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# Lingering

Margot Connolly  
*University of Iowa*

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# LINGERING

by  
Margot Connolly

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Theatre Arts (Playwriting) in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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Graduate College  
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Margot Connolly

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Theatre Arts at the May 2018 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

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Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

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Dare Clubb

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Lisa Schlesinger

“Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life sized.”

Margaret Atwood  
Cat's Eye

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Love and endless gratitude to my parents and sisters, who have always made me feel like my stories are worth telling.

## **Public Abstract**

A year after the mysterious death of Petra, her twin sister Dash convinces the scattered and estranged members of her Scout troop to re-form in order to return to Exploration Expedition, the site of her sisters passing. Though the troop have all been dealing with the loss of their defacto leader in different ways, their arrival at Expedition forces them to work together to confront their guilt in the events surrounding Petra's death and its effect on their own lives and friendships.

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# PREFACE

On weekend mornings in my childhood, me and my sisters would wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, and disappear into the basement to play until dinner. We'd stock up with juice boxes and cheesy rice cakes, send someone up for sandwiches at lunchtime, but otherwise everything we needed was in the basement - it even had a bathroom. This was where the dolls lived. Three girls meant we had a lot of dolls - well-loved Barbies with hopelessly tangled hair from the Great Lice Epidemic of '96, American Girl Dolls with period appropriate outfits and plastic, doll sized food, the "guy box" full of action figures; Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, a Godzilla with a red button in his chest that roared until the batteries died, a bendy Gumby with chewed up feet. Our games varied depending on our moods and the toys we chose to play with, but they were always incredibly complex, intensely collaborative, and shockingly dark. It was rare that a game passed without our heroes being bullied by our designated 'mean Barbie' Icepick, a trip to the orphanage, a boarding school with an evil principal, or our blonde haired, blue eyed Barbies trapped in a turn of the century Jewish tenement house or a World War II Polish ghetto. My sisters and I would put ourselves to the task of uncovering these stories, of acting them out, with the kind of diligence an artists puts to their work. Our dolls had lives inside them, and it was our job to discover them.

Living with two sisters meant an ever shifting alliance of friendships and fights, but it also meant moments like this, where we were united in common purpose - telling a story, building a world that was just for us, that ran by our rules, a world of "What if we lived in -" or "Then my girl would say -" It was rich and colorful and never ending, always twisting and morphing into the newest adventure. It was hard for me when we hit

an age where playing with dolls or playing pretend together was no longer a socially acceptable mode of play, when it became something just for ‘babies.’ My relationships with my sisters became much harder to navigate without the shared ground of stories.

One of the other creative outlets of my childhood, from a very early age, was theater. Here was another place, a socially acceptable place, where I could play pretend for huge amounts of time, where I could subsume myself in different worlds, more interesting stories. For much of my childhood I felt desperately unhappy and lonely. I was constantly looking for a place where I could just fit in for once, instead of always sticking out. Somehow in the real world this belonging always evaded me - I could only find comfort in these other stories. It always felt right to me, that the act of telling a story onstage was called a play.

However, as much I loved acting in plays in my childhood, they were seldom built for me. I was cast as a supernatural being or an animal almost twice as often as I played an actual girl of my own age, and I played a boy three times more often than that. My theatre classes were always full of girls, more girls than any play had parts for, the teachers would say. Even when I was cast as a girl, most of the stories centered around the boys or men. I was someone’s daughter or sister or mother more than anything else. Sometimes the play was cast with all girls but made no change to the source material, like the all female production my summer camp did of *Twelve Angry Men*. What difference might it have made in my life if I had been able to act in a play with a character like me, a girl that had struggles I could relate to? What would it have meant to have gotten to exist as that person for a period of time, what understanding or comfort might I have taken from it? What tools could this have given me to exist and shape my world?

What I find most important about playwriting is that it all centers around this idea of understanding. The idea that there are so many people in the world who experience and feel and know so many things. It is infinite and amazing, the way that the world and all these people and their thoughts and their lives all fit together. Theatre is literally a place to be seen – a story put up onstage for an entire audience to watch. In my childhood and adolescence, this was what I never felt – seen. It felt like there was this vast world inside me, these complicated, churning feelings and I felt like no one understood these feelings or even cared enough to look.

