, right? Thanks for letting me in early. I'm still getting used to the short course.

MORGAN

No problem. Grab a mat.

QUINN

oooooh, he swam in a LoNg-CoUrSe pool, next stop oLyMplcSsSsS

Kel unrolls a mat. The team stretches. Quinn side-eyes Kel.

KEL

...

QUINN

...Cool fastskin, bro.

KEL

Thanks.

QUINN

Nnnnew guy. With nnnnew equipment. Cooool.

KERRY

Dude—

QUINN

Where's Coach again?

A long, LOUD whistle. Everyone scrambles to their feet and rolls up their yoga mats.

Caps on, pants off, goggles up. A bunch of scurrying little seals.

Three bursts of the whistle. Lupe, Kerry, Quinn, Morgan, and Joey claim their lanes.

Kel hesitates, then takes his spot in front of the last lane.

Goggles on. GO.

200 back, 200 breast, 200 free

The girls' locker room.

Joey in her suit and a towel. Kerry in her suit and a parka.

Quinn is also there. Just chillin on the sink in his speedo.

KERRY

Just say it.

JOEY

I'm not gonna say it.

KERRY

Come on we're all thinking it, just say it! Say it say it say it say it—

JOEY

FINE! He's hot, okay?

KERRY

SOMEone's in LoOoOvE...

JOEY

SOMEone's PrOjEcTiNg...

QUINN

Girls are confusing.

JOEY

Where's your pants?

QUINN

I forgot em.

JOEY

How did you forget pants?

QUINN

Just let me live my life.

Joey pulls her swim cap off, releasing a waterfall into the sink.

JOEY

UGH WHY DOES MY HAIR RETAIN SO MUCH WATER

QUINN

Just chop it all off! Check it out, I just rub my head and it's dry!

Quinn speed-rubs his head

JOEY

Ew, you're getting hair water on me!

KERRY

UGH I don't wanna get changed

QUINN

(don't ever change)

Joey changes under her towel.

KERRY

You think I can just wear my parka in the car?

JOEY

You do it all the time.

KERRY

Yeah in my dad's car, not your dad's car. Can I have a wet butt in your dad's car?

JOEY

Quinn. Quinn. Quinn.

KERRY

QUINNIFER!

QUINN

What!

JOEY

Where's your parka?

QUINN

Forgot it.

JOEY

Where's your sweatshirt?

QUINN

~_(\ツ)_/

JOEY

How do you keep losing your clothes?

KERRY

He's a sloop

JOEY

Do your parents just buy you new stuff every week?

The locker room door opens.

MORGAN

OHMYGOD WHY ARE YOU IN HERE?!

QUINN

WHY IS EVERYONE QUESTIONING ME

MORGAN

QUINN GET OUT

QUINN

NO!

MORGAN

I'M TELLING COACH!

QUINN

UGH GET OUT MORGAN

MORGAN
YOU GET OUT! GAH!

Morgan storms out. A beat of silence.

LUPE
...Guys I just put in two tampons on accident

Quinn screams a little.

JOEY
Lupe how long have you been in here?

LUPE
Uh like the whole time?

QUINN
(crap did I say anything mean about her)

KERRY
(why would you say something mean about Lupe?)

QUINN
(I wouldn't, I just got nervous)

JOEY
...I'm sorry what? Lupe, you what?

LUPE
I put a tampon in but I already had one in

JOEY
Why would you do that?

LUPE
Well I didn't know I already had one in

JOEY
How did you not know?

LUPE
I dunno, it was like—
I just put another one in there

QUINN
Whoa, you can do that?

JOEY
Can you get it out?

LUPE
I think so

JOEY
You think so?

QUINN
Kerry can you fit two up there?

KERRY

Ew no!

...I dunno actually I haven't gotten mine yet

QUINN

Gotten your what?

...OHHHHH. Wait really?

KERRY

I'M A LATE BLOOMER OKAY

JOEY

Lupe take them out

LUPE

But I just put this one in I don't wanna waste it

JOEY

Do you wanna get TSS?

LUPE

Huh?

JOEY

Have you ever actually read the instructions?

LUPE

um not thoroughly

JOEY

You're gonna get TSS.

LUPE/QUINN

What's that?

JOEY

Toxic Shock Syndrome? Oh my god read the instructions

LUPE

Well I don't have them with me

JOEY

Just take them both out okay

QUINN

(what's toxic shock syndrome)

JOEY

I'll give you another tampon just take them out

QUINN

(what is it tho)

KERRY

(I dunno, look it up!)

Joey passes Lupe a tampon under the stall door.

JOEY

Make sure you take out the other two before you put that one in.

LUPE

Shut up.

Everyone waits with great anticipation. Sounds of paper tearing. Silence.

JOEY

...Lupe?

LUPE

...

Okay we're good. We're all good!

Everyone applauds.

QUINN

That was a whirlwind of emotions.

WHISTLE.

KERRY

Coach!

QUINN

HIDE!

Quinn dives into a stall and climbs up onto the toilet.

The door opens just a crack.

KERRY

QUINN'S NOT IN HERE ANYMORE, HE JUST LEFT

LUPE

Hey Coach, will I get TSS if I put two tampons in at the same time?

Silence.

The door closes.

Lupe comes out of her stall. Quinn stays in his.

QUINN

Good diversion!

LUPE

I was actually asking.

JOEY

So my advice wasn't good enough?

LUPE

Well are you a doctor?

JOEY

is Coach a doctor?

KERRY

Good point. Trust no one.

QUINN
anarchy fo LYFE

LUPE
I owe you a tampon.

JOEY
Don't worry about it.

LUPE
You still haven't gotten your period? Aren't you fourteen?

KERRY
Um, not until December?

LUPE
Oh, I thought you were older

KERRY
Thanks?

LUPE
You're just like
Tall. Like you're way taller than Joey.

JOEY
Thanks.

LUPE
I guess that's why your suit goes so far up your butt huh
cuz you're so tall

KERRY
Uh yeah, thanks Lupe

LUPE
No not like in a bad way I just noticed
it goes up your butt

JOEY
uh

LUPE
You should probably buy a bigger suit

KERRY
if I size up it'll be too baggy

LUPE
Can't you get a long size?

KERRY
This is a long size.

LUPE
Oh. Okay but it's like a LOT

KERRY

yeah I get it, I have a long torso and my suit goes up my butt thanks

LUPE

ugh I meant it as like a compliment

KERRY

uh

LUPE

But not like gay. Not in a gay way.

...umm anyway my mom's here

KERRY

cool

JOEY

See you Tuesday

LUPE

You're not doing Monday practice?

JOEY

I can't do Mondays anymore. I have tutoring.

LUPE

Why do you need a tutor?

KERRY

she's tutoring other people

LUPE

Oh, cool.

KERRY

I'll be here Monday! You wanna do Spanish homework after?

LUPE

uhh yeah okay

KERRY

Cool! NOS VEMOS EL LUNES DESPUES DE NADAR!

LUPE

uhhhhhhh

yeah

bye

Lupe leaves. A beat.

QUINN

I. AM LEARNING. SO MUCH.

Quinn comes out of the stall.

KERRY

Are you still coming over?

JOEY

I think so? It's probably the last time until break though.

QUINN

Awh, the end of an era.

KERRY

wow don't make it sad

JOEY

Whose house?

KERRY

MINE ONETWOTHREEDIBS

JOEY

Wow.

QUINN

I dunno if my mom's gonna let me.

KERRY

She said it's the LAST TIME QUINN

QUINN

Yeah but I'm kind of grounded?

KERRY

I'll help you with the geometry homework! It'll be eDuCaTiOnaL! Come on. C'mon.
C'maaaahhh—

QUINN

Okay, shit!

JOEY

We should've invited Lupe.

KERRY

She never comes anyway.

JOEY

We still should've invited her.

QUINN

She's right, your suit does go up your butt.

JOEY

Are you gonna call your mom?

QUINN

I ran out of minutes.

JOEY

It's the 12th. You ran out of minutes in 12 days?

QUINN

I got people to call

KERRY

(I can't believe you got a phone)

JOEY

You can use mine, just keep it quick.

KERRY

(I can't believe you both got phones)

QUINN

No it's okay, we can stop at my house on the way

JOEY

For clothes?

KERRY

He has the unicorn PJs at my house!

JOEY

Then why do we need to stop at your house?

QUINN

my mom bought Oreo- O's

KERRY

she WHAT

QUINN

she bought Oreo- O's

KERRY

LET'S GO RIGHT NOW

JOEY

Get dressed, Kerry.

KERRY

YOU SAID I COULD HAVE A WET BUTT IN YOUR DAD'S CAR WE'RE GOING RIGHT NOW

LUPE'S EVENT: 50 free

Lupe alone in the pool.

LUPE

I'm the only swimmer in my family. My older brothers play soccer. My little sister's a dancer. I don't think my parents ever thought I was gonna do any sports. Especially not swimming.

I remember my very first class. It was my first time in a pool without floaties on my arms, and I didn't want to put my head underwater. *Babies* can do it without even thinking, but I was SO scared. My goggles kept filling up because I cried so much, so... I took them off. And then I put my nose in the water. And then my forehead, and then my whole face, and then my whole head, and... I loved it.

I remember learning frog kick—that's what they call breaststroke kick when you're little. "Frog kick." Because it looks—y'know—like a frog kicking? And monkey-airplane-soldier! You're on your back, and you curl up your arms and legs like a monkey, and then you extend them out like an airplane, and then you bring it all into a straight line like a little toy soldier and *glide* through the water.

I remember my first flip turn. I got so much water in my nose—it stung sooo bad, like the biggest sneeze ever that just wouldn't come out. And the first time I couldn't get water out of my ear? OH man.

...

I remember when I was ten, I was the only girl in fifth grade to get my period, and everyone knew I had it because I couldn't get in the pool, and I heard the word "slut" for the first time

um

...

Oh—catch-up leg-touch fingertip-drag! It's a freestyle drill. It's my favorite. You have to come back to streamline before you pull your hand back, and when you pull it through the water you brush it against your thigh, and on the return, you drag your fingers across the surface. It's for form improvement, but it also makes me feel like I'm learning freestyle for the first time again.

We do it so fast now, we do it in sprints and hundreds and four hundreds, and take the whole thing for granted, but it's this amazing, like—*full gesture* that propels us through the water. It's so cool.

...

I really like how I feel in the water.

I'm like that egg! I'm like the mermaid egg in *Goblet of Fire*. There are poems in my body that I can only read underwater. On land, I'm—

Like I know I'm kinda clumsy and—

I mean I know I don't look like a popular girl.

But in the water, my body knows what it's doing.

And I'm fast and I'm strong and I'm coordinated and it feels just...

Just really good.

Dryland Warm-ups

September. The deck. Dryland.

For the record, dryland is a liminal space between school and practice, where everyone's in swimsuits but also still half-clothed and full of angst.

Morgan kneels on Joey's feet, flipping through flash cards as Joey does crunches.

Kerry and Quinn share a yoga mat, also sharing white earbuds connected to a dumb tiny square.

Kerry scribbles on her jeans with a sharpie.

MORGAN

Average acceleration.

JOEY

Change in velocity over elapsed time.

MORGAN

And what's the formula?

JOEY

a equals dv over dt .

MORGAN

Newton's first law.

JOEY

An object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion at a constant velocity unless acted upon by a net external force.

MORGAN

And it's also known as?

JOEY

Law of inertia.

MORGAN

Nice! Kerry, do some goddamn stretches. Formula for net force.

JOEY

Mass times acceleration!

Kerry does an exaggerated leg stretch and yanks Quinn's earbud out. He screams a little.

KERRY

Sorry!

Quinn scrambles to put his earbud back in.

QUINN

Okay here it comes—aaaaaand—

KERRY

WAKE ME UP

QUINN

~wake me up in/side~

KERRY
I CAN'T WAKE UP

QUINN
~wake me up in/side~

KERRY
SAVE MEEEEHHHHHHHHH

QUINN
~CALL MY NAME AND SAVE MEEE / FROM THE DARK~

MORGAN
SHUT THE / FUCK UP

KERRY
WAKE ME UP oh are we done, okay

MORGAN
Are you even stretching?

KERRY
It huuuuuuuuurts

JOEY
She has cramps.

MORGAN
Suck it up, girl.

JOEY
Cut her some slack, it's her first one.

MORGAN
Aww! Welcome to womanhood!

KERRY
I DON'T WANT IT

Lupe rushes in.

LUPE
Am I late?

QUINN
Yeah you missed it! We were talking about Kerry's period.

LUPE
Oh you finally got it?

MORGAN
(So have you talked to Kel yet?)

JOEY
(Nooo, just ask me about vectors or something—)

MORGAN
(I'm just saying—)

*Kel rushes in and slings his bag down just as:
WHISTLE!
Everyone starts leg and arm stretches.*

MORGAN
Speak of / the—

JOEY
(dude!)

KEL
Hey.

JOEY
Hey! Hi. You made it!

MORGAN
So I guess we're done with the quizzing?

KERRY
UGH IT HURTS

KEL
You okay?

QUINN
Ha!

MORGAN
Have you taken anything?

KERRY
(I'm really bad at swallowing pills)

KEL
I have a power bar if you wanna take one with food?

KERRY
(DOES EVERYONE ON THE TEAM NEED TO KNOW I'M ON MY PERIOD)

KEL
Oh. Sorry. I thought it was like a leg cramp or something.

KERRY
oh. (goddammit.)

WHISTLE: crunches. Kerry does a lot of groaning and whining.

MORGAN
You guys going to homecoming?

