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For all the teenage women fighting the good fight.

*And for my twelfth-grade Current Topics teacher for calling me
a feminazi in front of the entire class. You insulted me, but you
also sparked my interest in feminism, so really, the joke is on you.*

Revenge is best served cold, you jerk.

CHAPTER ONE

MY ENGLISH TEACHER, MR. DAVIES, RUBS A HAND OVER HIS MILITARY buzz cut. There's sweat beading at his hairline, and he puffs out his ruddy cheeks. He looks like a drunk porcupine.

The drunk part may be true. Even if it is before lunch on a Tuesday.

"Let's discuss the symbolism in line 12 of the poem," he announces, and I pick up my pen so I can copy down exactly what he says when he tells us what the gold light behind the blue curtains really means. Mr. Davies says he wants to *discuss* the symbolism, but that's not true. When we have our unit test, he'll expect us to write down what he told us in class word for word.

I blink and try to stay awake. Half the kids are messing with their phones, grinning faintly into their groins. I can sense my brain liquefying.

“Vivian, what are your thoughts?” Mr. Davies asks me. Of course.

“Well,” I say, folding in on myself and staring at the Xeroxed copy of the poem on my desk. “Uh . . .” My cheeks turn scarlet. Why does Mr. Davies have to call on me? Why not mess with one of the groin gridders? At least I’m pretending to pay attention.

Neither of us says anything for what feels like a third of my life span. I shift in my seat. Mr. Davies stares. I chew my bottom lip uncertainly. Mr. Davies stares. I search my brain for an answer, any answer, but with everyone’s eyes on me I can’t think straight. Finally, Mr. Davies gives up.

“Lucy?” he says, calling on the new girl, Lucy Hernandez, who’s had her hand up since he asked the question. He stares at her blankly and waits.

“Well,” Lucy starts, and you can tell she’s excited to get going, even sitting up a little straighter in her chair, “if you think about the reference the speaker makes in line 8, what I’m wondering is if the light doesn’t indicate, a, um, what would you call it . . . like a *shift* in the speaker’s understanding of . . .”

There’s a cough that interrupts her from the back of the room. At the tail end of the cough slip out the words, “Make me a sandwich.”

And then there’s a collection of snickers and laughs, like a smattering of applause.

I don’t have to turn around to know it’s Mitchell Wilson being an asshole, cheered on by his douche bag football friends.

Lucy takes in a sharp breath. “Wait, what did you just say?” she asks, turning in her seat, her dark eyes wide with surprise.

Mitchell just smirks at her from his desk, his blue eyes peering out from under his auburn hair. He would actually be kind of cute if he never spoke or walked around or breathed or anything.

“I said,” Mitchell begins, enjoying himself, “make . . . me . . . a . . . sandwich.” His fellow football-player minions laugh like it’s the freshest, most original bit of comedy ever, even though all of them have been using this line since last spring.

Lucy turns back in her seat, rolling her eyes. Little red hives are burning up her chest. “That’s not funny,” she manages softly. She slips her long black hair over her shoulders, like she’s trying to hide. Standing at the front of the room, Mr. Davies shakes his head and frowns.

“If we can’t have a reasonable discussion in this classroom, then I’m going to have to end this lesson right now,” he tells us. “I want all of you to take out your grammar textbooks and start the exercises on pages 25 and 26. They’re due tomorrow.” I swear he picks those pages blind. Who knows if we’ve even gone over the material.

As my classmates offer up a collective groan and I fish around in my backpack for my book, Lucy regains some sort of courage and pipes up. “Mr. Davies, that’s not fair. We *were* having a reasonable discussion. But they”—she nods her head over her shoulder, unable to look in Mitchell’s direction again—“are the ones who ruined it. I don’t understand why you’re punishing all of

us.” I cringe. Lucy is new to East Rockport High. She doesn’t know what’s coming.

“Lucy, did I or did I not just announce to the class that it should begin the grammar exercises on pages 25 and 26 of the grammar textbook?” Mr. Davies spits, more enthusiastic about disciplining Lucy than he ever seemed to be about the gold light behind the blue curtains.

“Yes, but . . . ,” Lucy begins.

“No, stop,” Mr. Davies interrupts. “Stop talking. You can add page 27 to your assignment.”

Mitchell and his friends collapse into laughter, and Lucy sits there, stunned, her eyes widening as she stares at Mr. Davies. Like no teacher has ever talked to her like that in her life.

A beat or two later Mitchell and his friends get bored and settle down and all of us are opening our textbooks, surrendering ourselves to the assignment. My head is turned toward the words *subordinate clauses*, but my gaze makes its way toward Lucy. I wince a little as I watch her staring at her still-closed textbook like somebody smacked her across the face with it and she’s still getting her breath back. It’s obvious she’s trying not to cry.

When the bell finally rings, I grab my stuff and head out as fast as I can. Lucy is still in her seat, her head down as she slides her stuff into her backpack.

I spot Claudia making her way down the hall toward me.

“Hey,” I say, pulling my backpack over my shoulders.

“Hey,” she answers, shooting me the same grin she’s had since we became best friends in kindergarten, bonding over our shared love of stickers and chocolate ice cream. “What’s happening?”

I sneak a look to make sure Mitchell or one of his friends isn't near me to overhear. "We just got all this grammar homework. Mitchell was bugging that new girl, Lucy, and instead of dealing with him, Mr. Davies just assigned the entire class all these extra pages of homework."

"Let me guess," Claudia says as we head down the hall, "make me a sandwich?"

"Oh my God, however did you figure that one out?" I answer, my voice thick with mock surprise.

"Just a wild guess," says Claudia with a roll of her eyes. She's tinier than me, the top of her head only reaching my shoulder, and I have to lean in to hear her. At 5'10" and a junior in high school, I'm afraid I might still be growing, but Claudia's been the size of a coffee-table tchotchke since the sixth grade.

"It's such bullshit," I mutter as we stop at my locker. "And it's not even original humor. Make me a sandwich. I mean, dude, you could at least come up with something that hasn't been all over the Internet since we were in middle school."

"I know," Claudia agrees, waiting as I find my sack lunch in the cavernous recesses of my messy locker. "But cheer up. I'm sure he'll grow up sooner or later."

I give Claudia a look and she smirks back. Way back when, Mitchell was just another kid in our class at East Rockport Middle and his dad was just an annoying seventh-grade Texas history teacher who liked to waste time in class by showing us infamous football injuries on YouTube, complete with bone breaking through skin. Mitchell was like a mosquito bite back then. Irritating, but easy to forget if you just ignored him.

Fast forward five years and Mr. Wilson managed to climb the Byzantine ranks of the East Rockport public school hierarchy to become principal of East Rockport High School, and Mitchell gained thirty pounds and the town discovered he could throw a perfect spiral. And now it's totally acceptable that Mitchell Wilson and his friends interrupt girls in class to instruct them to make sandwiches.

Once we get to the cafeteria, Claudia and I navigate our way through the tables to sit with the girls we eat lunch with every day—Kaitlyn Price and Sara Gomez and Meg McCrone. Like us, they're sweet, mostly normal girls, and we've known each other since forever. They're girls who've never lived anywhere but East Rockport, population 6,000. Girls who try not to stand out. Girls who have secret crushes that they'll never act on. Girls who sit quietly in class and earn decent grades and hope they won't be called on to explain the symbolism in line 12 of a poem.

So, like, nice girls.

We sit there talking about classes and random gossip, and as I take a bite of my apple I see Lucy Hernandez at a table with a few other lone wolves who regularly join forces in an effort to appear less lonely. Her table is surrounded by the jock table and the popular table and the stoner table and every-other-variety-of-East-Rockport-kid table. Lucy's table is the most depressing. She's not talking to anyone, just jamming a plastic fork into some supremely sad-looking pasta dish sitting inside of a beat-up Tupperware container.

I think about going over to invite her to sit with us, but then

I think about the fact that Mitchell and his dumb-ass friends are sitting smack in the center of the cafeteria, hooting it up, looking for any chance to pelt one of us with more of their lady-hating garbage. And Lucy Hernandez has to be a prime target given what just happened in class.

So I don't invite her to sit with us.

Maybe I'm not so nice after all.

CHAPTER TWO

OUR ANCIENT TABBY CAT, JOAN JETT, IS WAITING FOR ME WHEN I open the front door after school. Joan Jett loves to greet us when we come home—she’s more dog than cat that way—and she lives to meow and howl and get your attention, which my mother says makes her a good match for her namesake, the human Joan Jett, this woman who was part of an all-girl band in the 1970s called The Runaways before she started her own group. When Claudia and I were younger, we used to make videos of Joan Jett the cat dancing to songs of Joan Jett the singer.

I give Joan Jett a quick pet and then find a note on the counter from my mother. She could just text me, but she likes what she calls “the tangible quality of paper.”

Working late tonight. Meemaw and Grandpa said come over for

dinner if you want. Pls fold laundry on my bed and put away.