It isn't surprising to me that so many of my plays, in particular the ones I've written in my time at the University of Iowa, focus on the experiences of adolescent girls – two girls falling in love on their evangelical bible quiz team, a thirteen year old getting bat mitzvahed in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, elite gymnasts dealing with a mysterious twitch, a group of girls at a teen tough love program trying to find a way out, a troop of knock off Girl Scouts dealing with grief and loss. I want to see and acknowledge these stories, these emotions, these lived experiences of teenaged girls that it feels like the world doesn't care enough to look at. Nuanced, real teenage girls are underrepresented in American plays. Too often they are the butt of a joke with shallow concerns and no interest in the world outside themselves of their cell phones. They are viewed as a joke, a prize to be won, or as sidekicks and background characters in the coming of age stories of men. We must recognize these young women as humans in their own right, with lives and struggles and a coming of age of their own. My goal in my time here at the University and my goal in leaving it is to give voice to these young women, to allow them to be seen and heard by a world that does not understand their value. Not only

that, but to allow girls and young women to see themselves on stage – as people worth watching, an acknowledgement that they are here, that they have worth, that they are complicated and amazing and full of stories, beautiful stories, stories the world needs to hear. To give them value.

I'll never know what difference it might have made to me, as a desperately unhappy eleven year old, to get to see myself reflected onstage, or to have gotten to play a girl like me. I can only speculate. But I hope that somewhere, there's a girl who feels as uncomfortable as me, as adrift, who sees *Lingering* or *Quiz Out* or *Tough* or any of my other plays and feels a moment of recognition. A moment of seeing, and being seen. A moment of understanding that they have worth. And a moment of living in stories.

# LINGERING

Lingering received a production as part of the 2018 Iowa New Play Festival on May 1, 2018. It was directed by Lila Rachel Becker. Molly Winstead was the dramaturg. The scenic designer was Savannah Genskow, the lighting designer was Jacob Sikorski, the costume designer was Hayley Ryan, and the sound designer was Harry Daley-Young. Alexis Hinman was the stage manager, assisted by Genevieve Eckelaert. The cast was as follows:

DASH/PETRA  
CHRISTA  
KAYLA  
EMILY  
ZAN

Molly Winstead  
Chastity Williams  
Kaitlyn Vote  
Kaylyn Kluck  
Mackenzie Elsbecker

NICOLETTE/MELISSA  
JENNI/SARAH

Laura Brightman  
Jenna Smithson

MRS. O'DOWD  
ELLIE

Erica Toney  
Maggie John

## List of Characters

Dash, female, 14 year old, any race/ethnicity.

Christa, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Kayla, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Emily, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Zan, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Petra, 13 years old, played by the same actor who plays Dash.

Nicolette/Melissa, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Jenni/Sarah, female, 14 years old, any race/ethnicity.

Mrs. O'Dowd, Christa's mother, mid-late forties. Same race/ethnicity as Christa.

Ellie, Dash and Petra's mother, mid-late forties. Same race/ethnicity as Petra and Dash.

## Prologue

(The woods. It's dark, spooky. A group of girls huddled around a map by flashlight. Their faces aren't clear, except for one - PETRA, played by the actor playing DASH, but with a braid in her hair, clothes that fit, different manner of speaking, etc. The sky is periodically rent by lightning - almost too periodically to be natural. The air feels heavy, like just before a storm. Something's coming.)

PETRA

On my honor, I do swear  
in the Spirit of Exploration  
To do my best in all things  
To help others in all ways  
And to be true to the laws of my God, my Country, and my Sister Explorers.

ALL GIRLS

This we all swear.

PETRA

I will do my best to be  
Loyal, loving,  
Friendly, fair  
honest, helpful  
Brave, bright, reverent and responsible  
To myself, my Sisters, my family, and my world.

ALL GIRLS

This we all swear.

(They all link hands.)

PETRA

I swear never to abandon my Sisters  
To do good where good can be done  
To fight bad where it needs fighting  
To Explore in earnestness for all of my days  
To be true to myself and my troop.

(A huge crack of lightning, blindingly bright.  
PETRA looks up.)

That's it. Ready?

(She puts her hand in the center. The others follow.  
They do what looks like a secret handshake. Then  
PETRA stands up. Picks up the flashlight. Shines it

Let's do this.

out.)

(The other girls also stand. They make their way deeper into the woods. The lightning picks up in frequency, flashes brighter. And brighter. And brighter. Lights out.)

Scene One

(An empty school lunch room. Two girls, CHRISTA and KAYLA, are circling up chairs in the center of the room. The walls have posters of the food pyramid and bright, cartoon like pictures of vegetables and fruits. Two glowing soda machines and a snack machine sit against one wall. A pair of push doors on the other wall. It has the feel of a school after 3pm - weirdly quiet. CHRISTA and KAYLA, both fourteen, are wearing bright blue vests with copious patches on them. KAYLA has less patches than CHRIS, who aside from her vest looks like the cover girl for a grunge band.)