LUPE
I think so? I don't have a date though.

MORGAN
That's okay. Did you vote for Homecoming Court?

LUPE
Not yet.

JOEY

Pass out the flyers!

Morgan rolls over and passes out flyers featuring her and some cute dude.

KERRY

Whoa, is that your boyfriend?

MORGAN

Uh, yes? You'd know that if you ever came to a meet.

LUPE

You'll be such a good homecoming queen.

KERRY

Who're you up against?

MORGAN

Reba McGuire and Keenan Blacksmith.

KERRY

REEBUH MUH-GWAHR? Is she from ALA-BAY-MUH?

MORGAN

Um. I dunno.

KERRY

They sound like bitches.

JOEY

Should you be saying "bitches" at school?

KERRY

(it's AFTER school)

QUINN

you gonna ditch if you lose?

MORGAN

No, ASB has to be there. Also I reeeally appreciate your confidence.

KERRY

You're on ASB?

LUPE

She's the vice president!

MORGAN

Haven't you seen us at the rallies?

KERRY

I don't go to rallies.

JOEY

They have a sign-in sheet. How do you get out of it?

KERRY

Ummmm, I sign in and then I leave?

MORGAN
Are you going?

JOEY
I still haven't decided. I voted for you already though.

KEL
You should go!

JOEY
Huh?

KEL
What?

WHISTLE: push-ups.

KERRY
So do you think REEBUH's gonna beat you?

MORGAN
Dude I don't know. She's rich and pretty and blonde. Sooo, yeah, maybe.

LUPE
You're prettier than her.

MORGAN
Thanks. I don't really want to compare, though.

JOEY
Come on, you're Student Body VP. She doesn't even do any extracurriculars, she's just blonde.

MORGAN
They're telling me to run for President next year but like, I don't think I'll have time. With college tours on top of everything, I'd probably have to drop either cheer or debate club, so

KERRY
Drop cheer!

MORGAN
Okay you know what?

JOEY
Honestly I have to agree. If you had to drop one?

*Kerry tries to get a "drop cheer" chant going. It doesn't work.
She gives up on push-ups. She lies down on her face and waits for the whistle.*

MORGAN
Look, I know you guys don't think cheer is, like, a rEaL sPoRt or whatever, but it's really difficult, okay? It requires a lot of strength and coordination and—

KERRY
Miniskirts?

WHISTLE: jumping jacks.

MORGAN
It's actually pretty cool—if you ever went to a game, showed some school spirit—

KERRY

yeah no. I like swimming because it's a team sport but it's not really a TeAm SpOrT, y'know?

MORGAN

You are such a goddamn child.

KERRY

um as you may recall, I have recently ascended into womanhood so OWWW

Kerry does one-armed jumping jacks, clutching her belly.

QUINN

Hey new guy

KEL

Uh is that me? Cause I've already been here / for like a month—

QUINN

Did you check out my shuffle?

He proudly wiggles his dumb square thing.

KEL

Oh that's pretty sweet

QUINN

Yeah I know huh. Bet you don't have one of these babies.

KEL

Yeah no my iPhone holds some music so

QUINN

Wait what?

KEL

I said it holds some music so / I don't need my—

QUINN

You have an IPHONE THOSE THINGS ARE LIKE 600 BUCKS

KEL

Yeah it's got 8 gigs of internal storage, it's pretty sweet

QUINN

Can I hold it?

KEL

Yeah no, we're doing jumping jacks so

WHISTLE: chair sits against the wall.

QUINN

You going to homecoming?

KERRY

Why, you wanna be my date?

QUINN

uh no, I'm taking Tiff?

Kerry clutches her heart.

KERRY

AH! Shootin me down like Hedwig over here!

LUPE

Wait what?

JOEY

(Dude!)

LUPE

Someone shoots Hedwig?

JOEY

(Not everyone's read it yet, KERRY)

LUPE

Does someone shoot Hedwig?!

KERRY

Didn't you JUST break up with Lilliana?

QUINN

so?

LUPE

GUYS DOES SOMEONE KILL HEDWIG

KERRY

So you're such a sloop!

QUINN

It's supply and demand! Blame capitalism!

LUPE

SOMEONE TELL ME IF HEDWIG DIES

KERRY

LUPE! HEDWIG IS FINE!

LUPE

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU/UUUUUUUU—

KERRY

yeah no she goes and lives on like a like an owl sanctuary, I dunno! stop yelling!

LUPE

OH MY GOD

JOEY

You're making it worse.

LUPE

I HATE YOU SO MUCH!

Whistle-whistle-whistle: clothes off, caps on, goggles up, line up.

WHISTLE: Go.

BUTTERFLY ARM DRILLS

Late September. Everyone in the pool working on fly drills:

*Regular dolphin kick
left arm only for one, two, three strokes
right arm only for one, two, three strokes
both arms for one, two, three strokes
Kerry and Quinn touch the wall.*

QUINN

Kerrygold Buttah

KERRY

Ya

QUINN

Wanna go to winter formal with me?

KERRY

Dances are gay

QUINN

You're gay

KERRY

You're gayer than the Yuletide

QUINN

I'm asking you to winter formal. That's pretty hetero

KERRY

But like, homecoming is next weekend so slow down maybe?

QUINN

And?

KERRY

And you're dating Tiff still so maybe don't ask other girls to dances?

QUINN

Pretty sure she's gonna break up with me after homecoming.

KERRY

Also winter formal's in December?

QUINN

Ya but you have to get permission slips in way early

KERRY

How early?

QUINN

Like end of October

KERRY

That's still like a month

QUINN

Ya but you're really bad at remembering stuff

*The whistle blows. They push off.
Joey and Morgan touch the wall.*

JOEY

Have you started college apps?

MORGAN

A few. I'm still looking for good athletic scholarships.

JOEY

You could get an academic scholarship.

MORGAN

I need it to cover room and board.

JOEY

I don't think I'm good enough for a college team.

MORGAN

Don't even worry. You're only gonna be sixteen when you graduate—you could take a gap year.

JOEY

No way.

MORGAN

Why not?

*The whistle blows. They push off.
Kel and Kerry touch the wall.*

KERRY

...Sup.

KEL

Sup.

Whistle. Kel pushes off. Lupe touches the wall.

KERRY

Hey Lupe, you wanna study together?

LUPE

What like right now?

KERRY

No like this weekend. I need help with Spanish

LUPE

Uhhhhh sure yeah that sounds great

KERRY

Dude you don't have to, I'm just asking.

*Whistle. They push off.
Morgan and Quinn touch the wall.*

QUINN
You're really fast.

MORGAN
Thanks.

QUINN
No like can you slow down it's kind of annoying

MORGAN
Ha! Catch up, beeitch.

QUINN
OOOOHHHH DANG

*Whistle. They push off.
Lupe, Joey, and Kel touch the wall. Joey pushes off.*

LUPE
I feel really out of shape.

KEL
You're doing great.

LUPE
I guess this is pretty easy for you, huh.

KEL
Fly's hard for everyone.

Quinn touches the wall.

LUPE
I look like a drowning fish.

QUINN
Fish can't drown.

LUPE
This one can. Ugh my goggles are leaking

Morgan touches the wall.

KEL
Nobody looks good doing fly.

MORGAN
Michael / Phelps looks good doing fly

QUINN
I look good doing I mean yeah Michael Phelps

*Joey and Kerry touch the wall.
A short whistle. Nobody notices.*

KERRY
Y'ALL. Quinn just asked me to winter formal.

JOEY
Oh man your mom's gonna be so happy.

QUINN
Shut up Joey it's like a friend date

Whistle

KERRY
No it's good you're settling down! You've been kinda slutty.

QUINN
Lupe's the one who can fit two tampons up there.

LUPE
Hey!

KEL
Uhhhh

JOEY
Don't ask.

KERRY
Dude, that's not sluttiness, that's just like body type

LUPE
Thank you!

QUINN
So anyway how is your, uh

Whistle

LUPE
What

QUINN
You know

LUPE
No?

KERRY
Your hoo-ha

LUPE
What?

QUINN
Cabbage patch

KERRY
Garden of Eden

QUINN
Furry cove

KERRY
Salty Seagate

QUINN
Happy flaps

KERRY

Eww!

QUINN

oh THAT'S eww?

KERRY

I have my limits okay?

LUPE

Uh, guys?

JOEY

He's asking about your vagina.

QUINN

(oh my god Joey don't say the V-word!)

LUPE

OH! right. cuz of the tampon thing

MORGAN

Guys—

QUINN

Did you get TSS?

LUPE

I don't think so

MORGAN

Do you wanna sit on the deck? Because Coach is gonna make us sit on the deck.

QUINN

I know like everything about it now

KERRY

wat

QUINN

Toxic. Shock. Syndrome.

WHIIIIIIIISSSTLEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

A collective groan.

MORGAN

Wow, good job, Quinn.

QUINN

It's Lupe's fault!

LUPE

How is it my fault?

KERRY

Of course you blame the vagina.

WHIIIISSSTLEEEE

MORGAN
GUYS. Let's get this over with.

QUINN
Kerry's the one who—

MORGAN
COME ON.

Everyone slides out onto the deck.

And sits.

And sits.

And starts to shiver.

It's fuckin cold.

The second hand on the giant clock slides its slow way around a Whole. Damn. Minute.

*Various non-verbal moans, whimpers, chattering teeth can happen here—
all followed by violent shushing from the more responsible teammates.*

Whistle.

Everyone slides back into the pool with a sigh of relief.

*The whiteboard reads **800 fly.***

KERRY
800 FLY WHAT NOOO!

MORGAN
Sooner we're in, the sooner it's over.

KERRY
Wait. Quinn. You just

QUINN
What

KERRY
you just looked up vagina diseases online?

QUINN
Ya.

KERRY
Doesn't your whole family share a computer?

QUINN
Ya.

KERRY
So does your mom check the browser history?

QUINN
... oh

WHISTLE.

Goggles on.

GO.

quinn's event: 200 im

Quinn alone in the pool.

QUINN

In middle school, I was fucking cool.

Well. Comparatively. I'm not an idiot, I know nobody's ACTuALLY cool in middle school. But in the eighth-grade yearbook poll I was voted class clown *and* ~stud muffin~. I did track, soccer, swim team—we didn't have a football team but if we did I woulda been on it. And girls LIKED me. Not the "oh you're so cute I wanna put you in my pocket and carry you around" kinda liked me. They like... LIKE-liked me.

There was this moment, though. This moment where I realized—it didn't. actually. fuckin. matter. I was in seventh grade, had double A's in all my events, and... I turned thirteen. Didn't even do anything, just blew out some candles. And suddenly, my PR in the 200 IM—my best event—dropped to a double B.

They separate motivational times by gender and age group. For some events there's not a big difference, but mine's longer-distance, and, uh.

I had a great record when I was twelve. And one day later it was barely even worth writing down. I was gonna have to cut *thirteen seconds* to get back to a double A. That's not just shaving off a little rest time, that's weeks of training if you're going *hard*. It's not like you magically get faster and stronger on your birthday, either, but look at the motivational times and it's like, surprise, you actually suck now!

I should've been—I dunno. Excited? Like here's a new challenge, neat! Let's see if I can improve my time with my like growing body, or whatever.

But I was just mad. I was so mad I had this impressive-looking record and suddenly it wasn't impressive anymore. Suddenly I was like, average at best.

And outside of the pool it's the fucking same—here's this one high school for the whole district and everyone funnels in from other places and it doesn't matter what I got in the eighth grade polls because now I'm just another freshman. Another piece of like, fresh meat or whatever. I don't know anything about anything. I'm not cool. I'm not cute. I'm like—

...

I'm back at a double A now. I'm really close to a triple A, actually. But I turn fifteen next year, and then my PR's gonna drop back down under an A. Blow out the candles—back to double B. Back to average.

And it'll start all over again.

The thing is when you use a system like that, you never feel like you're improving.

It's just one step forward, two steps back.

All the time.

nothing changes.

8X50 breast on 1:00

Breaststroke drills.

*The deck clock keeping time. The whistle blows every minute.
(I mean it doesn't have to be an actual minute. It's theatre magic.)*

Kel gets to the wall first. He stretches his arms.

Quinn gets to the wall. Lifts his goggles, panting. Checks the clock.

QUINN

Yes!

Joey gets to the wall.

JOEY

How much time?

QUINN

Ten more seconds.

JOEY

Nice!

They high five across lanes.

Morgan gets to the wall. Gets ready to push off.

Lupe gets to the wall.

MORGAN

Five seconds.

Quinn smooshes his goggles back onto his face.

Kerry gets to the wall, grimacing.

KERRY

Morgan, I think—

The whistle blows. Everyone pushes off. They swim.

Kel gets there first. Joey next.

Morgan gets in and checks her time.

MORGAN

(shit!)

Lupe gets in a second before Quinn.

LUPE

Ha! Suck it, nerds!

(oh man I'm so sorry I just got really excited)

Kerry gets to the wall. She's having a hard time.

KERRY

Morgan my throat's like

MORGAN
Push through it.

*The whistle blows. Everyone pushes off.
Kerry gasps in some air and pushes off a second later.
Everyone but Kerry comes in more or less in the same order.
Everyone a little slower.
Morgan gets there with maybe a second to spare.*

MORGAN
GODDAMMIT!