Love you. xoxoxo Mom

I'm old enough now to stay by myself if my mom has a late shift at the urgent care center where she works as a nurse, but when I was little and she had weird hours, Meemaw would pick me up from school, and I'd go to her house and eat a Stouffer's frozen dinner with her and Grandpa, and then we'd all try to guess the answers on *Wheel of Fortune* before they'd tuck me into bed in the room that had been my mother's when she was young. Meemaw had redecorated it by then in soft pinks and greens, not a trace of my mom's old punk rock posters and stickers left, but I used to peek out the window of my mom's old room and imagine her being young, being wild, being set on leaving East Rockport one day and never coming back. Even though she only managed half the plan, my mother's youth still fascinates me.

Back in those days I'd drift off and, depending on how tired my mother was when she got home, I'd either wake up to my grandpa watching the *Today* show, or I'd be shaken awake in the middle of the night to make the ten-second walk back to our house, clutching my mom's hand, catching a whiff of the minty, antiseptic smell that always follows her home from work. Nowadays I only head over to my grandparents' house for dinner even though they still try to get me to spend the night like the old days.

My phone buzzes. Meemaw.

"Hey, sweetie, I'm heating up chicken enchiladas," she tells me. "Want to come over?" Meemaw and Grandpa eat breakfast at 5, lunch at 11, and dinner at 4:45. I used to think it was because

they're old, but my mom says that's how they've been all their lives and that when she moved out at eighteen she felt like a rebel for eating after dark.

"Okay," I tell her, "but I have to fold the laundry first."

"Well, come on over when you're done," she says.

I grab a piece of cheese from the fridge for a snack and answer a few texts from Claudia about how irritating her little brother is before I figure I should get the laundry over with. Joan Jett scampers off after me, wailing away as I head to the back bedroom where I find a mountain of laundry in the middle of my mother's unmade bed. I start folding pastel-colored underpants into nice, neat squares and hanging damp bras up to dry in the bathroom. It's strictly lady laundry. My dad passed away when I was just a baby after he crashed his motorcycle while driving the streets of Portland, Oregon—which was where he and my mom and I used to live. His name was Sam, and I know it's kind of strange to say about my dad even if I can't remember him, but from pictures I know he was kind of a total babe, with dirty-blond hair and green eyes and just the right amount of muscles to be attractive but not so many as to be creepy and gross.

My mom still misses him, and one night about a year or so ago when she'd had too much wine, she'd told me it was weird that she kept getting older but Sam would always be the same age. That's how she referred to him, too. Sam. Not "your dad" but Sam, which is really who he was to her more than anything, I guess. Her Sam. Then she went to her room, and I could hear her crying herself to sleep, which is not my no-nonsense mom's usual approach. Sometimes I feel guilty that I don't miss him,

but I can't pull up even the tiniest sense memory. I was only eight months old when he died, and after it happened Mom and me moved back to East Rockport so my grandparents could help take care of me while my mom went back to school and finished her nursing degree. And now, sixteen years later, we're still here.

I'm hanging up some of my mom's simple sundresses when my eye catches on a fat, beat-up shoe box she keeps on her closet's top shelf. In black Sharpie it's labeled MY MISSPENT YOUTH. I slide the final dress into place, tease the shoe box out of its resting spot, and take it to my bedroom. I've looked in this box before. Back when Claudia and I went through our Joan Jett dancing cat video phase, I used to love to take down this box and study the contents, but I haven't pawed through it in years.

Now I open it up and carefully spill the cassette tapes and old photographs and neon-colored leaflets and dozens of little photocopied booklets with titles like *Girl Germs* and *Jigsaw* and *Gunk* out onto my bed. I pick up a Polaroid of my mom where it looks like she was just a few years older than I am now, maybe nineteen or twenty. In the photograph, she has a platinum-blond streak in her long dark hair, and she's wearing a tattered green baby doll dress and combat boots. She's sticking her tongue out at the camera, and her arms are around the neck of another girl who has dark eyes and a piercing through her eyebrow. In black marker written down one of my mom's arms are the words RIOTS NOT DIETS.

My mom doesn't talk too much about her younger years before she met my dad in Portland, but when she does, she always grins a little with pride, maybe remembering how she graduated from high school and drove an ancient Toyota she'd bought with

her own money to Washington State just because that's where her favorite bands lived and played. Bands with names like Heavens to Betsy and Excuse 17. Bands made up almost entirely of girls who played punk rock and talked about equal rights and made little newsletters they referred to as zines.

They called themselves Riot Grrrls.

My mother was wild back then. Wild like with half her head shaved and black Doc Martens and purple lipstick the color of a serious bruise. Even though my mom is pretty relaxed compared to a lot of moms—like she's always been up front with me about sex stuff and she doesn't mind if I swear in front of her once in a while—it's still hard to reconcile the girl in the Polaroid with the mom I know now. The mom in butterfly-covered, lavender nursing scrubs who sits down at the kitchen table once a month to balance her checkbook.

I shift positions to get more comfortable on my bed and stare at a page in one of the Riot Grrrl zines. It has a cutout of a vintage cartoon Wonder Woman with her hands on her hips, looking fierce. The girl who made the zine drew words coming out of Wonder Woman's mouth, warning men not to mess with her when she's walking down the street unless they want a smack to the face. I grin at the image. As I flip through the pages, I find myself wishing that Wonder Woman went to East Rockport High and that she was in all of the classes I have with Mitchell Wilson. When Joan Jett meows for her dinner, I have to force myself to pack the box up and tuck it back into my mom's closet. I can't explain why, exactly, but something about what's inside the box makes me feel better. Understood somehow. Which is

weird because Riot Grrrl was a million years ago, and none of those girls know me. But I can't help but wish I knew them.

Meemaw has a rooster obsession. Roosters on dishtowels, roosters on plates, roosters made of ceramic walking the length of the kitchen windowsill like they're part of a rooster parade. She even has salt and pepper shakers shaped like—guess what—roosters.

I take the salt shaker in my hand and raise an eyebrow at the rooster's perpetual friendly grin.

"Do roosters actually smile?" I ask, sprinkling salt on my side serving of canned veggies.

"Sure," says Meemaw. "They're very sociable."

My grandpa just grunts and digs his fork through his plate of Stouffer's chicken enchiladas. "How many roosters have you known personally, Maureen?" he asks.

"Several," says Meemaw, not skipping a beat, and Grandpa just sighs, but I know he loves that Meemaw never lets him have the last word.

I appreciate how utterly grandparentesque my grandparents are. I like listening to their banter, to their gentle teasing, to the way two people who have been together for over forty years communicate with each other. I like how my grandpa has funny little sayings that he trots out over and over again and delivers in a voice of authority. (*"Remember, Vivian, you can pick your friends, you can pick your nose, but you can't pick your friend's nose."*) I like how Meemaw has never once solved a puzzle on *Wheel of Fortune*

but still insists on watching it every night and yelling out whatever answers strike her in the moment. (*“Mr. Potato Head! Fried Green Tomatoes! Sour cream and onion potato chips!”*)

They’re cozy, basically.

But like most grandparents, they’re totally out of it when it comes to knowing what it’s like to be, like, a girl and sixteen and a junior in high school.

“Anything exciting happen at school today?” Meemaw asks, wiping the sides of her mouth with her napkin. I push my green beans around with my fork and consider my day and the homework still waiting for me in my backpack.

“Nothing too exciting,” I say. “I got stuck with a bunch of extra work in English because Mitchell Wilson and his friends are jerks.”

Grandpa frowns and Meemaw asks what I mean, so I find myself telling them about Mitchell’s stupid comment.

“I don’t even understand what that means,” says Meemaw. “Why would he want someone to make him a sandwich?”

I take a deep breath. “He didn’t really want a sandwich, Meemaw,” I say. “It’s just, like, this stupid joke the boys use to try and say girls belong in the kitchen and they shouldn’t have opinions.” My voice gets louder the more I talk.

“I see. Well, that certainly wasn’t very nice of Mitchell,” Meemaw offers, passing Grandpa the salt.

I shrug, briefly fantasizing about what it must be like to be retired and able to spend your days puttering around with your ceramic rooster collection, totally oblivious to the realities of East Rockport High School.

“What he said . . .” I pause and picture the bright red hives of embarrassment burning up all over Lucy Hernandez. Remembering makes me burn for a moment, too, from my scalp to the tips of my toes, but it’s not embarrassment I’m feeling. “Well, I think it’s totally sexist.” It feels good to say it out loud.

“I suppose, I’d expect better manners from the principal’s son,” says Meemaw, sliding past my last remark.

“Can you imagine what Lisa would have done over something like that?” my grandfather says suddenly, looking up from his enchiladas at my grandmother. “I mean, can you even picture it?”

I look over at Grandpa, curious. “What?” I ask. “What would Mom have done?”

“I don’t even want to think about it,” Meemaw says, holding her hand out like a crossing guard ordering us to stop.