KAYLA

Where's your mom?

CHRISTA

Oh. I dunno. Probably like, getting shit from the car.

KAYLA

Oh.

(They continue arranging chairs.)

Do you think any of the others will come today?

CHRISTA

Um. Maybe. Emily has dance practice, so.

KAYLA

Oh. What about Marta?

CHRISTA

I dunno. She was in Earth Science.

KAYLA

Oh.

(They arrange chairs for a moment in silence.)

Do you think we'll have enough girls to qualify for Exploration Expedition?

CHRISTA

Um. I dunno.

KAYLA

Just because that's kind of one of the big reasons I stayed on for this year? Because I

really wanted to get my scuba diving qualification badge at Expedition last year, but then after -

(She trails off. Shrugs.)

Well. I mean. Just when we had to leave, I didn't. I just want to qualify this year. That's all. Does that sound really bad?

CHRISTA

No.

KAYLA

I feel like it sounds kind of bad.

CHRISTA

It doesn't sound bad. It sounds true. So.

(The doors to the cafeteria burst open. The noise makes KAYLA and CHRISTA jump. In come ZAN, NICOLETTE, and JENNI - the same age as KAYLA and CHRISTA, but way cooler in their attire and their manner. They're laughing with each other as they head over to the snack machines.)

NICOLETTE

My mom only gave me a five so I don't know if the snack machine will take it or if like I need exact change -

JENNI

Sometimes the soda machine will give you change if the snack machine won't -

NICOLETTE

I don't want a soda, though, I want Chex Mix! I neeeeeeed Chex Mix -

ZAN

Here, Jason gave me change earlier -

NICOLETTE

Ooh, Jasoooooon. Giving you chaaaaaaange -

KAYLA

Hey, Zan!

(She waves, awkwardly. ZAN, NICOLETTE, and JENNI turn and look at KAYLA and CHRISTA. A beat.)

ZAN

Oh. Hey, Kayla. Chris.

CHRISTA

Hey.

KAYLA

Are you coming to the meeting today?

(NICOLETTE and JENNI snicker. ZAN stiffens.)

ZAN

Uh. Nah.

JENNI

Ooh, Zan, are you sure? I mean, they probably're learning how to help little old ladies cross the street and planning some really important top secret candy selling missions -

NICOLETTE

Yeah, Zan. Plus I heard that Jason is like totally into those vests, super hot, right -

KAYLA

Jason? Jason Boyd? Zan, are you and Jason Boyd -

NICOLETTE

Are you guys seriously still doing Explorer Scouts? I thought everyone stopped doing that in like, elementary school.

KAYLA

No? I mean - yeah, we're still doing it, no, not everyone stopped in elementary school -

CHRISTA

It looks good. For like college and stuff.

NICOLETTE

People do it all the way until college? Weird.

CHRISTA

Why is it weird? Boys do Eagle Scouts in high school -

KAYLA

And it's not just candy selling. Last year I almost qualified for my scuba diving badge -

JENNI

What about the total dweeb badge? Did you qualify for that?

KAYLA

Um. No?

ZAN

Get your Chex Mix, Nic, we should get changed for practice -

NICOLETTE

Ugh, true, if Coach makes me run laps after I eat then I'll totally barf all over everyone, gross -

JENNI

I can't believe Coach is even still having us practice, I mean it's not like we have any games left, school is like almost over -

(They go to the machines. ZAN shuffles awkwardly, adjusts her backpack.)

ZAN

Um. Sorry.

KAYLA

For what?

ZAN

For, you know. Them. I mean -

(She shrugs.)

They're not that bad, when you get to know them.

CHRISTA

Wow. What a ringing endorsement. Do your not that bad friends know you used to do Explorer Scouts?

ZAN

Everyone used to do it. It's not a big deal.

CHRISTA

You did it last year though. In seventh grade. When you were in middle school. Which is one school higher than elementary school. Doesn't that violate some kind of cool girl code -

ZAN

Whatever.

KAYLA

You could stay? If you want? For the meeting? Mrs. O'Dowd's getting stuff from the car. We're doing first aid today, like, bandaging and tourniquets - you're good at that, remember last year at Expedition -

ZAN

I've got practice. Sorry.

(Beat.)

Are you gonna go back this year?

CHRISTA

Go back to what?

ZAN

Come on.

KAYLA

Oh. Well. We don't know if we'll have enough people. To qualify?