*The whistle blows. Morgan shakes it off and launches.
Kerry gets in after the whistle.
She puts her arms up on the deck.
Rests her forehead and tries to breathe.
Everyone but Morgan gets in with a second to spare.
The whistle blows.
Everyone pushes off with a groan.
Morgan comes in, slowly.
She puts her arms on the deck.
She coughs.
Morgan and Kerry rest their foreheads
And try to breathe.
The whistle blows.
The whistle blows.
The whistle blows.*

4X100 CATCH-UP DRILL WITH PULL BUOY

*The girls' locker room. Joey, Kerry, Quinn, Lupe.
Morgan sits on a bench, silent.*

JOEY

You guys okay?

KERRY

I think so.

JOEY

Morgan?

MORGAN

Yeah, I'm good.

KERRY

It still hurts really bad.

QUINN

Is it heartburn?

KERRY

I don't think so.

QUINN

Did you eat too much?

JOEY

Did you remember to eat lunch?

KERRY

Guys I ate like a normal human amount

LUPE

Sometimes when I eat too much cheese—

QUINN

Lupe, ew.

LUPE

I think I'm allergic to milk.

JOEY

Do you get a rash or is it more bloaty?

LUPE

Oh *man* is it bloaty! I get real bloated.

JOEY

You're probably lactose intolerant.

LUPE

Noooo!

KERRY

It felt like my throat was on fire.

QUINN

Like hot Cheetos fire, or—

KERRY

Like *just-threw-up* fire.

LUPE

Dangit, I really like cheese.

JOEY

It might be acid reflux.

LUPE

You just said I was lactose intolerant.

JOEY

I meant Kerry might have acid reflux also I'm not a doctor

KERRY

Are you freakin kidding me?

JOEY

Uh no, I'm really not a doctor.

KERRY

You're so lame.

JOEY

You've been having pretty crazy growth spurts—

QUINN

Yeah she's way taller than you now.

JOEY

I know, thanks. I'm petite. Did anyone else in your family grow really fast?

KERRY

Uh my dad did I think?

JOEY

You also might be cramping?

QUINN

Wait, are you still on your period?

KERRY

(MY CYCLE'S STILL IRREGULAR OKAY)

QUINN

Whaaat? Have you been bleeding like this whole time?

KERRY

No! Ew!

QUINN

What do cramps feel like?

KERRY

Uhh... Giant Enemy Crab inside your uterus.

QUINN

oh no

KERRY

Or sea urchins. Or like someone's wringing out a towel made of all your insides—

QUINN

okay I get it!

JOEY

No you don't, honey.

KERRY

Um. I don't think it's cramps though. This feels like I just threw up. And also like I'm about to throw up.

JOEY

Did you drink water?

KERRY

Yes, MOM.

MORGAN

Quinn.

QUINN

Ya.

MORGAN

I need to change. Can you please get out?

JOEY

Are you sure you're feeling all right?

MORGAN

Why?

LUPE

You look kinda sick.

MORGAN

No I don't.

KERRY

You were lagging a little during that sprint drill.

MORGAN

So were you.

QUINN

Yeah also you're not yelling at me—

MORGAN

I'm just off my game today. It's not a big deal. Just... I dunno. Just shut up about it.

QUINN

...Sorry.

MORGAN
It's—
Don't worry about it. It's fine.

QUINN
I'll get outta here.

Quinn leaves.

Morgan changes in silence.

LUPE
...I think my mom's here.

JOEY
Bye, Lupe.

Lupe leaves.

KERRY
...I think it might be cramps

Kerry grabs her bag and goes into a stall.

JOEY
...Are you okay?

MORGAN
I'm good. I'll see you tomorrow.

JOEY
Get some rest.

MORGAN
Yeah. You too.

JOEY
Thanks.

Joey leaves.

*Morgan pulls a homecoming flyer out of her bag and stares at it for a while.
Maybe she cries a little. Maybe she holds it in.*

*From inside the stall, papery fumbling and muffled crying.
A box of tampons clatters to the floor, scattering yellow-wrapped tubes everywhere.*

MORGAN
Are you okay?

KERRY
...No.
Are you?

MORGAN
...

*Morgan stares at the flyer a little longer, then crumples it up and drops it on the floor.
She crouches down and starts picking up the tampons.*

3X200 i.m. kick drills

Early October.

IM kick drills. Two laps of each stroke (since it's a 25-meter pool.) So:

Start with fly. Dolphin kick, with kickboard or on your back

And then backstroke drill. Streamline, flutter kick on your back

And then breaststroke kick with kickboard

And then for freestyle it's flutter kick again, kickboard or streamline

But obviously you're gonna use a kickboard cuz you can't gossip if you're underwater

The whistle blows. Butterfly.

Morgan isn't there.

LUPE

What do you mean she withdrew?!

QUINN

I heard they broke up.

KERRY

I heard he dumped her.

LUPE

Who in their right mind would dump her?!

KERRY

Nick's a douchebag.

LUPE

Homecoming's in two days! Why would she withdraw so close to the dance?

KERRY

I can't believe we're gonna have Miss Alabama 2007 as our homecoming queen.

QUINN

Since when do you give a crap about homecoming?

KERRY

I don't! I just hate preppy blonde people.

(if anyone in the cast is blonde, she can say "no offense")

The whistle blows. Backstroke drill.

A long-ish moment of silence as everyone flutter kicks on their backs.

The whistle blows. Breaststroke drill with kickboards.

JOEY

Are you okay?

KEL

Huh?

JOEY

You're just really quiet. Usually everyone talks during kick drills.

KEL
Oh—no, I'm just concentrating.

JOEY
Oh. Sorry.

KEL
I could... talk more? If you want?

The whistle blows. Freestyle drill.

QUINN
So did you get the thing?

KERRY
What thing

QUINN
The permission slip

KERRY
Oh! Yea, my mom signed it. Why aren't you going with Tiff?

QUINN
I asked you like a month ago. Plus me an Tiff broke up

KERRY
Oh, aw

QUINN
(Scottish accent) YE CANNAE CHANGE THA PAST

KERRY
AYE, YE CAN ONLY CHANGE THA FYUTCHAR

LUPE
what are you guys quoting?

QUINN
Girl, get on our level.

KERRY
Did you tell your mom you're taking me?

QUINN
It's just winter formal

KERRY
Yeah but she's totally gonna read into it

*The whistle blows. Back to butterfly.
Kel watches Joey. Joey notices.*

JOEY
Um hi—

KEL
Hi! I was just. You, uh, have a little flutter in your dolphin kick.

JOEY

I do?

KEL

Yeah just a little one right between kicks. I don't think it's enough to get DQ'd but—

JOEY

No that's good to know! I don't really race fly, but thank you.

Joey frowns, concentrating on her flutter kick.

KEL

I didn't mean to make you self-conscious.

JOEY

No, I need to get better.

KEL

...Man, it's so much quieter than the indoor pool. No echoes.

JOEY

...

KEL

I thought it'd be colder out here?

JOEY

Wait until November.

QUINN

What are you wearing?

KERRY

Speedo I think?

QUINN

No to the dance. Should we like match colors or something?

KERRY

Ya maybe. AAH MY WRISTBAND!

QUINN

WHAT HAPPENED

KERRY

Oh I thought it ripped nevermind

LUPE

Dangit, my goggles are leaking again.

KEL

Probably time to throw em out.

LUPE

These are my only pair for the schoolyear.

KEL

Oh. Sorry.

LUPE
Why are you sorry?

The whistle blows. Backstroke drill. A moment of quiet.

Kel jumps out of the pool and jogs over to the net bags. He digs around for a second.

The whistle blows. Breaststroke drill. Kel jumps back in the pool.

He catches up to Lupe and tosses her a pair of goggles.

KEL
Here.

LUPE
Oh what! No I can't—

KEL
Go ahead.

Lupe pulls off her old goggles. Puts on the new ones, adjusts the straps.

LUPE
Dude thank you! I'll give them back after practice.

KEL
Keep em. They're spares.

LUPE
Okay—are you sure—if you change your mind I can totally give them back

The whistle blows. Freestyle drill.

KERRY
how about black

QUINN
as our color?

KERRY
Ya

QUINN
um okay? Should I get you like a corsage or

KERRY
Do they come in black?

QUINN
I don't think so

KERRY
lame

QUINN
There's probably like really dark purple

KERRY
That works

KEL
Do you wanna get together sometime?

JOEY

Sure! Um—for what?

KEL

To uh... study? You tutor, right?

JOEY

Oh. Yeah, sure—what do you need help with?

KEL

SAT prep? I'm pretty bad at tests.

JOEY

When are you taking them?

KEL

I haven't registered yet.

JOEY

You should do that. The deadline's tomorrow for the November one.

KEL

That's not the last one, is it?

The whistle blows. Butterfly.

KERRY

Hey Lupe.

LUPE

Yeah?

KERRY

¿Dónde están los pantalones de Quinn?

LUPE

...

KERRY

I asked where Quinn's pants are.

LUPE

Yeah I know that

I'm guessing they're in his bag or something

KERRY

No it was a joke. I'm joking in Spanish.

LUPE

Oh

...haha

The whistle blows. Backstroke. Silence except splashing.

The whistle blows. Breaststroke.

JOEY

Hey—you have P.E. with Morgan, right?

KEL

Yeah.

JOEY

Is she doing okay?

KEL

She wasn't there today.

JOEY

I'm kinda worried about her.

KEL

She probably has that flu going around. How come you don't have P.E. with us?

JOEY

Oh, this is my P.E. I log my hours and turn them in to Coach Barney for class credit so I can take more academic courses.

KEL

Whoa. And you're only a junior? So you're, what, sixteen?

JOEY

Fifteen, actually. I skipped.

KEL

(oh shit)

LUPE

Hey you wanna hang out on Sunday?

KERRY

Can't.

LUPE

We could practice Spanish!

KERRY

No I have temple

LUPE

You're Jewish?

KERRY

no we're Buddhist.

LUPE

I didn't know that

QUINN

How did you not know that?

The whistle blows. Freestyle.

KERRY

You should come sometime.

LUPE

to your temple?

KERRY

Well like come for Obon

LUPE

What's that?

QUINN

it's dope

KERRY

it's this festival we have to honor our ancestors? You missed this one but you should totally come next year.

LUPE

Oh that's awesome! Is it like Día de los Muertos?

KERRY

Yeah kinda but like way less skulls

QUINN

FEWER

KERRY

SHUT UP

KEL

So you're just getting it over with early? The, uh. SAT... stuff?

JOEY

No, I'm doing it now in case I get a bad score and need to do it again.

KEL

Wow.

JOEY

I just really want to get into a good school.

KEL

I think it's cool.

QUINN

You peepin Joey and new guy?

KERRY

Ya it's pretty ghey

*They do a stupid one-handed, kickboard-infused version of their secret handshake.
The whistle blows.*

4X100 FLY ON 1:50 WITH :10 REST

Dryland.

Lupe doing some weird-ass leg-in-the-air stretch.

Joey helping Kerry stretch out her abdomen.

Kerry in her one-piece and cargo pants. (Zip-offs. With straps in the back. Duh.)

KERRY

Owww.

JOEY

Keep breathing.

KERRY

I can't breathe when you're SQUISHING MY LUNG

JOEY

It hurts because you're not breathing.

KERRY

I'm BREATHING okay?

JOEY

Come on, big inhale...

Kerry flares her nostrils and inhales, making weird eye contact with Joey.

LUPE

Where is everybody?

JOEY

Quinn's on his way.

LUPE

Did he text you?

JOEY

No, his mom did.

KERRY

heh.

JOEY

Keep breathing.

LUPE

Where's Kel?

JOEY

No idea.

KERRY

Thought you guys were hanging out.

JOEY

uh I'm helping him with SAT prep?

KERRY

Suuuure. We've seen you hanging all over him.

JOEY

I do not hang all over anyone, thank you.

KERRY

You're such a bad liar.

JOEY

Hey Lupe.

LUPE

Hm?

JOEY

Where's Morgan?

LUPE

.....Hm?

JOEY

Morgan? You didn't mention her.

LUPE

Did... I... not?

JOEY

She's been gone for a few days.

LUPE

oh uh yeah I dunno hey sweet cargo pants

KERRY

thanks

LUPE

Are they zip-offs?

KERRY

Yup.

LUPE

Cool.

Quinn rushes in.

QUINN

AH, BEANS! IS COACH HERE YET?

KERRY

Hey Quinn, Joey's a bad liar right?

QUINN

Oh totally. Is she pretending she's not into Kel?

JOEY

The heck!

QUINN

Whoa, what's wrong with your face?

KERRY
I'M JUST BREATHING, OKAY?

QUINN
That's a weird breathing face.

JOEY
She's got acid reflux.

QUINN
Oh, you were right! Nice!

Quinn and Joey high-five.

KERRY
Did you just high-five my acid reflux?

QUINN
Man, you look like a dying whale.

KERRY
THANKS

QUINN
Sweet zip-offs

KERRY
actual thanks

QUINN
where'd you get em?

KERRY
Thrift store.

QUINN
Did they come with the straps in the back?

KERRY
Na I made those

QUINN
Nice

KERRY
Ya. OWWWW

JOEY
Breathe, stupid!

KERRY
YOU SUCK.

JOEY
Take it easy in the water today.

KERRY
I'm not getting in the water.

JOEY

Why not?

KERRY

(because you're not supposed to go in the water if you're bleeding)

JOEY

Um that's only if there's sharks

KERRY

WELL THERE'S SHARKS OKAY

JOEY

are you not using tampons yet?

KERRY

(I AM NOT READY FOR INVASIVE PROCEDURES)

QUINN

Where is everybody?

LUPE

I DON'T KNOW

QUINN

Whoa, chill! Lupe what's wrong with your face?