“Your mother wouldn’t have done just one thing,” Grandpa continues, scraping his plate for one last bite. “It would have been a list of stuff. She would have started a petition. Painted a big sign and marched around the school. Exploded in rage.”

Of course my mother would have done all of those things. The tales of her teenage rebellion started long before she moved to the Pacific Northwest and took up with the Riot Grrrls. Like the time she showed up at East Rockport High with her hair dyed Manic Panic Siren’s Song blue the day after the principal announced the dress code would no longer allow unnatural hair colors. She got suspended for a week and my grandparents had to spend a fortune getting it covered up without my mom’s hair falling out. I briefly imagine what it must have felt like to walk down the main hallway of school with everyone staring at you

because your hair is the color of a blue Fla-Vor-Ice. I cringe just thinking about it.

“The problem was your mother was always looking for a fight,” Meemaw continues before draining the rest of her sweet tea. “She had more than her necessary share of moxie. It made things so difficult for her. And us, too, as much as we love her.”

“Yeah, I know,” I say. I’ve heard this speech before. And maybe it did make things difficult for Meemaw and Grandpa, but the girl in the Polaroid picture from the MY MISSPENT YOUTH shoe box didn’t seem to find life so tough. She seemed to be having fun. She seemed to enjoyed starting battles, even if she didn’t always win.

“The good news,” Meemaw announces definitively, “is that the rebellious gene seems to have been some strange mutation.” She smiles at me and starts stacking the dirty dishes.

“Our dutiful Vivian,” Grandpa offers. He even reaches over and ruffles my hair with his big, callus-covered grandpa hand, like I’m ten.

I smile back, but I’m prickly all of a sudden. I don’t like feeling prickly toward my grandpa. Or Meemaw. But I don’t like being called dutiful either. Even though it’s probably—no, definitely—true. So I don’t say anything. I just smile and try to bury the prickliness.

After dinner I do my homework (of course), and then I join my grandparents in the family room (or what Meemaw and Grandpa call “the TV room”) to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. I laugh as Meemaw shouts out ridiculous answers (“‘*Luck Be a Lady Tonight!*’ *Lady and the Tramp! My Fair Lady!*”). I accept Grandpa’s

offer of decaf coffee with cream and sugar. But my mind keeps remembering Lucy's hurt face and the snickering coming from Mitchell and his stupid friends. The burning sensation that flashed through my body during dinner twists my stomach. Makes me restless.

After the bonus round on *Wheel*, I tell my grandparents I have to be heading home, and they do their typical protest to try and get me to stay just a little longer, at least through *Dancing with the Stars*. But I beg off and kiss them each on the cheek and thank them—dutifully—for having me over.

“Of course, sweetie,” Grandpa says, walking me to the door and hugging me tight, and I feel guilty for getting so irritated with him earlier.

After I get home and watch some dumb television and mess around on my phone, I decide it's time to get ready for bed, so I throw on my pajamas—boxers and an old Runaways T-shirt my mom gave me for Christmas one year, featuring a very young Joan Jett (the human one). While I'm brushing my teeth, I hear the front door open.

“Mom?” I say, stepping out into the hallway that leads to the kitchen.

“Hey, lady,” she answers back, tossing her car keys onto the counter where they skid to a stop by the blender. Then she stops in the middle of our postage-stamp-sized kitchen and stares up at the ceiling before letting loose a loud exhale. “Oh man, what a night,” she says, unwinding the bun on top of her head. Her

thick black hair slides down her back like a curtain after a performance. She walks over to the fridge and peeks inside, and I finish brushing my teeth and join her.

“Where’s that leftover Chinese?” she asks me as she shifts around takeout containers and cans of Dr Pepper.

“I finished it the other night,” I say, giving her a sorry face as she shoots me a friendly scowl over the refrigerator door.

“Dang,” she mutters. “Well, ice cream for dinner at 10 p.m. never killed anyone. At least not that I’m aware of.” She pulls a pint of mint chocolate chip out of the freezer and makes her way to our little den next to the kitchen, the room where we spend most of our time together. I follow her and watch as she collapses into her regular spot on the well-worn couch and then pats the space next to her as a sign that I should join her.

“You okay?” I ask as she swallows a spoonful of ice cream and finally relaxes her body a bit.

“Yeah, just tired,” she says, frowning and digging around for another big scoop. “We were slammed from the minute I got there until the minute I walked out.”

“Anything gross or scary?” I ask. I watch as she swallows her ice cream and tips her head back to rest, closing her eyes briefly. My mom is still beautiful, even in her cheeseball pink nursing scrubs covered in tiny white daisies. Her dark hair stands in such contrast to her pale skin, and she moves her tall body with total grace. Meemaw says we look alike even if we don’t act alike, and I hope it’s true even though I’m pretty sure it’s not.

“No, fortunately nothing too weird. Just urinary tract infections and ear infections all night long.” Sometimes my mom

comes home with strange stories that make us both laugh, like the time a kid stuck a bunch of Flintstones vitamins up his nose.

We sit in silence for a bit, and I reach out and stroke one of her long, pale arms. She looks at me and smiles.

“How was school?” she asks.

“The usual,” I answer. “School.”

“Such a detailed report.”

“There’s really nothing to say,” I insist. Which isn’t true, of course. On a different night I would talk through Mitchell Wilson’s stupid remark and how sorry I felt for Lucy and how annoyed Mr. Davies made me in English class when he punished all of us instead of dealing with the actual problem. I might even be able to admit that Meemaw and Grandpa annoyed me by calling me dutiful. But I can tell from the way my mom wrinkles her forehead to try and keep her eyes open that she’s exhausted.

“Well, it’s late anyway,” she tells me, “and you should get to bed. I smell like an urgent care center, but kiss me good night anyway, would you?”

I lean in for a hug and a peck on the cheek and as I head to my bedroom, I hear my mom turning on the television to unwind. After shutting my door, I slide under the covers and turn off my bedside lamp. The glow-in-the-dark stars I stuck on my ceiling light up like they’re saying hello. Sliding my headphones on, I think about my mom’s MISSPENT YOUTH shoe box. I scroll through my phone, looking for Riot Grrrl music, and play a song called “Rebel Girl” by a band named Bikini Kill.

It starts with this pounding drumbeat that’s so strong and

angry that I think if I listen to it loud enough I might fly off the bed. Then the guitar kicks in.

But the best part is when the lead singer starts singing and her voice shoots out of her gut like a rocket launching.

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood

She's got the hottest trike in town

That girl she holds her head up so high

I think I wanna be her best friend, yeah

Rebel girl, rebel girl

Rebel girl, you are the queen of my world

The music thuds and snarls and spits, and as I listen, it's hard for me to imagine that the tired, ice-cream-eating, scrubs-wearing mom on the couch is the same mom from the MY MIS-SPENT YOUTH box. The same girl with the platinum-blond streak in her hair and tongue sticking out and dark eyes that aren't afraid to fight back.

And I know that now she's tired and exhausted and worried about paying all the bills. But there was a time when she listened to this music. When she raged and roared and rioted. When she wasn't dutiful. There was a time when she lived out loud. And no one can take that away from her.

When the song ends I lie there for a moment in silence and then hit repeat, waiting once more for the drums to begin their attack.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WEEK CONTINUES LIKE IT ALWAYS DOES. ON WEDNESDAY I GO TO school, and Mr. Davies doesn't even check the stupid extra homework he made us do in the grammar book. Lucy Hernandez doesn't raise her hand once all class. I go home and do my homework and text Claudia and listen to music and go to sleep. Thursday is pretty much the same routine. It's been the same each year since middle school. Every fall starts with me thinking maybe this year something will be different—something will happen that will shake up my merry-go-round life. But I'm so used to the sameness of every year at East Rockport, I can't even identify what I want that Something to be. I only know that by the end of September it's obvious another school year is sitting in front of me like a long stretch of highway.

The only thing that makes today, Friday, feel at all unique is,

of course, that the fate of the East Rockport High football team will be decided a few short hours after the final bell rings.

East Rockport is just a 3A town, so it's not like the big cities or anything, but our football team is pretty good. And by that I mean when I was in the fifth grade we made it to the state championships but we lost, and people still talk about that day more than they talk about the fact that the one of the first astronauts to fly around in space was born right here in East Rockport. On Fridays in the fall, class feels like an excuse to legally require us to come to school so we can admire the football players' lockers decorated with orange and white crepe paper streamers and attend the mandatory pep rally before lunch and participate in the call and response cheers and observe Mitchell Wilson and his crew walking down the hallways like the second comings of Tom Landry and Earl Campbell. And the fact that I even know who Tom Landry and Earl Campbell are should tell you I really have been born and bred in this state.

"So we're driving out together tonight, right?" Claudia says as we file into the bleachers for the pep rally. "My mom said we could take her car. She's staying home with Danny because he isn't feeling good."

"Yeah, okay," I say, plunking my rear end down on one of the top bleachers. I can hear the pep band's horn section getting warmed up. I wince. It sounds like a pack of elephants mourning the loss of their leader or something. In the corner of the gym, the cheerleaders are finishing up their final stretches, dressed in uniforms the color of a Creamsicle.

Claudia and I aren't big football fans, really, but we go to all

the games, even the away games like the one tonight in Refugio. That's what you do here. You go to the games. Even Meemaw and Grandpa wouldn't miss one. Grandpa likes to use white shoe polish to write GO PIRATES! on the rear window of their car even if Meemaw always worries he won't be able to drive safely because of it. Claudia and I always sit in the student section on game nights, but usually on the edge of it, like we do at the pep rallies. We split a box of super salty popcorn from the Booster Booth, and we clap our greasy hands along half-heartedly while Emma Johnson and the other cheerleaders lead us in cheers, their voices veering up and down like seesaws. "LET'S go PI-rates."—*clap, clap, clapclapclap*—"LET'S go PI-rates."—*clap, clap, clapclapclap*.

"Come on, let's get this show on the road," Claudia mutters, her eyes darting around to make sure none of the teachers patrolling the perimeter of the gym are watching us before she pulls out her phone to mess with it.

That's when I happen to glance over my shoulder and see him. Two bleachers in back of us and maybe like five people over.

A new boy.

In my experience the new boy is always someone's cousin who's just moved here from Port Aransas or wherever, and he's a total goober with an incredible talent for picking his nose in class when he thinks no one is looking. That's the new boy. That's been the new boy since the sixth grade.

Until right now. Because there's nothing about New Boy that reads East Rockport. First of all, he's wearing tight black jeans and a gray T-shirt and his long, dark hair is hanging in front of

his eyes like he's trying to hide behind it. He turns his head a little to scratch the back of his neck, and I can tell the hair on the back of his head is cut short, almost shaved. Boys in East Rockport don't cut their hair like this. Boys in East Rockport have their mothers and their girlfriends cut their hair into neutral guy haircuts while they sit on stools in the middle of their kitchens. Boys in East Rockport go down to Randy's Barbershop on Main Street and flip through *Playboys* from 2002 while they wait for Randy to charge fifteen dollars for the same terrible cut he's been giving them since preschool. The one that makes their ears stick out for weeks.

New Boy must never go to Randy's. Ever.

In addition to the super cool haircut, he's got olive skin and full lips and dark eyes like two storm clouds. He's watching the activity on the gym floor below him with confused interest, like the pep rally is part of some documentary on one of those strange tribes in the Amazon that has never had contact with modern civilization.

I nudge Claudia.

"Don't look in, like, a super obvious way, but who is that guy a few rows behind us? He's new, right?"

Claudia turns and glances, then flares her nose a little in disgust, like New Boy is a stain on her favorite shirt, which is so unfair considering how deeply unstainlike New Boy is.

"Him? Yeah, I know who he is."

My mouth pops open and Claudia grins, relishing the moment.

"Oh, come on, don't hold back," I say. Of course at a school

as small as East Rockport High it's only a matter of time before I'll learn New Boy's name anyway, but still, it would be nice to know it as soon as possible so I could begin fantasy boyfriend-ing him right away. I'm much more experienced with fantasy boyfriends than actual boyfriends.

Claudia carefully twirls her long hair with one finger, dragging out the suspense. "His name is Seth Acosta, and he's a junior, too," she says. "His parents are these weird artist types from Austin, and they're renting from my parents. Their house and this finished garage that they're using as their gallery space. Down by the bay."

"Near the mansion?" I ask. The Oakhurst Mansion was originally owned by some guy named Colonel Oakhurst who served in the Republic of Texas Army. Once a year each year in elementary school we were all forced to tour a musty house built in the late 1880s that didn't have any toilets. One of the singular experiences of an East Rockport childhood, I guess.

"Yeah, by the mansion," Claudia offers. "Why? Are you thinking of saying hello to a real live boy for once?"

I shoot her a look and feel my cheeks flush. I'm so awkward around boys that I don't talk to them except when absolutely necessary—like when a teacher puts us in groups to do stupid projects. And Claudia knows it.

"I don't get why two Austin artists would move to East Rockport," I say, changing the subject. I have to kind of shout because the pep band is starting its standard pep rally opening number, "All Hail East Rockport." Some of the kids around us are stomping out the beat on the bleachers with their feet.

“Maybe Marfa is done,” Claudia yells back. “Maybe they’re so cool they’re anti-cool. I mean, honestly, can you think of a more not-cool town than East Rockport?”

I shrug in agreement. Claudia is right. There’s not much to do on weekends if you’re a teenager except cruise the Sonic and the Dairy Queen or try to find a stupid party. In terms of culture, the one museum in town is the Nautical and Seafood Museum of the Gulf Coast and the best part of going there is the fried shrimp-on-a-sticks that they sell in the cafeteria.

“So, are you going to talk to him?” Claudia asks, not giving up. “He sort of reminds me of Johnny Cade in *The Outsiders*. Remember how you read that book in middle school and made me watch the movie, like, ten times? He’s so your type.” Claudia’s right. There’s something rebellious about Seth. But not too rebellious. Dangerous but approachable at the same time. I glance in his direction again until Claudia starts making loud, slurping kissing noises near my ear.

“Okay, Claudia, enough,” I protest, shoving her gently in the ribs with an elbow. Like I said, I’m great at fantasy boyfriend-ing, but the truth is I’ve never had a real boyfriend. It always stings to think about it, but I’m in eleventh grade and I’ve never gone out with anyone. Or even kissed a boy. I want a boyfriend because I kind of feel like a dork for never having had one, but I’ve pretty much given up on the idea that it’s going to happen for me in high school.

As the cheerleaders form a pyramid and the pep band forces out a few more pep-filled notes, I manage to sneak one more

peek at Seth. He's still sitting there, his expression wandering somewhere on the border of neutral and bored. He lifts up one lanky arm and drags his hand through his hair and his bangs fall in front of his eyes.

I wonder what his middle name is.

I wonder what he smells like.

I wonder what music he listens to, and I wonder what he looks like when he brushes his teeth.

"Let's hear it for the East Rockport Pirates!" comes a booming voice from the center of the gym floor. Principal Wilson is standing behind the microphone, his gut hanging over his belt, his face cherry red before he even starts yelling. Pretty soon he gets even redder as he bellows and shouts about the best football team in the world and how we all have to support the mighty Pirates and on and on and on.

"I'm bored," Claudia announces, her voice flat. She stares out over the heads of the girls in front of us, then yawns as if proving her point.

Principal Wilson introduces Coach Cole and then Coach Cole introduces the football players and Mitchell Wilson and all the other boys trot out in their jeans and football jerseys over their shirts and Emma Johnson and the other Creamsicle girls do backflips and the pep band exhibits pep and Claudia yawns again.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to live in a town that doesn't revolve around seventeen-year-old boys who get laid way too often just because they know how to throw a football.

"Folks, I want to remind y'all how important it is to come

out and support your Pirates tonight because we're going to need every one of y'all cheering as loud as you can, am I right!" Coach Cole hollers. The crowd hollers back, like they're at a church service run by one of those preachers you see on TV. The rally continues like this until the bitter end when Jason Garza, the senior captain, whips his football jersey over his head and swings it around like a lasso before throwing it into the crowd, where a bunch of girls scream and lunge for it like a bouquet at a wedding.

"Oh, shit, look at what he has on," Claudia mutters. "Another one of his gross shirts."

Under his football jersey, Jason is wearing a white T-shirt with big black letters. It reads GREAT LEGS—WHEN DO THEY OPEN?

"Gross," I mutter. Jason is wearing the shirt in front of Coach Cole and Principal Wilson, but it won't matter. He can get away with it. He always gets away with shirts like these, and he's not the only boy in the school who likes wearing them. Boys being boys or whatever. The rest of the football players, including Mitchell, are laughing. I catch the expressions of some of the guys in the front bleachers, and they're laughing, too. Jason even does a little attempt at a sexy dance in front of a few of the girls up front, shifting his hips around like he's trying to keep up some invisible Hula-Hoop. The thatch of dark hair on his head makes him look like a rooster strutting around up there. The girls laugh and put their hands up in front of their faces, and I can't tell if they're grossed out or if they're actually liking it.

Then I notice one of the girls is Lucy Hernandez. Even from all these rows back, it's easy to see she's not smiling or giggling or laughing or even pretending to be grossed out. She's just grossed out for real. This isn't the first pep rally of the year, so poor Lucy should know by now that you never sit in the first few rows unless you're a hardcore Pirates fan. Better to hide toward the back, like people who only go to church on Christmas.

Jason must get Lucy's disgust because he makes a point of gyrating his hips right up near her face, and she just looks away, down at the floor. She's blushing. Everyone else is hooting.