LUPE

This is just my face

QUINN

No there's something wrong with your face

LUPE

It's definitely just my face

QUINN

You look like you're gonna explode

LUPE

I have uhh gas

QUINN

No that's not your gas face

KERRY

Yeah that's not the gas face

LUPE

Wait, I have a gas face?

KERRY

AHA! CAUGHT IN A WEB OF LIES!

QUINN

Lupe, for real, wassup?

LUPE

NOTHING!

...uh I mean... nothing

JOEY

Lupe.

LUPE

OKAY! I heard Coach talking to Morgan's mom after practice last week and they uh they said the (...C-word)

KERRY

Hold up, what?!

JOEY

About Morgan?

LUPE

I heard it, okay?

QUINN

I mean she can be kind of a asshole sometimes but wow. The C-word?

LUPE

Yes!

KERRY

Is she suspended from the team?

LUPE

Why would she get suspended from the team?

QUINN

Like if she did something—I mean if they were using the C-word—

KERRY

Wait did *she* say the C-word or were they saying that *about* her?

LUPE

No I think she's just taking a break. You know, for treatment and stuff?

JOEY

Wait, what C-word are you talking about?

LUPE

Don't make me say it!

JOEY

Lupe.

LUPE

FINE!

...

(cancer)

KERRY

Lupe, that's not the C-word.

JOEY
Kerry.

KERRY
What?
...Oh.

LUPE
I told you okay, are you HAPPY

KERRY
Okay that's not the—
we're gonna come back to this later but—
Really?

QUINN
Fuck.

Kel enters.

KEL
Whoa, looks like a funeral out here.

...
What's going on?

JOEY
Nothing. It's fine.

QUINN
Hey! Lemme see your iPhone.

KEL
Why?

QUINN
I dunno tell me about the gigs or whatever

KEL
Seriously, what's going on?

QUINN
Dude we can't talk about it I'm distracting you okay

KERRY
I feel like it's weird not to talk about it.

QUINN
Don't be a dick, Kerry!

KERRY
How am I a dick? She has cancer, what am I supposed to do?

LUPE
Guys can you stop saying the C-word

KEL
Who are you guys talking about?

LUPE
um nothing no one

JOEY
Guys, seriously—

Morgan enters.

Silence. Everyone looks at her.

*She pulls a mat out of the rolling cart and rolls it out on the ground. Starts stretching.
After a moment, she clocks the silence. She looks at everyone looking at her.*

MORGAN
OH, GODDAMMIT!

LUPE
...

JOEY
...

KEL
...

KERRY
...

QUINN
...

MORGAN
Okay look, I don't really wanna—
I mean... can I just stretch with you guys? And like have it not be weird for a second?

KERRY
...

QUINN
...

LUPE
...

KEL
...

JOEY
...Yeah. Of course.

MORGAN
Thank you.

The team stretches together. It's silent. It's unbearable.

Everyone looks at Morgan.

Morgan looks at no one.

Joey looks for a way to save her.

JOEY

...Crunches. Let's go. Everyone on your back.

Everyone but Morgan starts doing crunches.

She hugs her knees and watches.

JOEY'S EVENT: 100 BREAST

Joey alone in the pool.

JOEY

Swim meet fun fact: kids who race multiple events like to make a chart on their wrist in sharpie—event, heat, lane—so they don't forget what they're swimming.

I never needed a chart though. I always knew exactly when and where to show up.

And then this one meet—

I'm on the block for the hundred breast. My best event. The girls in the last heat hadn't even touched my PR. Got my goggles on, and they say "on your marks," and I spread out my toes and lunge down and put my fingers on the edge of the block. And there's this long space between the voice and the beep. And in the space between the voice and the beep—my mind goes blank.

And there's the beep, we dive in, and a few seconds in, I realize I just did three strokes of fucking freestyle.

And one of the fat dads volunteering as a ref puts up a flag at my lane and I know I'm disqualified, and I'm so mortified I could drown myself right there but I switch to breaststroke and I finish the lap, and I finish the next three, and... I finish first.

I don't even cool down, I just climb out and take my DQ slip from the fat dad. And my parents wrap me up in my towel like "you swam so well, everyone gets DQ'd eventually, you still have three events," but I'm so freaking devastated I feel like I'll never love again or whatever—

And then I hear someone snickering behind me. And my face gets hot and my eyes start stinging and hooooly crap, I wanna cry so bad, and I can't turn around but I can't walk away, and I'm totally frozen--

And then someone behind me just says "HEY!"

And I turn around—

and it's Morgan.

And she's staring down this kid from another team—the one who was laughing behind my back.

And Morgan makes herself as tall as possible and like, towers over this girl and she's like,

"You wanna stop laughing right now."

And the girl stops laughing.

And then Morgan takes the DQ slip out of my hand and crumples it up and shoves it in the pocket of her parka. And then she just says, "You should eat a banana before your next event."

The other events went fine, and I kind of forgot about the DQ for a while. Of course when I got home it was all I could think about.

I was just mad that I screwed up what probably would have been a double A time.

I got a double A at the next meet, but.

I don't like messing it up the first time.

resistance bands

Mid-October.

Morgan sits in the chair by the deck clock, staring at the water.

She notices a few leaves floating on the surface.

She stands up and grabs the pool skimmer. The pole slips and clatters onto the deck.

She bends over to pick it up again. Puts her hands on her knees.

She starts to cry.

Joey enters, bag slung over her shoulder.

JOEY

Hey...

MORGAN

Oh! Hey.

JOEY

You okay?

MORGAN

Yeah! Totally, I was just um. There's some leaves in the, uh—

I was trying to. Get them.

Joey skims the leaves and dumps them out onto the deck.

JOEY

When did you start?

MORGAN

Earlier this week.

JOEY

So what is it? I mean I know it's— / but...

MORGAN

Acute myeloid leukemia. Abnormal white blood cells.

JOEY

Oh.

MORGAN

A few weeks for induction, and if I go into remission, periodic treatments for another couple of years.

JOEY

Wow. And um—what if you—

MORGAN

—don't go into remission?

JOEY

...Yeah.

MORGAN

Immunotherapy, stem cell transplants maybe. They said probably not radiation. I don't know.

JOEY
Have you had any side effects?

Morgan laughs.

MORGAN
I mean. I can't pick up the skimmer. So there's that.
I'm too scared to wash my hair.
Pretty stupid, huh.

JOEY
It's not stupid.
I'm sorry about Nick.

MORGAN
It's—not fine, obviously. But um

JOEY
Did he know?

MORGAN
Yeah. That's kind of why he dumped me.
He couldn't handle having a girlfriend with cancer. He said it made him "depressed."

JOEY
What an asshole.

MORGAN
Yeah, you're uh, you're not wrong.

JOEY
...
Why didn't you tell me?

MORGAN
I don't know. I guess I was worried you'd...

JOEY
...dump you too?

MORGAN
Yeah.

JOEY
Well... I won't.

A smile. A beat.

MORGAN
How's practice?

JOEY
Pretty bad.

MORGAN
That meet was rough.

JOEY

Yeah. The freaking Otters ranked above us. I'm honestly sorry you had to see that.

MORGAN

Wish I could join.

JOEY

Us too. We need you back.

Indistinct yelling from off.

MORGAN

I should head out.

JOEY

Do you wanna do dryland with us?

MORGAN

I'm not supposed to.

KERRY

NO I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY EVERYONE IS HIDING IN A FOREST

QUINN

THERE ARE LARGER THINGS AT PLAY IN BOTH BOOKS

KERRY

HARRY, HERMIONE AND RON? HIDING IN A FOREST. BELLA, EDWARD AND JACOB? HIDING IN A FOREST. LIKE WHAT ARE THEY SUPPOSED TO ACCOMPLISH BY GOING CAMPING?

QUINN

THEY'RE RIDING OUT THE STORM

KERRY

THAT'S FREAKING BORING

QUINN

WELL MAYBE IF YOU UNDERSTOOD THE NUANCE—

KERRY

THERE IS NO NUANCE!

QUINN

Oh, hi Morgan.

MORGAN

Hey guys. I was just heading out.

KERRY

Cool. we were just arguing about... whether fictional characters go camping for too long.

MORGAN

You guys ready for Breakers this weekend?

KERRY

Ya but I had to cut down my events. Last time I did four sprints and I threw up.

MORGAN

Yikes.

QUINN
I think I'm ready.

MORGAN
You think?

QUINN
I thiiiiink deeeefinitely.

Kel enters.

KEL
Hey Jo!

JOEY
Hi!

Morgan raises an eyebrow at Joey. Joey shrugs back.

KEL
Morgan. How you feeling?

MORGAN
Y'know. Good days. Bad days.

KEL
How's your appetite?

MORGAN
Comes and goes. I can't really eat what they told me to.

KEL
Peanut butter, right? With crackers?

MORGAN
Yeah. I can't stomach it.

KEL
The smell?

MORGAN
It's the fucking worst!

KEL
Try almond butter.

MORGAN
Really?

KEL
Yeah, if you can find some. Almost as much protein; that's all they're looking for. Smell's not as strong, and it's a little thinner—easier to get down. Better than nothing.

MORGAN
...Thanks, Kel.

KEL
Yeah.

Joey stares at Kel with new understanding. He flashes a quick, sad smile at her.

Lupe enters.

LUPE

Hey! Are you swimming with us?

MORGAN

No, not today. Soon though.

LUPE

How soon is soon?

MORGAN

Kick some Otter ass at Breakers for me this weekend, okay? Quinn, watch out for Darian.

QUINN

Who?

MORGAN

Darian Wynn? Riptides? Jefferson High? Bright orange cap with a shark on it?

QUINN

...?

MORGAN

Ugh, Quinn! He always kicks your ass in the 200 IM because you get lazy in the last 50. That's your *freestyle*. That's your *sprint*. Got it?

QUINN

You got it, Coach!

MORGAN

(Don't let Coach hear you say that.)

LUPE

You're not coming to the meet?

MORGAN

I, uh... we'll see. I'll try. Bye.

Morgan exits. An awkward beat.

JOEY

Kel—

Your mom?

KEL

...Yeah.

JOEY

I'm so sorry.

KEL

Let's uh. Let's just stretch. Yeah?

JOEY

...

All right! Big weekend. LET'S MOVE!

freestyle sprint drills

Kerry, Lupe, Quinn, and Kel do sprint drills in the pool.

Kel touches the wall first.

Kerry gets in next. She heaves a few rattling breaths.

Quinn and Lupe touch the wall at the same time, just as the whistle blows.

QUINN

Nice!

He and Lupe high five.

KEL

You came in last.

QUINN

Uh I was high fiving her for improving her time?

LUPE

Aww.

KERRY

Goddammit, this sucks!

QUINN

What? You beat us.

KERRY

Yeah I know, I'm a better sprinter. MY THROAT IS ON FIRE UGH

KEL

Take a cooldown lap.

KERRY

Um excuse me are you Coach now?

The whistle blows. Kerry groans and starts a cooldown lap.

QUINN

Hey new guy.

KEL

Oh my god, come / on—

QUINN

I saw your dad at Ace this weekend.

KEL

...What were you doing at Ace?

QUINN

I need to sand down my deck.

KEL

Your parents trust you with that?

QUINN

My *skateboard*, not my porch, rich boy.

LUPE

uhhh I might do a cooldown lap too

QUINN

Why didn't he come to Breakers this weekend?

KEL

Why do you care so much?

QUINN

Just curious.

KEL

...Have you seen Joey today?

QUINN

Nerp.

KEL

She never misses practice.

LUPE

She said she was working on a project today?

Kerry returns from the laziest cooldown lap ever.

KERRY

The heck? Am I the only one who has to cool down?

QUINN

You're the only one with acid reflux.

KEL

Hey, have you heard from Joey?

KERRY

Nerp.

KEL

I didn't see her in class.

QUINN

Me neither.

KEL

You don't have class with her.

QUINN

Yeah, well, not everyone can take chem and physics at the same time.

KERRY

Ha, yeah, she's probably got a time turner or something. (You've read THAT ONE, RIGHT LUPE)

LUPE

She said it wasn't a school project.

KEL

Wait, what?

QUINN

She skipped school?

KEL

You think she's okay?

KERRY

Why do you care so much HUH?

KEL

Uh... because she's our teammate and she never skips school and it's weird?

KERRY

Sure, I see you

KEL

Do another cooldown lap.

KERRY

Make me.

KEL

Dude.

The whistle blows.

KERRY

OH COME ON!

She does another cooldown lap.

Joey enters the pool area with a big plastic jar. Her hair has been cropped into a short bob.

Kel climbs out of the pool and starts to run over.

WHIIISTLEEE: He slows to a trot.

KEL

Hey! Are you okay?

QUINN

Whoa, your hair!

LUPE

It looks really good!

JOEY

Thanks—

KERRY

Did you donate it?

JOEY

Um yeah, and I'm fine I just

She shows them the jar. It's covered in pictures of Morgan, about a third of the way full with cash, maybe one or two checks.

KEL

Is that what you were doing today?

Lupe, Quinn, and Kerry climb out of the pool.

QUINN
Daaang.

JOEY
I just came by because I knew practice was ending soon and I thought maybe you guys would want to chip in

KEL
Yeah! Yeah absolutely.

KERRY
What's it for?

QUINN
Morgan's treatment, you dip.

KERRY
I'm not a dip, you're a dip

LUPE
I don't think I have any money.

QUINN
I do! Somewhere.

*They search their net bags.
Kel empties his wallet into the jar, glancing up at Quinn.*

JOEY
Kel, that's a lot—

KEL
Don't worry about it.