Something charges through my body, and I look down and see my hands are balled up into fists. I stare at them for a moment, surprised, and then will them to release.

"All right, all right," Principal Wilson announces on the microphone, "let's get going to lunch, y'all. Why don't we save that energy for the game, Jason."

The band plays its last notes as we stream out of the gym. I look back but Seth has been swallowed up by the crowd. I hope Seth Acosta is not the sort of guy who would wear a shirt that reads GREAT LEGS—WHEN DO THEY OPEN? He could look as hot as a young Ralph Macchio in *The Outsiders*, but I still wouldn't want to hang out with a guy who wears a shirt like that. Even my fantasy boyfriends have to have standards.

As Claudia and I head toward the cafeteria for lunch, we get pushed and bounced through the shuffle of the crowd, and I realize I've ended up near Lucy. She walks toward the edge of the

hallway, her shoulder bumping into the row of lockers every so often. Her cheeks are still pink, and she's not really looking at anyone as she makes her way down the packed hallway. I think about asking her to eat with us in the cafeteria, but the idea of breaking out of my regular social routine and talking to someone new seems exhausting somehow.

After she spoke up in Mr. Davies's class, I know Lucy is the kind of girl who isn't afraid to be the center of attention even if it doesn't make her too popular. It's not so much that I want to be popular, because popular people at East Rockport High School are basically assholes, but I like flying under the radar. I wish I didn't give a shit about what people think about me. Like my mom coming to school with blue hair. She was never dutiful or under the radar when she went here. That's why she became a Riot Grrrl.

When Claudia and I get to our regular table in the lunchroom with our friends Meg and Kaitlyn and Sara, I look for Lucy but I don't see her. I don't see Seth Acosta either. But I do see Jason with his dumb shirt on, cutting in line in front of some freshmen.

GREAT LEGS—WHEN DO THEY OPEN?

I have the urge to clench my fists again until the slivers of my mostly bitten fingernails dig into my palms.

I wonder what Wonder Woman would do right now. Or my mom. Or the girl who sings that rebel girl song. The one whose voice was a weapon. The one who didn't care if all eyes were on her. In fact, she liked it that way. What would she do to Jason?

Maybe march right up to him and tell him how gross his shirt is? Maybe take a pair of scissors and cut it right off his body?

He'd probably like that, though. He could show off his stupid six-pack.

I take a bite of my ham sandwich and listen as Claudia and Kaitlyn and the others talk about where we should try to sit at the game tonight. I put my sandwich down and pick at the crust. I'm not really hungry.

"So what time do you want me to pick you up?" Claudia says, kicking me under the table.

"I'm not going," I hear myself saying. I'm surprised at my own response. But also relieved.

"What?" Claudia asks, frowning. "We were just talking about how I have my mom's car."

"I'm not really feeling well," I say, coming up with the easiest excuse.

Kaitlyn reaches over and touches my forehead with her hand. She has, like, five younger brothers and sisters so she's always doing mom-stuff like that.

"You don't have a fever, I don't think," she tells me. "Do you feel achy or cold?"

"It's my stomach," I say, pushing away my lunch.

"Eww, stay away," says Meg, sliding her chair toward the other end of the table. "I don't want to get sick."

Claudia is eyeing me carefully. Just a few minutes ago I was fine, checking out the new guy at the pep rally.

"I don't know what it is," I admit. And I don't. But something

has shifted. It happened the moment I said I wouldn't go to the game and now I can't go back.

Or did it happen during the pep rally, when I saw Jason's shirt and realized my hands were in fists?

Or did it happen before that?

"Maybe you should go to the nurse," Kaitlyn says. "Do you want one of us to walk you?"

"No, I can get there on my own," I answer. "But thanks."

"Text me later?" Claudia asks. Her voice is small and a little hurt, I think. But maybe she just doesn't know what to make of my weird behavior. Honestly, I don't either.

Nurse Garcia lets me lie down on one of the cots in the back room of the clinic all afternoon. There's no one else back there, and she turns the lights off for me. It's nice and cool and quiet. When I shift positions, I hear the paper sheet crumple underneath me. The bell for sixth period to start comes and goes, and I pass the time staring at a poster that reads COUGH AND SNEEZE? ELBOW, PLEASE! A little stick figure girl and boy cough and sneeze into their stick figure elbows. I lie there through sixth period, indulging in the fact that I'm tucked away inside my little clinic cocoon while everyone else has to be in class. The bell rings again for seventh period and then again for eighth. And then, finally, the last bell of the day.

"Feeling better?" Nurse Garcia asks as I step into the main clinic office, blinking my eyes at the bright lights.

"Yeah," I answer. "Thanks for letting me rest so long."

"You're not one to fake it, Vivian," she says. "And you don't look quite right, to be honest. Just go home and stick to toast,

bananas, and rice, okay? And get rest and drink lots of water. I'm sorry you have to miss the game."

"I'll survive," I tell her.

Usually at the end of the day, Claudia and I meet by my locker, and we walk home together or try to catch a ride with someone we know. But today I grab my backpack and make my way out a side door, taking a different route than I normally do. I walk fast, leaving East Rockport High behind me as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEEMAW AND GRANDPA ARE GOING TO THE GAME, AND MOM HAS TO work late again. I call my grandparents and tell them I'm not feeling well so I won't see them at the stadium, and I call my mother at work and tell her my stomach is acting up and I'm staying at home. She gives me the same instructions as Nurse Garcia and reminds me to call her if I start feeling worse.

But I don't feel worse. I feel better. There's something weirdly freeing about knowing that almost the entire town is driving into Refugio and I'm safely hidden inside my house all by myself.

I let myself wonder for a minute if that new boy, Seth, is going to the game. If his weird artist parents are taking him there as part of their research for some performance piece they're doing on Small Town Texas Life. Maybe he's already begged them to let him move back home to Austin. Maybe he never even existed at all and is just a figment of my imagination.

As dusk falls outside, I heat up a mini frozen pepperoni pizza and take it into my bedroom with me, balancing it on a paper towel. I love eating in bed. It feels so lazy and wrong and also so luxurious and awesome at the same time. After I carefully pick off and eat all the pieces of pepperoni but before I start in on the cheese, I find this documentary I watched once with my mom and start playing it on my laptop. It's about Bikini Kill's lead singer, the girl with the rocket-launching voice who sings that song about the rebel girl. I remember that when my mom and I watched the movie the first time, I glanced over at her during the closing credits. In the semi-darkness of our den, her face lit only by the flashing images on the television screen, I could see she was blinking away tears. But I could tell by the way she was smiling through her tears that she felt good and sad at the same time. Sometimes I wonder how old you have to be to feel really nostalgic. Sometimes I wonder if it's possible to feel nostalgic for something you never actually got to experience yourself. I think that's how I feel about the Riot Grrrls.

I finish the pizza, wipe off my greasy fingers and face, and pat the bed so Joan Jett will jump up and snuggle with me as I keep watching the movie. One of the things Kathleen Hanna—that's the lead singer's name—talks about in the documentary is the idea of the bedroom culture of girls. Every girl has some super secret world going on in her bedroom where she can make and create things, and Kathleen thought it would be cool if girls could share what was happening in their secret spaces with other girls. That's what Riot Grrrl tried to do. They tried to make ways for girls to find each other. Girls who cared about the same things

and fought the same fights and liked the same stuff. But since it was before the Internet, they did it with zines and bands and lyric sheets and shows and cassette tapes they sold for five dollars.

Sitting there in the semi-darkness of my own bedroom, watching Kathleen and the other Riot Grrrls on my laptop screen, I can't stop thinking about my mom's MY MISSPENT YOUTH box. About Wonder Woman taking out street harassers. About old Polaroids of girls with black lipstick who look like they are ready to take over the world with their attitudes. About neon-green flyers advertising a Riot Grrrl convention in Washington, D.C., and fund-raisers for rape crisis centers.

Audacious. That's a fancy vocabulary workbook word that would earn me extra points on any of Mr. Davies's stupid unit tests.

The Riot Grrrls didn't care what people thought. They wanted to be seen and heard.

Because they were audacious.

I cuddle with Joan Jett on my bed while the documentary plays, and an idea that's been building in the back of my brain begins to take shape. It's crazy. It's ridiculous, really. But I can't stop thinking about it.

Up until I was in third grade, my mom smoked cigarettes. She tried to be sneaky about it when I was really little, but eventually she knew I got wise to her and would apologize to me every time she headed out to the back porch to smoke.

"Oh, Vivvy, I'm sorry," she would tell me, sighing. "I'm really trying to quit, but it's so hard."

My third-grade brain came up with an idea. Alone in my

room, I cut out a dozen slips of paper the size of my palm and wrote things on them in black Sharpie like SMOKING KILLS and SMOKING CAUSES CANCER and I DON'T WANT TO LOSE MY ONLY PARENT. Looking back, I cringe at that last one, but I was an earnest third grader, and I was going for the jugular. After decorating them with skulls and crossbones and a stick figure that was supposed to be me crying next to a tombstone that read R.I.P MOM, I commenced the final part of my secret mission. I hid the signs all over the house. Behind her deodorant in the medicine cabinet. In her underwear drawer. Folded into squares in the carton of eggs. I even tucked one into her pack of Camel Lights.