QUINN
I can't find my pants. Has anyone seen my pants?

LUPE
No, sorry

QUINN
Dangit! My money's in my pants

*Kerry goes through the many, many pockets of her cargo pants.
She finds a few crumpled-up dollar bills. She's visibly disappointed.*

KERRY
Um—this is all I have—

JOEY
That's great, thank you.

KERRY
Wait, I might have some quarters—

LUPE
Joey I feel really bad

JOEY

It's okay.

LUPE

I think I have some saved up at home? Can I give it to you tomorrow?

JOEY

Yeah, honestly any time, her chemo is like four weeks, so

QUINN

Where are my pants??

KEL

I can talk to my dad.

JOEY

Thank you, that's really nice

KERRY

¡¿DÓNDE ESTÁN LOS PANTALONES DE QUINN?!

LUPE

I'll ask my brother, he's friends with Morgan too

QUINN

GUYS!

HAS ANYONE SEEN MY PANTS?

KERRY

No!

QUINN

dangit I had like six dollars in there

*Morgan enters. She looks a little thinner, a little wearier.
She's wearing a colorful headwrap and carrying a pair of sweatpants.*

MORGAN

I saw these in the parking lot and took a / wild guess who—

QUINN

Oh what yes! Thank you!

He takes the pants triumphantly. Looks up at her and goes quiet.

MORGAN

You should probably stop getting naked in public.

QUINN

...Yeah

MORGAN

...It's a joke. I'm joking with you.

QUINN

Oh.

LUPE / KERRY / KEL

...

MORGAN

You cut your hair!

JOEY

Yeah!

MORGAN

It looks good.

JOEY

Thanks.

LUPE

She donated it!

MORGAN

You did?

JOEY

They need 10 inches, so it's a little shorter than I thought it would be, but

MORGAN

No it looks really good.

JOEY

Thanks

MORGAN

...did you do that for me?

JOEY

...Yeah, I guess—I mean I know it wouldn't go to you or anything, because you know, the wigs take a really long time to make, and we don't even have the same hair type or anything but

MORGAN

no it's nice. It looks really good.

JOEY

Thank you.

...the headwrap looks really good too.

MORGAN

Thanks.

How's practice?

QUINN / KERRY / KEL

...

LUPE

It's good!

um. We're not as good without you haha

MORGAN

I bet you're great

LUPE

Not really, honestly

MORGAN

I'd love to sit in sometime if that's—if that wouldn't be weird?

JOEY / LUPE / KEL

Of course not! / No that would be awesome / You should come tomorrow

MORGAN

Cool, I'd like that.

KERRY / QUINN

...

Morgan looks at Kerry and Quinn. They can't look at her.

MORGAN

...

guys, it's just me.

QUINN

No we know it's just / we're like

KERRY

we're not trying to be weird / it's just

QUINN

we kind of don't know what we're / supposed to

MORGAN

Guys. You can be, like, normal, you know?

KERRY

...

okay yeah

QUINN

yeah dude no for sure

MORGAN

...

KERRY

it's just weird

like I'm sorry but it's hella weird

MORGAN

It's weird for me too.

KERRY

Oh—jeez no I didn't mean—like obviously it's worse for you but—

MORGAN

it's okay.

KERRY

I'm trying to be like

not weird

MORGAN

I know. You can't help being weird.

Kerry laughs kind of too hard.

KERRY

...Yeah

MORGAN

...

What's that?

JOEY

Oh. I was hoping you wouldn't see it until it was full, but.

MORGAN

Joey—

JOEY

Everyone chipped in—

LUPE

I haven't yet but I'm bringing money tomorrow

MORGAN

You guys really don't have to—

KERRY

Kel put like his Whole Wallet in it—

KEL

It's not a big deal—

JOEY

It's not as much as I was hoping, but Mr Ferguson said we can keep it in the chem locker for the week and Mariela said she could take it on her free period when I'm in APUSH—

MORGAN

Holy shit you guys

Is she crying? No? Maybe a little?

LUPE

...

guys I'm really sorry I have to go home

MORGAN

Oh, god, yeah, practice is way over huh

LUPE

Joey I'll have the—I'll meet up with you at lunch?

JOEY

Yeah.

LUPE

Okay cool. um. Bye Morgan. I like your headscarf

MORGAN
Thanks.

Lupe leaves.

KEL
...I kinda have to—

JOEY
Yeah, no, that's cool, I'll see you at, um, tutoring

KEL
Yeah. Maybe see you at practice?

MORGAN
Yeah definitely.

Kel grabs his stuff and leaves.

JOEY
Kerry, do you have a ride home?

KERRY
Yeah, Quinn's mom is dropping me off.

JOEY
Cool are you guys having a / sleepover?

KERRY
I actually / didn't ask—

QUINN
No, I have homework.

KERRY
Oh. Okay.

A car honks.

QUINN
That's her.

KERRY
uh bye Morgan

MORGAN
Bye guys

She and Joey stand in silence for a moment.

MORGAN
...Thank you for doing all this.

JOEY
of course

MORGAN
Um, mostly just thanks for like... treating me like a normal person.

JOEY

Why wouldn't I?

MORGAN

You saw them. Everyone looks at me like there's this toxic cloud around me and every time I get near somebody it's like (LOOK OUT, SHE HAS CANCER!)

JOEY

That's really stupid.

MORGAN

I've actually had to tell people it's not contagious.

JOEY

...

MORGAN

You know it's actually not so bad.

JOEY

What's not so bad?

MORGAN

The hair.

JOEY

I mean I bet if anyone looks good without hair it's you.

MORGAN

Honestly I might keep shaving it after treatment just so Kelly Lyons can't stick her fingers in it.

JOEY

Kelly Lyons sticks her fingers in your hair?

MORGAN

Oh god, freaking everyone in cheer does.

Well.

I mean.

Not anymore.

She laughs a little. But it's sad.

JOEY

...

Are you coming to practice tomorrow?

MORGAN

I can't, I have another appointment.

Soon though.

KERRY'S EVENT: 50 BACK

Kerry alone in the pool.

KERRY

I don't think you can really appreciate how much I hate swim meets without knowing that my best event is 50 back... and I'm terrified of backstroke.

Backstroke is—every time it's like, what if I don't flip over in time and I bash my head into the wall and get knocked unconscious and drown? And like, the flags are your overhead marker, and you count your arm strokes between the flags and the wall so you know when to flip over. So, logically, I *know* when I have to turn, but there's this voice in the back of my head that's like HAY! WHAT IF YOUR ARMS GREW IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND YOU'RE COUNTING WRONG AND YOU BASH YOUR HEAD AND DIE!

I mean I've seen people bash their heads before because they missed the flags.
...mostly Quinn. But.

I have, uh, strong arms. That's why I'm good at back. I'm not built like a girl. I have really strong arms and wide shoulders and I don't look good in dresses and it's hard to find shirts that are long enough let alone racing suits so that's convenient

And I'm not even a competitive person. I mean at school I am, but not here. I can hardly even race anymore anyway. I sprint one lap and my stomach gets heavy and fire ants start crawling up my throat and it's so freaking stupid, like my stupid giraffe limbs and my stupid long torso and my stupid period and I'm totally being betrayed by my stupid body—FUCK!

...I'm not allowed to say "fuck" yet.

...

I hate swim meets. I hate them so much. Coach gets so mad at me, like "Kerry, you're fast, but you don't give a crap about racing, why are you here?" Why am I—

I'm here because I learned to swim at summer camp when I was five and Quinn was six, and we tried to keep our wristbands on until I turned six too but they ended up ripping on the first day of school.

I'm here because I like waiting in the car in my parka with the heater blasting while my dad runs in to 7-11 to get us hot chocolate

and I like after-practice sleepovers where Quinn and I have to sleep head-to-foot because my parents are kinda cool, but not cool enough to let us sleep in the same bed AND face the same direction but I get to poke his face with my toes and he gets really grumpy

I'm here because I love practice. I freaking love it. The pool's the only place where nobody's looking at me weird or making fun of me, and having long arms is actually cool and my body is useful and competition just totally ruins it.

I like beating my own time. I don't like worrying about the girl in the lane next to me.

...

I just go to meets for the cup-a-noodles.

8X (25 f19 – 50 free – 25 f19)

Halloween.

The girls' locker room. Kerry and Lupe are in full costume. Kerry is smearing her eyeliner. Quinn is in a half-assed costume (ideally a None Pizza With Left Beef T-shirt). Joey sits on the bench in her parka and sweatpants.

LUPE

Who are you supposed to be again?

KERRY

Dead Gerard Way.

QUINN

Dead Gerard Way looks a lot like regular Gerard Way.

KERRY

Yeah well I was gonna be Salad Fingers but my mom won't let me shave my head

LUPE

Are you guys going to the carnival?

KERRY

No?

LUPE

Why not?

KERRY

Uhhh, because it's for little kids and it's gay?

JOEY

That doesn't even make sense.

LUPE

Dude can you stop saying that?

KERRY

We're going trick-or-treating.

QUINN

Um—

KERRY

I saw Miss Alvarado at the safeway and she was buying freaking SOUR PATCH KIDS. Like WHOLE BOXES OF THEM!

Kerry tries to start their secret handshake. Quinn just gives her a look.

QUINN

You... still wanna do that?

KERRY

Um. What else would we do?

QUINN

Tony Eberhardt is throwing a party at his house.

KERRY

Tony Eberhardt smells like weed and wet dog.

QUINN

Well his parents are out of town, and he said I could bring whoever I want.

KERRY

Since when do you even talk to that guy?

QUINN

Whatever, it's better than going trick-or-treating.

KERRY

Are you kidding me? Parties are so lame!

LUPE

Yeah.

KERRY

So's the carnival in the freaking gym, Lupe.

QUINN

Joey? Party at Tony's?

JOEY

I'm going home.

LUPE

Where's your costume?

JOEY

I don't have one.

LUPE

What do you mean you don't have one? What are you going as?

JOEY

Uh, I'm going as not wanting to fail my chem test on Tuesday.

KERRY

How are you getting there?

QUINN

I'm going with Tiff.

KERRY

I thought you and Tiff broke up.

QUINN

We got back together.

KERRY

You didn't tell me that.

QUINN

Do I have to tell you everything? *A knock on the door.*

KEL (outside)

Nobody's naked, right?

QUINN
Nerp.

Kel pops his head in.

KEL
Hey. Can I talk to you?

JOEY
Sure—

KEL
uh, hi Quinn.

QUINN
sup.

LUPE
Can you help me with the blood? I don't want it to drip too much.

Kerry starts dabbing fake blood on Lupe's face.

QUINN
Hey Joey, can I borrow your phone?

JOEY
Fine. Just keep it short, okay? You almost got me grounded last month.

Joey reluctantly hands Quinn her phone and steps outside with Kel.

*Quinn opens his own phone and copies over a number.
He starts texting. Kerry side-eyes him hard.*

KEL
Hey—do you wanna do something tonight?

JOEY
I have a chem test on Tuesday.

KEL
You still have the whole week. Come on, this guy / Tony—

JOEY
I know. I just can't.

KEL
Well would you want me to—

JOEY
I can't, okay?

Joey starts crying.

KEL
Whoa—no it's okay, I didn't mean to—

He puts his arms around her. She breathes him in for a moment.

In the locker room:

KERRY

Are you writing a novel or what?

QUINN

Dude her keyboard's annoying as fuck, leave me alone.

KERRY

Well please, don't let us interrupt!

LUPE

um I don't think I should be involved—

Outside: Joey wipes her eyes.

JOEY

Sorry. I don't usually cry in front of... people.

KEL

It's okay—what's going on?

JOEY

Um. Everything. School, Morgan, college apps, I'm just—ha. Jeez. Complaining.

KEL

You're dealing with a lot. I get it.

In the locker room:

KERRY

Why are you being such a jerk? Like suddenly you're too cool for us?

QUINN

That's funny. You makin jokes now?

KERRY

It's not even working. You're still a dork.

QUINN

Oh I'm a dork, huh? You still wanna go trick-or-treating, but *I'm* the dork?

KERRY

Yeah and you used to be my dork!

*Oh no. That was cheesy.
Quinn turns away and keeps texting.*

Outside:

KEL

Look, you're probably too busy for—like I know you're just being nice, tutoring me and everything, and / I'm totally slowing you down—

JOEY

I'm not being nice. I like studying with you.

KEL

Oh. Really?

JOEY

Yeah, I um... like hanging out. With you.

KEL
Oh. Cool.

Wow, this is fucking awkward.

In the locker room:

KERRY
Dude, I am so sick of being your backup plan.

QUINN
The hell does that mean?

LUPE
Guys, should I leave?

KERRY
You're bailing on Halloween, just like you bail on everything else!

QUINN
Are you kidding me? I drop shit for you all the time! *I ruined my shuffle mix for you!*

KERRY
YOU LOVE EVANESCENCE AND YOU KNOW IT!

QUINN
NO, I DON'T, KERRY, I JUST LOV—

KERRY:
...

Silence as they process this.

Outside:

KEL
...So listen, I—

*Joey stretches up and kisses him.
It can be short or long—whatever's right for the moment.*

Somewhere off, a car horn honks.

In the locker room:

QUINN
I gotta go. Tiff's here.

KERRY
...Doesn't this mean anything to you?

She holds up her arm with the crusty old camp wristband.

QUINN
We're not at summer camp anymore.

Quinn tears off his wristband and lets it drop to the ground.

KERRY
What are you saying?

QUINN
I'm—I'm saying grow up.

Quinn shoves the door open. Joey and Kel break their embrace.

JOEY
Quinn?

QUINN
See you at practice.

He pushes her cell phone into her hands and disappears.

*All at once, Joey remembers everything terrible going on.
She checks the time on her phone.*

JOEY
I have to go. The bus comes in five minutes.

KEL
Wait! Can I give you a ride?
Maybe we can stop at Morgan's?

JOEY
...Okay. That'd be nice. Just give me a second.

Joey goes back into the locker room. Sees the wristband on the floor.

LUPE
...Quinn left.

Joey grabs her net bag.

JOEY
I'm going home, guys. Happy Halloween.

She leaves the locker room. She and Kel join hands. They exit.

In the locker room: a moment of tense silence.

KERRY
...
Do you want to go to the carnival?

LUPE
I thought it was gay.

KERRY
I didn't mean it like that.

LUPE
Then how did you mean it?

KERRY
...

LUPE
I'm gonna take my little sister trick-or-treating. My parents need a night off.

KERRY

Do you want some company?

LUPE

Okay.

Wait. No. I don't.

KERRY

What?

LUPE

You don't even like me.

KERRY

Dude yes I do, don't be stupid.

LUPE

Oh right, I forgot, you call me names and make fun of me because you *like* me. You're literally only talking to me because Quinn ditched you.

KERRY

I'm not—I don't—

LUPE

How come you only ever want to hang out when you need help with Spanish?

KERRY

Come on, I don't / just—

LUPE

I DON'T EVEN FREAKING SPEAK SPANISH!

KERRY

...What?

LUPE

I'm sick of being *your* backup plan.

Lupe leaves.

Kerry stands there.

She picks up Quinn's wristband.

She maybe starts to cry.

4X100 recovery

The next day. The deck.

Lupe stretches silently. Her face is smudged with leftover Halloween makeup.

Kerry enters, bag in hand, also sporting some eyeliner smudges.

She unrolls a mat next to Lupe.

Lupe moves her mat away.

KERRY

...

LUPE

...

KERRY

Where is everyone?

LUPE

Dunno.

KERRY

You'd think they would be here.

LUPE

Okay.

KERRY

...

How was trick-or-treating?

LUPE

I didn't go.

KERRY

Oh—I thought you said—

LUPE

My parents needed me to hand out the candy.

KERRY

...

That drill was freaky.

LUPE

What drill.

KERRY

The lockdown drill.

LUPE

Oh.

Yeah.

KERRY

I'd never done one before. It was weird.

LUPE

Okay.

KERRY

We were just like... finding the angles of a quadrilateral and then all of a sudden we were under our desks with the lights off.

LUPE

I was in geography

KERRY

I miss fire drills. They were easier.

LUPE

...I liked being on the field in little lines

KERRY

Yeah. Me too.

LUPE

And the teacher would do the head count and then we got to just hang out on the grass

KERRY

Yeah.

LUPE

...

KERRY

...

Look, I'm—you're not my backup plan, okay?

LUPE

Sure.

KERRY

I just wanted—I don't know why Quinn is being such a dick anyway—

LUPE

Whatever.

KERRY

...

You really don't speak Spanish?

LUPE

Just what I learned in middle school.

KERRY

Why didn't your parents teach you Spanish?

LUPE

Why didn't your parents teach you Japanese?

KERRY

Um well my dad's like super white and my mom doesn't / even speak

LUPE

I was making a point.

KERRY

Oh. Got it.

LUPE

I guess they wanted me to grow up as, like... aMeRiCaN as possible

KERRY

Oh. That makes sense I guess.

LUPE

I hate it. All my cousins make fun of me.

KERRY

That sucks.

LUPE

...

KERRY

I'm sorry I assumed you spoke Spanish.

LUPE

...I'm sorry I didn't know you were Buddhist.

KERRY

When did that come up?

LUPE

Um like a month ago

KERRY

Oh. Okay?

LUPE

I mean I don't remember exactly but I think it was about 29 days ago

KERRY

Um. It's fine? I don't really know what you are either. I'm guessing you're... Catholic? ish?

LUPE

Yeah. I just was thinking about it because I was working on the ofrenda for my grandma last night—

KERRY

Oh cool! I just made one for my grandma in Spanish class! I drew these sugar skulls with like traditional calligraphy and you're supposed to put out food for the spirits so I found these nevermind continue

LUPE

...and I remembered when you told me about that festival—

KERRY

Obon.

LUPE

Yeah. And I didn't know what it was or like. I dunno. I just felt bad.

KERRY

It's okay. I mean we're not like. I dunno. We're not what you probably first think of—

LUPE

Like monks?

KERRY

Yeah you didn't really need to add that but okay

LUPE

Do you believe in god?

KERRY

Do you?

LUPE

Um, obviously?

KERRY

Oh, oBvIoUsLy. Because Christianity is the default so it should be ObViOuS.

LUPE

Well I'm Catholic but—I was just thinking about it during the lockdown drill. Like what if someone did come in and like what if I died in geography class, would I go to Heaven or like... is there even a Heaven? I mean obviously of course there is but like ...is there?

KERRY

I don't know.

LUPE

I don't either. Like when I'm in church I know there is, but when I was under my desk...

KERRY

I feel the same way about temple sometimes. Like I believe in the Dharma, and wisdom and compassion, but like, the trials of young Buddha—am I supposed to take all of that literally?

LUPE

...

OKAY I don't think Jesus was resurrected after three days I think he stayed dead which is sad because he was a really good person do NOT tell my parents I said that.

Kel and Joey enter. Kind of together. Kind of hiding it.

KERRY

Hey guys.

JOEY

Hi...

KERRY

Did you go to the party?

KEL

No, we uh

JOEY

I... went home. We hung out with Morgan and then Kel uh, gave me a ride home.

KERRY
In that swweeeet car of yours?

KEL
um

LUPE
At least someone had a fun Halloween.

KERRY
...

Kel and Joey grab yoga mats and start stretching.

KEL
...Are you okay?

JOEY
Yeah.

KEL
Do you wanna talk about it?

Joey turns and stares at Kerry, who is TOTALLY NOT LISTENING

JOEY
...Right now?

KEL
No, we don't have to—I'm just worried I messed something up.

JOEY
Why would you think that?

KEL
I dunno, if I like made you uncomfortable, or if you changed your mind or

JOEY
I didn't change my mind.

KEL
Okay. Well—I had a lot of fun.

JOEY
Me too.

KEL
Good.

Kel kinda leans in. Joey laughs a little and leans away.

JOEY
(not in front of everyone are you kidding me)

KEL
(I'm sorry I just like your face)

JOEY
(if my parents find out I swear to god)

Kerry's jaw drops. This is fucking gold.

LUPE

Hey um—have you guys seen Quinn?

JOEY

Not since last night. Is everything okay?

LUPE

Did he text you?

KERRY

Even if he had any minutes left, I don't think he'd use them on me.

Quinn enters—shuffling feet, sunglasses, nursing a Gatorade.

LUPE

Hey—

Quinn shakes his head and sits down on the ground.

JOEY

You okay?

QUINN

...

JOEY

Are you hungover?

QUINN

...

LUPE

I didn't know you drank.

QUINN

...

JOEY

...I have some acetaminophen.

Joey rummages through her net bag. Fishes out a couple pills.

Quinn takes them without a word.

LUPE

Is that midol?

JOEY

it helps with headaches.

KERRY

What the hell did you do last night?

QUINN

...

I don't remember

WHIIIISSSTLEEEEE.

*Quinn covers his ears and runs off to throw up. The team watches him.
Kerry stands up to follow him off.*

WHISTLE WHISTLE WHISTLE: They strip down to their suits.

JOEY
Look, let's just—

Morgan enters in sweats and a headwrap.

MORGAN
Hey.

JOEY
...Hey.

MORGAN
...How was your Halloween?

JOEY / KEL / KERRY / LUPE
Fine / Good / Sucked / Great, how was yours? I mean obviously—

MORGAN
You ready for district intramurals?

JOEY
Not without you.

MORGAN
If you've been practicing, you'll be fine.

KERRY
Define "practicing."

MORGAN
What.

KERRY
At least we're not hungover.

MORGAN
Excuse me?!

Quinn re-enters.

QUINN
I threw up your period pills.

MORGAN
Are you fucking serious? QUINN!

QUINN
Jesus, what? Holy shit, Morgan, I thought you were—

MORGAN
What the fuck is wrong with you?

QUINN
What?

MORGAN

You're hungover?

QUINN

No! What? Kerry, you asshole—

MORGAN

You got fucking drunk last night?

QUINN

No! I'm just sick okay?

MORGAN

You're fourteen fucking years old and you're drinking at parties?

QUINN

Shouldn't you be in bed or something?

MORGAN

Yeah, but guess what? I'm here, because nobody's won a fucking ribbon since September and apparently I'm the only one who cares.

QUINN

Dude, I care, okay—

MORGAN

Well you're not gonna fucking win if you're sitting around nursing a fucking hangover.

LUPE

Morgan I know it's messed up but can you watch the—

MORGAN

The fucking swearing?

LUPE

...yeah

MORGAN

You're all kidding me right now. You're literally kidding me.

JOEY

Morgan—

MORGAN

I can't sleep. I can't eat. Tomorrow I get another fucking needle in my arm. And I want more than anything to go beat the fucking Riptides this weekend but I can't do a 25 without choking. And what are you doing? What the fuck are you all doing?

Is she about to cry?

QUINN

...Morgan, I'm sorry.

MORGAN

Don't be sorry, just get in the fucking water.

JOEY

...

Let's GO!

Morgan lowers herself into a chair next to the giant deck clock.

MORGAN

...don't throw up in the pool.

KEL'S EVENT: 100 FLY

Kel alone in the pool.

KEL

Ryan Lochte gets a bad rap.

Michael Phelps is a better swimmer. And he's a nice guy, practically a national hero—like he's on Wheaties and—if you've never had Wheaties, I'll save you the trouble right now 'cause they're nasty, but I made my parents get like *eight* boxes when Michael Phelps was on the front.

But I think everyone likes to shit on Lochte a little extra hard because he's not a golden boy. Like—he ended Aaron Peirsol's *seven-year* winning streak at the world championships this year, set a new world record for the 200 back, and didn't even want to do the interviews.

I think part of it is that it's just fuckin hard to get coached by your dad. You're never gonna be good enough. My dad was my coach too. He was like, a fixture at my high school from '95 all the way up until this summer, when we uh—when we moved here. And he's good. Tough—really tough—but good. He's looking for gigs, but nothing really pays around here, and the teams are—

I mean these kids are pretty good, but honestly? The Mavericks? The mighty Mavericks?

When this team, when we show up to meets, who takes us seriously? If I want to make NCAA, who's gonna take me seriously? I went from a team that *dominated* every dual meet and invitational to this little co-ed after-school sWiM cLuB that can barely get its swimmers to show up at all. Who's gonna look at my college apps and think, *oh, there's an athlete who takes things seriously?*

I miss my old high school. I miss my old team. I miss the 50-meter pool. I miss rolling up to the aquatic center and piling out of the van and seeing all the kids from the other teams crap their pants like *OH SHIT the Sea Wolves are here!*

I miss going to school and wondering why my backpack was so goddamn heavy, and then finding all these power bars and Gatorade and fruit and sandwiches my mom hid in all the pockets because she knew how much I needed to eat just to get through the day. I miss—

...

fuck

...

In 2003, Michael Phelps set the US record for boys age 17-18 in the hundred fly. 51.1 seconds. He was point-zero-three seconds away from breaking the world record and just barely out of high school.

And at the same time Ryan Lochte's acting like he doesn't even give a shit about swimming, but why would he race this hard if he didn't? I mean he's the, uh.

The second-best swimmer alive.

...

I try to copy Michael Phelps's warmups. He's just a better swimmer.

But I get why Ryan Lochte feels so antsy.

BOOT CAMP

Mid-November.

*Joey in the pool, alone, with a kickboard.
She kicks in silence for a little while. Back and forth.*

Kel enters and watches her for a minute.

KEL

Hey.

JOEY

...

KEL

...

Jo? Are you okay?

JOEY

I'm fine.

KEL

Can we talk for a minute?

JOEY

...

KEL

Okay, I'll come to you.

*Kel strips down to his fastskin and grabs a kickboard.
He slides into the pool and kicks to catch up to Joey.*

JOEY

...I don't know how I could be so stupid.

KEL

Jo, you have so much going on right now.

JOEY

I don't wanna talk about it.

KEL

Well we have to talk about it because this isn't sustainable, okay?

JOEY

It's not *sustainable*?

KEL

I know it sucks, but you can take it again. You said there's one like every month.

JOEY

I'm not going to take it again. I MISSED THE TEST.

KEL

So you overslept ONE day of your life! You're working yourself to death. I'm surprised you haven't gotten an ulcer. YOU NEED TO REST.

JOEY

All that money, the practice tests, the hours and hours—

KEL

Jo, you're fine.

JOEY

I'm not fine.

KEL

Okay, you're not fine. So what? You're just gonna give up?

Joey stops kicking. Kel stops too.

JOEY

I have to take the ACT too.

KEL

Why?

JOEY

Colleges are starting to look at it more, and if I don't do well on the SAT, which I WON'T / because now I'm having panic attacks about it and I can't—

KEL

Whoa, whoa, okay—so you'll take both. Great. What's the problem?

JOEY

I'm—I don't have enough money saved up for the ACT *and* the change fee.

KEL

You said you could take it again if you had to.

JOEY

I know. But, um... I didn't think I'd need to.

KEL

What about your parents?