My mother found the first one (buried inside her box of Special K) and waved it at me during breakfast that morning.

"Vivian, was this you?" she asked, arching an eyebrow.

"I don't knooooooow," I said, arching an eyebrow back. "It could be some anonymous anti-smoking person." I loved playing some secret avenger. Even if in my heart I knew I wasn't actually so secret.

My mother rolled her eyes at me, but something funny happened after she found all of the cards.

She stopped smoking. For good.

My mission had worked.

When the documentary is over, I give Joan Jett one last pet and go to my mom's desk in the den for a few supplies. My body hums with excitement. I cross my fingers that our wonky printer that only works half the time will work tonight. And then I get the last item I need from my mother's closet.

I spill out all of my mom's old zines for the hundredth time

and look at them with fresh eyes. I'm taking notes. Or, to be totally honest, I'm kind of stealing. But I don't think the girls who made *Girl Germs* and *Bikini Kill* and *Sneer* would mind. In fact, they'd probably be happy about it.

I run one finger over the words of something called a Riot Grrrl Manifesto. I can't remember ever reading it before. It's in one of the *Bikini Kill* zines, and I wonder if Kathleen Hanna wrote it herself. I swallow up the words.

Because we don't want to assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.

Because we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak

Because I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real.

I picture Lucy Hernandez's stunned, hurt expression in class when Mitchell Wilson told her to make him a sandwich. I think about Jason Garza's gross T-shirt and his swiveling, stupid hips. I imagine my life in East Rockport stretching out in front of me, a series of pep rallies and vanilla conversations in the cafeteria with dutiful girls I've known since kindergarten. I picture all the expected things that come after all that—go to college, end up with an okay guy and an okay job, and spend my Fridays in the fall at East Rockport High football games until I'm eighty years old.

I take a deep breath and uncap a black Sharpie. I need the right name to get started. My eyes glide over the well-worn covers of my mom's zine collection. I pick up a copy of one called *Snarla*

and hold it close to my face and shut my eyes and take a deep inhale, imagining I can smell the musty basements and warehouses where the Riot Grrrls used to play shows for three dollars. Imagining I can hear them singing out the lyrics they've so painstakingly copied onto the pages of their zines.

I won't be your baby doll

I won't be your pageant queen

Girl let's dance in our bare feet

Let's hold hands all night long

Go ahead and try us boy

We love to fight back!

Those last lines are my favorite.

I can visualize the Riot Grrrls—my mother among them—walking the streets at night in their Doc Martens and their bad haircuts and their dark lipstick, ready to stand up for what they believed in. What they knew was right.

Angry. Untouchable. Unstoppable. And, if you were to use my grandmother's words about my mom during last night's dinner, full of moxie.

Suddenly, I've got it.

My tongue between my teeth, my mind focused, my hand steady, I make careful letters, already imagining what the end product will look like. I finish lettering the title and then at the last minute add the perfect motto. When I'm finished, I crack my neck—it's a little sore from hunching over my creation so

intently. And then I admire my work. I can feel the adrenaline pumping through me. I smile.

This is the most excited I've been about anything in ages.

With an hour left before my mom gets home from work, I take my finished pages and place them gingerly in my math folder, then slide the folder into my backpack. Before I lose my nerve entirely, I wheel my bicycle out of the garage and hop on, making my way toward downtown East Rockport.

Since it's game night, the whole town is mostly a dead zone, with signs at the Dairy Queen and the Sonic that read CLOSED FOR THE GAME. The yellow glow of the streetlights illuminates the empty streets and parking lots. But U COPY IT is on the outskirts of the business district, and it's one of the few places in East Rockport that's always open until midnight. I coast past the Walgreens and the hair salon where my grandparents had to pay way too much money to fix my mom's blue hair all those years ago.

It's so quiet I feel like one of the last surviving citizens of a ghost town. The sticky autumn air smells like grease traps and gas stations, and if I take a deep breath I won't catch even a sliver of the scent of the briny Gulf waters just a few blocks away. In East Rockport, it's easy to forget you live by the ocean. Not that the Gulf of Mexico actually counts as the ocean. Last summer there was so much fecal matter floating in it, they shut the beaches down for two weeks. East Shitport is more like it.

Braking gently, I park my bike and walk into U COPY IT,

my eyes taking a moment to adjust from nighttime darkness to the bright fluorescent shine of the inside of the copy shop. There are no customers and just one employee, a guy wearing a frayed red vest that I guess is supposed to be some sort of U COPY IT corporate regalia. Perching on a stool behind the register, he's so busy reading a tattered paperback novel that he doesn't even look up when I walk in. Taking my folder carefully out of my backpack, I approach the counter. The guy's name tag reads FRANK.

"Uh, hi?" I say, and Frank looks up and blinks hard a few times, like he's trying to process that I'm here. He has a little stubble under his chin and a mass of unkempt salt-and-pepper hair that sits like a bird's nest on top of his head. He could be thirty or sixty, I'm not sure. But before he decides to speak to me, he carefully adjusts his frameless glasses and blinks three or four more times.

"Can I help you?" he says at last, setting down his copy of *Carrie* by Stephen King.

"Uh, I was wondering . . . if you could make me some copies?" I hate talking to people in stores, even if there's no one else to hear me. I'm always afraid I'm going to sound stupid.

"Well, the store is U COPY IT, so I can help *you* do it," Frank says dryly. But half a smile pops up on his face so I'm not too anxious.

Frank pulls out a small plastic counting device, walks me over to one of the machines, and slides the device into place. He shows me how it works and offers to observe as I do a practice run to make sure I do it right.

My cheeks heat up, but I pull my pages out of my bag and try to program the machine so it will copy double-sided, like Frank showed me.

“A lady boxer, huh?” Frank says, nodding his chin at the front cover.

“Yeah,” I say.

“Cool,” Frank says, ignoring how flustered I am. He makes sure my test copy turns out okay, even folding it in half so it’s all finished. When he hands it to me, it’s still warm as toast.

Holding it in my hand, my idea feels so real that all of a sudden I can’t decide whether I should scream with excitement or stop now.

“This looks good,” I manage.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Frank says.

Once he’s back at the counter, I busy myself making copies. I do a mental count of how many girls’ bathrooms I think there are at East Rockport High and punch in the number of copies I need. While the machine whirs, I check my phone for the tenth time. I have to make it home before my mom or she’ll never buy that I was so sick I decided to skip the game. It’s possible Mom would understand what I’m doing, but I can barely grasp the fact that *I’m* doing this, so I don’t know how I would even begin to explain it to her.

And anyway, there’s something delicious about it being my secret.

At last I pop out the counting device and head back to the counter to pay with some of my birthday money leftover from last month. Frank offers me another half smile before I walk out.

And then, just as I step through the door, he calls out, “See ya, Moxie!”

It takes me a moment to realize he’s talking to me, and by the time I turn around to wave, his eyes are already buried deep in his book again.

I beat my mother home and slide the paper sack into my backpack—I’ll have to fold the rest of them over the weekend. That is, if I don’t lose my nerve.

I should listen to “Rebel Girl” on repeat tomorrow and Sunday so I don’t.

I pull my Runaways T-shirt over my head and brush my teeth, and as I turn out the lights and slide into bed, my mom’s car pulls into the driveway. Soon there’s a sliver of light shining across me, and I squint my eyes like I’ve been sleeping all this time and have just been taken by surprise.

“Viv?” My mom’s silhouette is peeking through the doorway, her voice a whisper. “You feeling better?”

“Yeah,” I answer back, hoping the kitchen doesn’t smell like pizza. I’m supposed to have a stomach bug, after all.

“Let me know if you need anything, okay?”

“’Kay,” I whisper.

After my mom shuts the door, I slide deeper under the covers and feel my body buzz with anticipation when I think about the copies inside my backpack. No one else on the planet knows about them. Well, except Frank at U COPY IT. And anyway, he doesn’t know the next step of my plan.

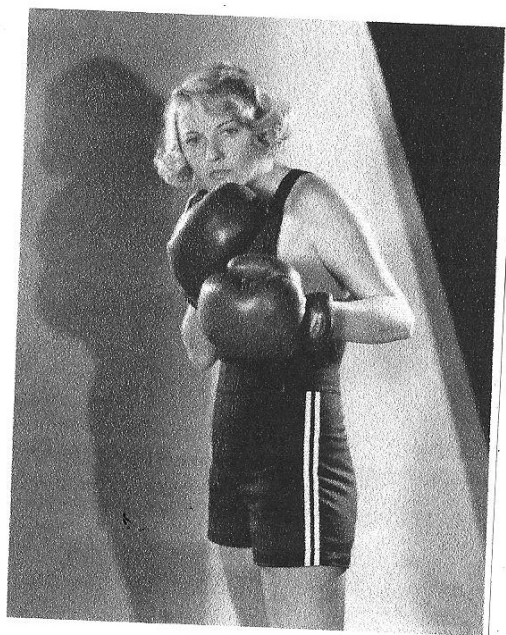
Finally, after a few minutes, I sense myself drifting off and when sleep overtakes me, I dream about marching through U COPY IT with Frank, the two of us dressed in matching Run-aways T-shirts, leaving copies of my creation on top of every Xerox machine.

Moxie

Issue
#1

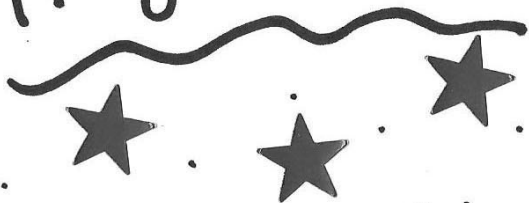
Free
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Moxie Girls
Fight Back!





Hey ladies!



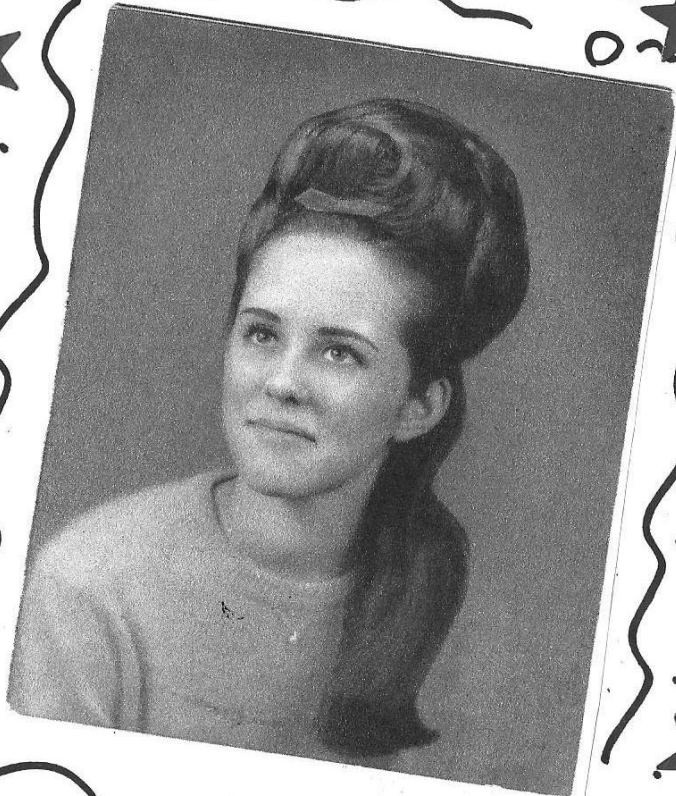
are you tired of a certain group of male students telling you to "Make me a sandwich!" when you voice an opinion in class?

are you tired of the football team getting tons of attention & getting away with anything they want?

are you tired of gross comments & disgusting T-shirts?

★ THE GIRLS OF MOXIE
ARE TIRED TOO!!! ★

What would
East Rockport High
look like if
MOXIE was in
charge ???



Attention Grrrrls of
★ East Rockport High! ♥ ★ ♥

If the words you've read
make sense to you - draw
some ♥s and ★s on your
hands before school next

FRIDAY OCTOBER 5

Find girls who feel like you!



CHAPTER FIVE

A SCHOOL SUPER EARLY IN THE MORNING FEELS HAUNTED. IT DOESN'T

look all that different on the outside, but without teenage bodies filling its halls and slamming its lockers, it seems like a cavernous, creepy space on the outskirts of some parallel universe, full of the spirits of teenage dreams that died sad, tragic deaths involving multiple-choice quizzes and prom-night disasters. All I can do as I pull open a side door is shake off the weirdness and hope there isn't anyone inside to catch me.

I pick the language hall as my secret entry point. I know the head custodian, Mr. Casas, gets here crazy early to unlock the doors and turn on the lights and power up the air-conditioning or the heat—both always seem to break on the hottest and coldest days of the year, respectively. It's not technically against the rules to be here at 6:30 on a Monday morning, but if this plan of mine is going to work, no one can see me.

My heart thrumming, I slide into the first girls' bathroom I see. Once inside, I take a breath and reach inside my backpack for my copies of *Moxie*. My hand slips around a stack of about twenty zines, then pauses. If I pull them out and put them down and walk out, I can't take it back. Not with the early bell ringing in thirty minutes.

The *plink plink* of a drippy sink taunts me in the background.

You. Can't. You. Can't. You. Can't.

I'm a girl who studies for tests. I'm a girl who turns in homework on time. I'm a girl who tells her grandparents she'll be over in five minutes and shows up in three. I'm a girl who doesn't cause a fuss. I even shrink into my desk when a teacher calls on me in class. I'm a girl who would prefer to evaporate into the ether rather than draw even positive attention to herself.

Drip. Drip. Drip. You. Can't. You. Can't.

Total truth? Sometimes I catch myself lip-syncing lyrics into the mirror alone in my bedroom, and I get embarrassed for myself even though there's no one there to see me but my own reflection.

DripDrip. DripDrip. DripDrip. YouCan't. YouCan't. YouCan't!

If I get caught distributing *Moxie*, I can only guess what kind of punishment Principal Wilson will dream up. A zine criticizing his precious school would definitely earn me a huge, public punishment. Way worse than anything that would have happened to my mother when she walked down the hallways of this very building with illegal blue hair. I glance at the lady boxer on the cover of *Moxie*, trying to channel her total badass attitude.

But damn it! I'm dutiful Vivian, and I'm going to be dutiful

about this, too. After all, these zines exist because I made them. They're real. I can't stop now.

And with my breath held, I slide the stack onto the windowsill, just underneath the filmy first-floor windows that the girls crack open sometimes so they can smoke without getting caught.

There. It's done. I look at the copies for a moment, trying to imagine how they'll appear to someone who has no idea where they came from. Hopefully like a Christmas present. Or a treasure hunt clue.

Walking quickly through the hallways, my mind running excuses as to why I'm here so early. (*I'm supposed to meet a teacher to make up a quiz. I wanted to see my college counselor. I had insomnia so I decided, what the hell, I might as well get here early.*) I stop at each girls' bathroom and drop off stacks of *Moxie* until there's only one copy left. I never see Mr. Casas or any other adult. Finally, I make it to my locker and slide the final remaining issue underneath some old spirals.

The first bell rings, and it's not long until bodies start streaming into the building as the sun rises. As I walk to American history, I scan the faces of my classmates, wondering if every girl I spot has already been inside a bathroom. Wondering if an issue of *Moxie* is tucked inside a notebook or folded inside the back pocket of a well-worn pair of jeans. I feel my heart pulsing, full of something important.

I take my seat in the second to last row as the bell rings, and Claudia runs in a beat later, sliding into the seat next to me. Our teacher, Mrs. Robbins, is fiddling around with papers at her desk. She doesn't even look up to greet us.

Our friend Sara is seated in front of us, and she takes advantage of Mrs. Robbins's lack of preparation to turn around and face Claudia and me. It's then that I see a copy of *Moxie* in her hands. I can feel my cheeks redden and tip my head forward so my hair covers my cheeks.

"Did y'all see this?" Sara asks.

Claudia reaches her hand out. "No, what is it?"

Sara hands the zine over, and I watch as Claudia's eyes skim the words I wrote Friday night while she was half-heartedly cheering the East Rockport Pirates on to a win over Refugio.

"Whoa," Claudia says.

"What is it?" I ask instead, praying I look normal as I peer over Claudia's shoulder.

"See for yourself," Claudia says, and I lean over the zine so I can read my own creation. I try to contort my face into one of surprise and curiosity.

"Huh," I manage. I feel so unnatural I can't believe they're not all staring at me.

But my friends' eyes are on the zine. "It's totally right on," Sara says. "I mean, all of this is totally accurate. But I wonder who made it? Like, who are these Moxie girls it's talking about? Are they some sort of club or something?"

"Did you see the thing on the back?" Claudia asks. "About coming to school on Friday with stars and hearts on your hands?" She shrugs and raises her eyebrows. "Not sure what the hell that's going to accomplish."

Claudia's words sting because it hits me that I never really thought about what the stars and hearts are going to do. Riot

Grrrls used to do similar things to help like-minded girls find each other at punk shows. But I'm not sure what the girls with decorations on their hands will do on Friday. I'm not sure any girls will show up to school with their hands marked up at all.

"I guess it's cool it got made, at least," I say, fishing for some validation.

"Too bad Mitchell Wilson and his asshole friends won't even realize it exists when they're the ones who need to read it," Claudia says. "Here." She tosses *Moxie* over Sara's shoulder and slumps back in her seat as Mrs. Robbins heads over to her podium to begin her millionth lecture on the Teapot Dome Scandal or something else equally mind-paralyzing.