JOEY

They said we could only afford the one.

KEL

Oh.

JOEY

...Kel?

KEL

Um—

JOEY

I hate asking—

KEL

Jo—

JOEY

You know I hate asking for anything—remember when we went to Happy Taco and we argued for like ten minutes about who was buying—

KEL

I know. Jo, listen—

JOEY

I just need a loan. I'll pay it back with interest.

KEL

I mean that's, I can't even calculate interest—

JOEY

That's okay, I already did. I figured it out at fifteen percent, but I could go higher / if you think—

KEL

No, fifteen is fine—

JOEY

Okay great!

KEL

Wait no—

JOEY

Kel, please. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important.

KEL

I know you wouldn't, and I'd say yes any other time—

JOEY

I wouldn't ask any other time.

KEL

I know but I.

JOEY

...What?

KEL

I can't.

I'm sorry.

JOEY

...

It's okay.

KEL

Jo, you're so smart. You're so smart it's like scary. And you're beautiful and you work your ass off every single day and you don't need a standardized test to tell you you're good enough. Fuck that.

JOEY

...

KEL

...

JOEY

Why are you staring at me like that?

KEL

...

Jo, I can't—

I can't take you to winter formal.

JOEY

Oh.

...

Why?

KEL

I can't take you to Langley's anymore either.

JOEY

Oh—I mean it's really hard to get a table there.

KEL

It's not the reservations—look, I'm sorry.

JOEY

Is it because I had to ask for money? Because I know you're probably used to just / dropping a credit card or whatever, but you can trust me—

KEL

No! Jo, that doesn't bother me. It's not / that—

JOEY

Are you going with someone else? Someone better?

KEL

No! God no, Joey, you're—I'm not going at all.

JOEY

Why not?

KEL

We're broke, okay?

JOEY

...What?

KEL

Me and my dad. We're completely fucking broke.

Kel pushes himself up onto the deck and sits. Joey joins him.

JOEY

...How?

KEL

I don't really um. My parents took out a loan to buy this property and then—I don't know. I feel like an idiot. I don't know how it happened.

JOEY

...That happened to my uncle too.

KEL

And. Y'know. Treatment's expensive.

JOEY

...Can I help?

KEL

No, I don't want charity, I just—I don't want anyone to know.

JOEY

Okay.

KEL

...I'm sorry about the dance.

JOEY

It's okay.

KEL

I really wanted to take you.

JOEY

I know.

KEL

...

JOEY

What are you gonna do?

KEL

...

Join up.

JOEY

...Wait, what?

KEL

Marine Corps. I turn 18 next year—

JOEY

You're joking, right?

KEL

I looked it up and the starting pay is 1300 a month—in a couple years I could be making 1800—

JOEY

In a couple years you could be dead! Have you seen what's going on in Afghanistan?

KEL

At least I'd be doing something meaningful, right?

JOEY

Meaningful? No one even knows why we're fighting there!

KEL

Oh, is that what your parents told you?

JOEY
What?

KEL
You're fifteen, Jo. You don't get it.

JOEY
Oh, so you think you know what's going on in the world and I don't?

KEL
Don't talk to me like I'm stupid.

JOEY
Then stop saying stupid stuff. There are other ways to make a living!

KEL
Not without a degree, and it's not like colleges are lining up to give me a scholarship—

JOEY
What about NCAA?

KEL
College isn't for everyone, all right?

JOEY
At least you wouldn't get *killed* in college.

KEL
You don't know that.

JOEY
What's that supposed to mean?

KEL
What, you think you'll be safe just because you're surrounded by other nerds?

JOEY
Stop.

KEL
Your sTuDy BuDdY might snap like that asshole in Virginia and show up to / class with a fucking Glock—

JOEY
DON'T joke about that.

KEL
You think we're safe *now*? Every time I drive you home we might get sideswiped. Or how about terrorists, huh? You gonna neutralize a bomb with a bachelor's / degree?

JOEY
I GET IT—

KEL
Fucking face it, Morgan's probably gonna die before we graduate!

JOEY
...

KEL
I didn't—

JOEY
You did not just say that.

Joey gets up and roughly wraps herself in a towel.

KEL
Joey, wait—

JOEY
You're being a jackass.

KEL
Jo—come on!

JOEY
Don't talk to me. Don't fucking talk to me.

*Joey grabs her net bag and storms off. Kel watches her go.
He hurls his kickboard across the pool.*

KEL
FUCK!

UNDERWATER KICK DRILLS

The team (minus Morgan) is assembled on the deck.

Yoga mats as far away from each other as possible.

The following should be exhausting, full of fury, but not cathartic.

*The whistle blows.
They stretch their legs.*

*The whistle blows.
They switch to arms.*

*The whistle blows.
They switch to crunches.*

*The whistle blows.
They switch to push-ups.*

*The whistle blows.
They switch to jumping jacks.*

*The whistle blows.
They run to the back wall and do chair-sits.*

*The whistle blows.
They switch to burpees.*

*The whistle blows.
They line up at their lanes.*

*The whistle blows.
Caps on, goggles up.*

*The whistle blows.
They dive into the water.*

They do underwater kick drills.

*It is very, very quiet
except for the swishing of water that you can hear when you're completely submerged
that sort of muted oceanic sound*

*They touch the wall.
Come up for air.
Nobody speaks.*

*The whistle blows.
They go under again.*

freestyle drill; breathe every 3, 5, 7 strokes

Early December.

*By this point, the sun sets long before practice ends.
The warm yellow of the underwater light ripples through the blue.*

The team does a kick drill.

It's silent for a while.

KERRY

Hey.

QUINN

Hi.

KERRY

...

QUINN

...good talk.

KERRY

Dude.

You should be the one trying to talk to me right now.

QUINN

Yeah but I'm not.

KEL

Hey, Jo.

I signed up for the SAT.

JOEY

...

KEL

I'm taking the January one at the library.

JOEY

What about the exam fee?

KEL

I sold my iPhone.

JOEY

...

KEL

I wrote down your number though. You don't need to give it to me again.

JOEY

Are you still joining the military?

KEL

Yeah.

JOEY

Then why bother taking the SAT?

KERRY

I'm not gonna pretend I didn't hear what you said on Halloween.

QUINN

What, "grow up"?

KERRY

No. You know which part I mean.

QUINN

No, I really don't. The whole night's kind of a... blur.

KEL

...

Look, what I said about—I didn't mean it. You know I didn't.

JOEY

Then why did you say it?

KEL

Because—I don't know. I felt stupid and I got mad. I'm sorry.

JOEY

...

I didn't mean to make you feel stupid.

KEL

...She finished the chemo this week, right?

JOEY

Yeah. A couple tests now, and results in a few weeks.

KEL

She's gonna be okay.

KERRY

Are you still going to winter formal?

QUINN

I don't fuckin know.

KERRY

You should go.

QUINN

Why?

KERRY

Because—we—hey Lupe!

LUPE

I wasn't listening!

KERRY

Are you going to winter formal?

LUPE

Oh, uh. with you guys?

QUINN

I'm not going / with her.

LUPE

As like a friend group?

KERRY

No, as a Mormon commune.

LUPE

I think that's like culturally insensitive maybe

KERRY

Are you already going with someone?

LUPE

uh no—I was thinking about... not going

KEL

Are you going to winter formal?

JOEY

I'm going with Morgan.

KEL

Oh. Okay.

JOEY

...I can buy you a ticket if you want.

KEL

What about the ACT?

JOEY

I applied for a fee waiver.

KEL

...That's okay. You should save your money.

Plus Tony Eberhardt gave me like five hundred for my iPhone so um. I'm good.

I think I'll probably stay home.

Little plinks of...rain?

QUINN

Is it raining?

LUPE

ow!

KERRY

It's freaking *hailing*?

The little plinks get harder and faster.

KEL

Ow, what the shit!

They kick through the hailstorm, yelling over the roar.

LUPE
COACH, CAN WE—OW!—CAN WE—
KERRY
NATURE STOP IT RIGHT NOW
QUINN
OH MY GOD WHAT IS THIS
LUPE
IT'S ICE, YOU DIP
QUINN
HEY!
JOEY
DID LUPE JUST SAY THAT?
KERRY
EYYYYYYYYYYYYY!
KEL
OH MY GOD THIS HURTS SO MUCH
JOEY
GET USED TO IT! THIS HAPPENS EVERY WINTER!
KEL
WHY DON'T YOU GUYS HAVE AN INDOOR POOL?!
QUINN
THIS IS YOUR POOL TOO, BITCH, GET OVER IT!
LUPE
OH MY GOD IT'S MELTING INTO MY BUTT CRACK

Kerry starts laughing.

Lupe starts laughing too.

Fucking everyone starts laughing.

They cackle maniacally in the hailstorm.

Morgan enters, bundled up, umbrella in hand.

She watches them laugh and kick and scream.

She smiles.

The whistle blows.

MORGAN'S EVENT: 400 IM

Morgan alone, poolside. Feet dangling in the water.

MORGAN

You're on the starting block.

Knees bent. One foot forward, one foot back. Toes gripping the sandpaper plastic. Cap secure, goggles on, straps tight. They haven't told you to get on your marks but you're on your mark.

"On your marks—"

Your head goes down. Muscles tighten. Back heel lifts. Fingers curl around the edge. Wait.

The low, loud beep, and you fucking launch. Streamline. Legs together. The perfect curve to pierce the water without breaking your forward momentum. A moment between worlds that feels like flying—

And then you're in.

Hundred fly. Feet bound with invisible rope, core tightening with every kick, shock waves from your belly to your toes.

Come up for air, arms launch behind you, snap to the front, now you're in it. Four laps of this. Hit the wall, two-hand touch. Make sure they see your fucking hands, don't get disqualified on the first leg. You feel yourself flagging. Don't slow down, just pull. Stripe of tile—there's the wall. Both hands. Knees up. Streamline and launch.

Hundred back. Cut the rope that binds your feet. Kick and fucking kick. Pass the flags. Roll over, flip turn, streamline, launch. This is easy. This is so goddamn easy—no, don't get lazy, don't get complacent, that's how you lose. Pass the flags. Roll over. Flip turn. Streamline. Launch and twist.

Hundred breast. Halfway there. Legs burning, core burning, arms dead but still moving. Push out, curve around, press together, cut through, knees up, push out, press together, do it again.

You wish you could breathe the water; the air burns too much. You only breathe when you have to. You think you have to but you don't. Two-hand touch. Knees up. Left arm out. Feet press. Launch.

Hundred free. Last chance. Kick for your life. Arm back. Elbow up. Your hand is a blur. You wish you could step outside yourself to see what your body looks like.

For a minute you forgot about winning. For a few laps there in the middle it was just you and the water. Then you catch a glimpse of the girl in the lane next to you. She thinks she's catching up. You have to fucking win. Flip turn. Two laps. Flip turn. Last one. You only breathe once the whole way back.

Pass the tile. One-two-wall: it's done.

It's done.

Goggles up. Heaving lungs. Air tastes good again. Check the board:

First in your heat.

Personal record.

Triple A time.

6X100 YOUR CHOICE OF STROKE

Mid-December. Winter Formal.

The girls' locker room. Lupe and Kerry are getting ready.

Somewhere in the background, some classic 2000's high school dance music.

Like Smack That or Gasolina or Party Like a Rockstar.

Lupe's in one of those shiny dresses with the weird pleats on the tummy.

Kerry's in a black flouncy thing with some safety pins and fishnet gloves up in there.

They're fixing each other's hair and flowers and shit.

Lupe is really stressed out.

LUPE

Where did you get that corsage?

KERRY

My mom found it.

LUPE

Do I need a corsage?

KERRY

No, I shouldn't even have one cuz we're going stag but it's like ALMOST BLACK LOOK

LUPE

my hair's still wet

KERRY

Shoulda cut it off like Joey did

LUPE

Is it really obvious?

KERRY

Na it just looks darker. We could twist it up like

Kerry tries twisting up Lupe's hair into a bun thing.

LUPE

I look like a old lady

KERRY

Ya but a sexy old lady!

LUPE

...huh?

The door opens. Quinn pokes his head in.

QUINN

Uhhhh. Hi. Can I come in?

KERRY

Since when do you ask first?

QUINN

Siiiiince everyone started being really mad at me

KERRY

Yeah come in. I have something for you.

QUINN

Oh! I have something for you too. It's kind of a birthday present cuz I didn't actually get you anything—

Quinn enters, revealing a REALLY baggy suit. Kerry starts laughing her ass off.

KERRY

THIS IS THE BEST PRESENT EVER

QUINN

WOWWWW IT'S MY DAD'S OKAY BYE

KERRY

Waitwaitwat! It's great. You look great.

QUINN

...did you wanna show me something, or

KERRY

You first.

QUINN

Oh what, is yours better?

KERRY

I mean no one can say for sure.

But yes. It is.

QUINN

...'kay

KERRY

Sooo did you have something for me?

QUINN

Yeah.

KERRY

...?

QUINN

...Dude, I'm—

I acted like a jerk.

KERRY

Yeah you were a real dickweed.

QUINN

...Yeah. Anyway I guess what I'm tryna say is I'm

um

KERRY

ummmm

QUINN
uhhh

KERRY
Does it start with sssss—

QUINN
Sorry! Yes, I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry for acting like a dickweed.

KERRY
...Thanks.

QUINN
Anyway that wasn't the thing I was bringing you.

He holds out one of those dumb plastic containers with the corsage in it.

KERRY
Oh what! This one's even BLACKER!

QUINN
Yeah it was like, really hard to find.