When the bell rings to end class, Sara leaves *Moxie* behind on her desk as if it's a forgotten homework assignment. I resist the urge to pick it up and take it with me like some sort of overprotective mother.

By the time I walk into English class with Mr. Davies, I feel like a firecracker dud. I've seen a handful of girls with copies of *Moxie* in their hands, but since Sara and Claudia in first period, I haven't heard anyone talk about it. A visit to one of the girls' bathrooms reveals half a stack of *Moxie* zines sitting sadly on the counter, one haphazardly knocked to the floor, a faint footprint right on the front cover. People seem more excited to discuss the Pirates' win and the upcoming game against Port Aransas this week.

But as I take my seat in English, I spot Lucy Hernandez in

the front row with a copy of *Moxie* in her hands, her lips locked tight and her brow furrowed as she reads the inside. She flips the zine over to read the back. Then she opens it and reads the whole thing again. I can't help but watch her as she studies it, and I catch the tiniest sliver of a smile break out on her face.

The bell rings, and Mr. Davies walks in. I'm resigning myself to beginning the worst class of the day when I notice that following him is the new boy from the pep rally. The artists' son from Austin. Seth Acosta.

"Uh, hey?" Seth says to Mr. Davies's back. Mr. Davies turns around and stares at Seth.

"Yes?"

"I'm new," he says, handing Mr. Davies a slip of paper. "I just got put in this class." His voice is low and thick.

As Mr. Davies looks over Seth's schedule, I hear snickering coming from the back of the room. Mitchell and his beefy, empty-headed buddies are cracking up, probably because Seth is new and dresses like he's from Austin and not East Rockport, and this must be amusing to them. But Mitchell Wilson could live a thousand lives and never attain the perfection that is Seth Acosta in his sleeveless Sonic Youth T-shirt and perfectly tousled black hair.

"Take a seat, Seth," Mr. Davies instructs, nodding toward the desks. Seth chooses an empty one in a corner nowhere near me. He chews on a thumbnail and stares blankly at the chalkboard while I try not to stare too much. I wonder what he had for breakfast and which Sonic Youth song is his favorite and whether or not he's ever had sex with anyone before.

That last thought turns my breathing shallow.

Mr. Davies begins a lesson that is only slightly less boring than Mrs. Robbins's from first period, and I spend my time gazing from Seth to my notebook where I'm trying to take notes. Seth takes notes, too, which makes me think he's smart or at least cares about doing well in school, which is a turn on, honestly, even if I'm pretty sure that East Rockport High is not a place that makes anyone smarter.

I'm so consumed with watching Seth that I almost don't notice that Lucy has a copy of *Moxie* sitting on the corner of her desk. But about halfway through the tedious fifty minute class I see it perched there, like a good luck charm. She leaves it there through the whole lecture, but she keeps her mouth shut the entire class, even when Mr. Davies asks questions, so I guess she's learned her lesson. I can't help think, however, that there's something deliberate about the way she keeps *Moxie* visible, and it's sort of cool.

Finally, Mr. Davies sits down at his desk to zone out on his computer while we're allegedly "working independently" (actually messing around with our phones as surreptitiously as possible). That's when Mitchell Wilson gets up from the back row where he's almost certainly been sleeping without consequence and waltzes up to the front of the room to throw something away in the garbage can. On his way back, in one smooth motion, Mitchell slides *Moxie* into his hand and takes it back to his desk. Lucy whips her head around, her mouth in an O as if she's about to speak, but then she just shuts her lips tight and turns toward the front of the room. I catch her crushed expression in profile, even though her face is half-hidden behind curls.

“What the hell is this?” Mitchell says over the snap of paper that must be him opening the zine. I don’t turn around. It’s one thing to criticize Mitchell in the pages of *Moxie*. But being in his sightline as he reads my words makes my *Moxie* secret terrifying instead of thrilling.

“The girls of *Moxie* are tired?” he asks. “Maybe they should take a nap then.” The guys sitting next to him respond with a chorus of heh-hehs.

I glance over at Mr. Davies, who seems to sort of startle awake at his desk. He glances at the clock.

“Okay, hey, y’all . . . you can chat for the last few minutes of class, but keep it down, please.”

Great. Now the hounds have really been released.

“Okay, wait a minute, listen to this,” Mitchell continues as most of the class shift in their seats, leaning in toward him. Even Seth is looking over his shoulder, his dark eyes taking in the goon in the back row. Maybe not turning around actually makes me look suspicious. I crane my neck and see Mitchell’s eyes skimming the pages of *Moxie*. My pages.

“Are you tired of a certain group of male students telling you to ‘Make me a sandwich!’ when you voice an opinion in class?” he reads, then looks up, his grin spreading wide like he’s just been named All-American. “Hey, that’s me!” He shrugs his shoulders all guilty-as-charged. *Sorry not sorry!*

“Wait, read that one,” says Alex Adams, another football player in the back row. He points a finger at *Moxie* and smacks at it once, then twice, enjoying himself. “Read that last part.”

I’m trying to keep my face normal and neutral, but I’m

pushing my feet into the bottom of my shoes so hard one of them squeaks against the tiled floor.

“Okay, let me,” Mitchell agrees. “It says, ‘Are you tired of the football team getting tons of attention and getting away with anything they want?’” Mitchell laughs out loud like he’s just read the Earth is flat or time travel exists. (Actually, Mitchell might be dense enough to think those things are true.) “Is this thing serious? They’re pissed we’re doing our job and winning football games? I’m sorry, I didn’t realize I was supposed to lose so a bunch of girls don’t feel all sad and shit.”

Cackle cackle, heh-heh, belchy, burpy dumb-boy noises follow, but the truth is some of the other kids in the class are smiling and laughing, too. Even some of the girls.

Mitchell leans forward in his seat, looking toward Lucy, who is packing her stuff inside her backpack. She stares up at the clock like she’s willing it to speed up.

“Hey, new girl,” he says in the general direction of Lucy’s back. “New girl, turn around, I have a question for you.”

Lucy’s shoulders sink just a bit. But she turns around.

“Yeah?” she says.

“You write this?” Mitchell asks, waving *Moxie* around between his fingers.

Lucy waits a beat longer than she needs to before offering a cold and clipped, “No,” and then turns around to continue packing up.

“There were copies in all the girls’ bathrooms this morning,” someone says. Mitchell shrugs again, his gaze on Lucy. It lingers for too long.

“Whatever, it’s a bunch of shit,” Mitchell mutters under his breath. He crumples *Moxie* in his quarterback hands and tosses it toward the front of the room where it bounces off the whiteboard.

“Please, let’s use the trash can,” Mr. Davies says, coming to life briefly.

The bell rings at last, and I catch Seth making a break for the door, not looking back.

In the crowded hallway, I find myself bumping up against Lucy. She has her eyes fixed forward, her mouth a firm line.

“Hey,” I say, my voice low. “I have an extra copy of that thing if you want it. My locker’s right there.”

Lucy turns, surprised, her eyebrows popping up.

“Yeah?” she asks.

“Sure.”

She stands off to the side as I fiddle with my combination, and once I find the one copy of *Moxie* I saved, I hand it to her.

“Thanks,” she says, grinning. “This thing is so cool.”

“Yeah, it is pretty interesting,” I answer.

“I didn’t make it, you know,” she says. “Do you know who did?”

I shake my head no. If I speak she’ll know I’m lying.

“That Mitchell guy is a complete asshole,” Lucy says, and when she says it I find my eyes darting up and down the hall, double-checking that Mitchell isn’t nearby. It pisses me off that my first reaction is to make sure he can’t hear us, but I don’t want to get caught by him and become the next brunt of his jokes. He scares me too much.

“He can kind of do whatever he wants around here,” I offer, my voice quieter than it needs to be.

“I’ve figured that out,” Lucy says, arching one eyebrow. “Anyway, thanks for this.” She tucks *Moxie* inside a notebook. “Hey, what’s your name again?”

“Vivian,” I tell her. “People call me Viv.”

“Right, I thought so. You never really talk in class, so I wasn’t sure.”

I shrug, not sure how to respond at first. “I don’t think talking in that class gets you anywhere,” I finally manage.

“Seriously,” she says. “Anyway, I’m Lucy. And as that asshole pointed out, I’m new this year.”

I smile and nod. “Yeah, I know.” I’m not sure what else I’m supposed to say. In East Rockport I run into so few new people.

Lucy smiles back, but when I don’t say anything else, she offers me a little half wave and starts off down the hall. I raise a hand goodbye, and it’s not until she’s filtered through the crowd that I realize I could have asked her where she was from or why her family moved here. I could even have asked her if she was planning on coloring stars and hearts on her hands this Friday as *Moxie* instructed.

I stare down at my own bare hands and realize I need to answer that same question for myself.