KERRY
You know where imma put this?

QUINN
please don't say up your butt that's really mean I had to go to like / three different stores

KERRY
eww, no, you dip! Look.

She holds up her corsage-less wrist—the one with the camp wristband.

QUINN
Oh dude, no—

KERRY
Ready?

Kerry picks up a pair of scissors and slips one blade under the nasty-ass paper.

A moment as she considers the weight of this.

She snips the wristband. It falls to the floor.

They both let out a breath they didn't know they were holding.

QUINN
...You didn't have to do that.

KERRY
It was time.

QUINN
What happened to leaving it on until it completely disintegrates and falls off your body?

KERRY
Well... there's no point if your best friend doesn't do it too.

Oh noooo that was cheesy and everyone knows it

QUINN

...

KERRY

Plus it was like barely hanging on anyway. It was nasty.

QUINN

...Did you know I was gonna bring you a corsage?

KERRY

Nerp.

QUINN

You were gonna cut it off anyway?

KERRY

Yerp.

QUINN

...Do you wanna wash your wrist before I—

KERRY

Um no?

Quinn ties the corsage onto her naked wrist. She puts out her arms like laser guns.

KERRY

YESSSS DUAL WIELD BITCH!

QUINN

NERRRRRR HAVE MERCYYYY

They chase each other around the locker room. It's refreshingly immature. They come together for a slightly slower, more deliberate version of their secret handshake from the top of the play. The giggles subside.

QUINN

Anyway. Happy birthday.

KERRY

You know it's next week, right?

QUINN

Yeah, but. I dunno. It's like a birthday-winter-formal-apology present.

KERRY

Well. Thank you.

QUINN

Soo, I hope we can go in there together.

As like. A friend group.

KERRY

(gay)

LUPE

UGGGGHHHHHHHHHH

QUINN
wassup Lupe?

LUPE
hm?

QUINN
Ya makin noises.

LUPE
no one's gonna dance with me

QUINN
I'll dance with you!

LUPE
You don't count.

KERRY
OOOOHHH

QUINN
You cut me deep, Shrek. You cut me real deep just now.

*The door opens. It's Kel, in regular street clothes.
Okay he's a little dressy. But just like his normal nice-lookin self, not a suit.*

KEL
Uh... hey. Is Joey in here?

QUINN
Nerp.

KEL
Okay. What are you doing in here?

KERRY
He comes in all the time.

KEL
Oh. Can I come in?

KERRY
EW NO OHMYGOD GET OUT

KEL
Sorry!

KERRY
Dude I'm kidding.

KEL
Oh. Okay wow that was pretty intimidating actually.

KERRY
thank you

QUINN
Where's your suit, new guy?

KEL
Really? Are we really still doing the—

KERRY
Didn't Joey dump you?

KEL
I'm not going to the dance. I just wanted to talk to her for a minute.

The door opens. Joey pokes her head in—cute hairpins in her little bob.

KERRY
Well speak of the

JOEY
Hey guys—oh.

KEL
Hi.

JOEY
Hey.

KEL
Can I talk to you? Um. Out there?

LUPE
(man he really likes talking to her outside the locker room)

JOEY
I'm kind of in the middle of something—

KEL
It'll just take a minute. And then I'll get out of your hair.
which looks great by the way you look really pretty like wow, um

JOEY
...

KEL
Okay, here's fine too. Look. I was an asshole. I know I blew it and I'm not trying to pull anything,
I just wanted to say I'm sorry and I didn't mean it. Morgan is a badass and she's gonna be fine.

JOEY
...excuse me for one second please

Joey disappears.

KEL
Oh—okay—

*Whispering on the other side of the door.
It reopens. Joey enters with Morgan. They're both dressed for winter formal.
Maybe Morgan still has the headwrap, or maybe she's starting to grow some hair back.*

MORGAN
Hey, guys.

KERRY

Hey!

LUPE

Wow, you look so pretty!

QUINN

BIIIIIITCH LOOK AT THAT DRESS!

KEL

How are you feeling?

MORGAN

Well—uh...

...

I got my test results back.

KERRY

And?!

MORGAN

...

QUINN

...

JOEY

...

LUPE

...

KEL

...

Fuck.

KERRY

Oh no.

MORGAN

...

I'm in remission.

Everyone loses their shit.

Like screaming and happy-crying and y'all can improvise here, but it's happy as shit.

KERRY

THAT WAS SO MEAN OH MY GOD I THOUGHT YOU WERE LIKE DYING

QUINN

TAKE THAT YOU BITCH-ASS CANCER

LUPE

Does this mean you're back on the team?!

MORGAN

Not yet, but soon—

LUPE

How soon is soon?

MORGAN

Um, well I'm—

JOEY

IN REMISSION!

KERRY

SHE'S IN REMISSION YEAH BITCH

QUINN

Wow so hey you have a date tonight or ?

KERRY

Wow the whole corsage thing right there and now you're ditching me?

QUINN

well come on, it's Morgan.

KERRY

Yeah that's fair, I'd ditch you for Morgan.

Morgan intertwines her arm with Joey's like a Proper Lady™.

MORGAN

I already have a date, thank you!

KERRY

GAAAYYY

LUPE

MORGAN YOU LOOK SO PRETTY

MORGAN

Thanks! Are you... okay?

LUPE

I just

my hair's wet it looks bad

MORGAN

You look really pretty.

LUPE

thank you

MORGAN

Okay I love you guys but it's like really crowded in here and y'all are super loud

JOEY

Shall we hence?

MORGAN

We shall! Lemme make sure my shit's okay here

Morgan checks herself out in the mirror. Not bad.

KEL

...I don't, um. I'm not usually—they said I could be in here?

MORGAN

It's fine.

KEL

Quinn does it all the / time apparently

MORGAN

Hey Kel, do you wanna—uh. Can you... help Joey... help me?

KEL

Are you okay?

JOEY

(you said you were fine)

MORGAN

(I am fine, just roll with it)

JOEY

(what are you—)

MORGAN

(he called me a badass, that's gotta count / for something—)

KEL

Is everything / okay?

MORGAN

Yeah! I could use another, uhhh, escort.

KEL

Oh. Yeah—I mean I can get you to the door, but I can't go in.

MORGAN

You can go in.

KEL

I actually can't.

MORGAN

I'm ASB Vice President and I just finished beating CANCER. They're gonna let you in.

Joey gives Morgan the look that would later become the upside-down smiley emoji.

JOEY

(seriously Morgan what are you doing)

MORGAN

(you are so ridiculous just let me help you for once)

KEL

Should I wait outside?

MORGAN

Nope! Let's go!

KEL
Joey? Is that okay with you?

Joey hesitates. Morgan elbows her in the side.

JOEY
Ow!

MORGAN
(go go power rangers!)

KEL
Jo?

JOEY
...I could use the help. She is, in fact, a great burden.

MORGAN
Truly I am.

KEL
Uh... okay.

MORGAN
Thank you, kind escorts.

KERRY
I want an escort.

QUINN
I'll be your escort!

KERRY
You don't count.

KEL
I don't have a suit—

MORGAN
You look great. Let's go. See you bitches insiiiiide~

Kel and Joey each take an arm and guide Morgan out.

LUPE
Wow she looks so good.

QUINN
Yeah

LUPE
She looks so pretty that's so amazing

Uhhh is Lupe crying

KERRY
Quinn

QUINN
Ya

KERRY

Quinnifer

QUINN

Kerrygold Buttah

KERRY

Aw, it came back!

LUPE

Hnnnnngggghhhhh

KERRY

okay but seriously can we have a minute?

QUINN

OH. Yeeah.

KERRY

I'll meet you inside. Kay?

QUINN

Ya. I will be.... where the snacks are.

Quinn snaps his fingers and exits.

KERRY

Are you okay?

LUPE

Yeah—no—does my hair look okay?

KERRY

Yeah!

LUPE

Are you sure? Like super sure?

KERRY

YOU LOOK LIKE A PRINCESS

LUPE

...Really?

KERRY

Yeah. You look really really good.

LUPE

Thanks.

um—so are you and Quinn—you know

KERRY

...no?

LUPE

Are you guys like a thing

KERRY

NOOOOO no no no no. Nerp. Never.

LUPE

But on Halloween I thought—

KERRY

Nooo he's like my irresponsible little brother! Who's older than me. Whatever. No way. Ew. He's SO gay.

LUPE

Oh. He is?

KERRY

Well not *really*. I don't think so? Maybe a little. You know what I mean though.

LUPE

No?

KERRY

He's just gay.

LUPE

Why do you keep saying that like it's a bad thing?

KERRY

I'm not!

LUPE

You say it like it grosses you out.

KERRY

No I don't! Why is it a big deal? I'm / just saying "gay"—

LUPE

BECAUSE I'M

...

KERRY

...You're what

LUPE

Nothing what

KERRY

What

LUPE

Hm?

KERRY

You said you're

LUPE

Yeah never mind that was really gay

KERRY

yeah like literally did you just come out to me

LUPE

uhhh. yeah. I guess so.

KERRY
that's dope

LUPE
...Really?
I thought you thought it was a bad thing

KERRY
No dude, it's just a thing I say. It's like a catchphrase. Or whatever.
...uh. If it really bugs you I'll stop. I know like a LOT more adjectives anyway.

LUPE
I bet.

KERRY
I did spelling bee in middle school.

LUPE
cool

KERRY
...my zipper keeps slipping down at the top

LUPE
Do you want me to pin it?

Kerry pulls out a safety pin and gives it to Lupe, who pins the zipper pull.

KERRY
Um—I think gay people are pretty cool, by the way.

LUPE
Oh. Just pReTtY cool?

KERRY
What?

LUPE
But not as cool as straight people.

KERRY
No gay people are really cool!

LUPE
WOW. Not all gay people are the same, okay?

KERRY
Oh my god I'm sorry what do you want me to say!

*Lupe stares daggers at Kerry.
She can't keep it up. She starts laughing her ass off.*

LUPE
OH MAN YOUR FACE

KERRY
OH MY GOD YOU'RE SO MEAN!

LUPE
I'M SORRY YOU'RE JUST SUCH A DICK SOMETIMES

KERRY
I'M GONNA STOP SAYING IT OKAY?

LUPE
I KNOW I JUST HAD TO

KERRY
UGH! THAT WAS... pretty good, actually.

LUPE
I learned it from you.

*A beat. In the silence, a slow dance comes on.
I'm not saying it HAS to be "Don't Matter" by Akon.
I'm just saying I'll be disappointed if it isn't.*

KERRY
So why um—if you're not into Quinn, why—because honestly his taste in girls is terrible

LUPE
Not completely terrible

KERRY
Are you kidding? Lilliana and Tiff? And I heard he hooked up with Kelly Lyons too so come *on*.

LUPE
He's not in love with them.

KERRY
Dude I told you, Halloween wasn't even—

LUPE
...

KERRY
OHHHHHH
...oh

LUPE
there you go I guess

KERRY
Dang Lupe, I didn't—
that's like a lot

LUPE
yeah same?

KERRY
Is that why you like... pretended to speak Spanish? So we could study together?

LUPE
I mean I never really pretended to speak Spanish, you just kinda yelled stuff at me

KERRY

Why didn't you ever hang out though? Like you never came to sleepovers—

LUPE

I wanted to! My dad wouldn't let me.

KERRY

Why not?

LUPE

Because Quinn was always there, and he didn't want me spending the night with boys.

Joke's on him though, right?

...You probably don't even like girls, huh

KERRY

...I don't *know* that I don't.

LUPE

you don't have to pretend you're gay to make me feel better

KERRY

no I haven't really liked anyone before so how would I even know?

LUPE

You've NEVER had a crush on anyone? NEVER.

KERRY

I mean... Kind of. I guess. In seventh grade English.

LUPE

Who?

KERRY

(...Lily Cho)

LUPE

Lily Cho?

KERRY

No? That's not what I said?

LUPE

You said you had a crush on Lily Cho in seventh grade English!

KERRY

Well I didn't say it like that! You're making it sound gay.

LUPE

Pretty sure you're making it sound gay?

KERRY

I don't know, okay? I got really nervous around her but like maybe I was just competitive

LUPE

Man I can't even come out without you stealing my thunder

KERRY

I WASN'T TRYING TO COME OUT BRO

LUPE
WELL NEITHER WAS I

KERRY
YOU ARE SWORN TO SECRECY ON THIS

LUPE
YEAH OBVIOUSLY YOU ARE TOO

KERRY
GREAT LET'S TAKE A BLOOD OATH!

LUPE
OKAY FINE! wait no

KERRY
... I don't even wanna think about this stuff yet.

LUPE
Me neither, honestly.

KERRY
Like I'm literally on my second period ever so

LUPE
Oh come on, you've been bleeding like this whole semester.

KERRY
Well this is the second like normal one

LUPE
aw, at winter formal?

KERRY
ya it blows

LUPE
do you need a tampon? I carry like a lot of extras with me now

Silence. Then hysterical laughter.

Kerry squeezes Lupe into a long, tight hug.

KERRY

...

LUPE

...

this is really gay

COOL-DOWN

The team is assembled.

They peel themselves out of their formal wear, down to their swimsuits.

They line up at their lanes.

Kerry looks over at Quinn. They touch hands.

A silent smile between Joey and Kel. Joey puts on her goggles.

Kerry reaches out for Lupe's hand. Lupe takes it and squeezes, just a little.

Morgan loses her balance a little.

Every single hand reaches out to keep her steady.

She recovers. Pulls on her goggles.

The team does a collective deep lunge.

On your marks.

Whistle: GO.