ZAN

Oh. Bummer.

KAYLA

I mean, I think we need at least five, but Emily will come if she doesn't have dance, and if you and Marta came back, that'd be five - or maybe even Dash, you know, maybe she would -

ZAN

What is wrong with you?

KAYLA

I - what?

ZAN

Dash isn't going to go to Expedition. Jesus.

KAYLA

Well - I mean, I don't know, I just -

ZAN

The only thing less likely than me coming back is Dash coming back. God.

CHRISTA

Whatever, Kayla. We don't need her. If she's too good for us -

ZAN

What? I didn't even say anything! I was being nice -

CHRISTA

Well, I guess by the standards of your new friends that's nice, but around actual normal

people that's not really -

KAYLA

Don't fight - Zan, come on, we miss you - it could be really nice, right, if you stayed, it'd be like old times -

ZAN

No it wouldn't.

(She shifts again. Notices NICOLETTE and JENNI walking back towards her.)

I gotta go. Softball. Coach gets pissed if we're late. Come on, guys.

NICOLETTE

Chill out, we have seven minutes - here, I got a Diet Coke to make change, you want some?

(They exit, ZAN leading the way, not looking back.)

CHRISTA

Why'd you ask her to stay? We don't need her. If she won't stick with us after -

KAYLA

Why'd you have to be mean to her?

CHRISTA

I wasn't being mean to her, I was just saying the truth. She's not our friend.

KAYLA

That's not true. She's been in the troop with us since -

CHRISTA

Well she's not anymore, is she? If you can flake out on us like that, after what happened - then you're not really a friend. 'I will do my best to be loyal and loving, friendly and fair -'

KAYLA

What about, 'an Explorer Scout can find a friend anywhere, if she knows how to look?' You should have given her a chance -

CHRISTA

I gave her plenty of chances. And you shouldn't have said that about Dash.

KAYLA

Why not? Don't you want her to come back?

CHRISTA

Well - I mean. It's just not going to happen so you shouldn't talk about it like it is. That's all.

KAYLA

But we'd take her back. If she wanted to come back. Right?

CHRISTA

She's never going to want to. And you just sound stupid pretending she is, so, stop. People think we're stupid enough already.

(MRS. O'DOWD enters. CHRISTA's mom, in her early forties, crating an enormous brown cardboard box.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Hey there, ladies! Sorry I'm late, had a devil of a time parking. Where're the others?

KAYLA

Um. Emily has dance?

MRS. O'DOWD

Oh, darn! Again? Which one of you will take notes? Chrissy?

CHRISTA

Uh. Okay.

MRS. O'DOWD

What about Marta?

(CHRISTA shrugs.)

KAYLA

Um.

MRS. O'DOWD

(with a forced laugh.)

Well. Just us chickens today, huh? That's all right. I brought plenty of bandages so we can get to work on that first aid badge and I guess we could let out a little early. Chrissy, honey, you want to start us off?

(She sets the box down on a table and stands in front of one of the circle of chairs. KAYLA and CHRISTA join, sitting on either side of her. The circle looks lonely and empty. CHRISTA holds up one hand up, two fingers protruding from a fist - like a vertical salute. KAYLA and MRS. O'DOWD join her.)

CHRISTA

On my honor, I do swear, in the Spirit of Exploration -  
(She continues saying the pledge. Lights out.)

## Scene Two

(Lights up. We are in the woods again - a different woods than before. It's dark. Shadows of tree branches everywhere. The low hum of the highway in the distance. DASH, a fourteen year old girl, identical to PETRA in appearance but very different in manner, sits cross legged center stage. She has a purple backpack in her lap with a Girl Explorer patch sewn on the front. She's wearing clothes that are too small for her, like she's gone through a sudden growth spurt. Her tee shirt rides up, her jeans stop an inch or so above the ankle. Not fashionable, just outgrown. She looks older than PETRA - not only because it's one year later. She has a bright green cast on her arm. It has no signatures on it. Her hair is loose, undone, messy. She unzips the backpack and pulls out a flashlight, which has P. DASHELL written on it in black sharpie. She turns it on, sets it out carefully to one side to illuminate the area. She reaches into the bag again, pulls out a mirror. She places it in front of her, centering it. She moves the flashlight so that its in front of the mirror. She closes her eyes. Concentrates. Lets her hands hover over the mirror.)

DASH Hello?

(She waits. No response. She swallows, tries again. Closes her eyes, centers herself, lets her hands hover.)

Hello? Are you there? It's me.

(No response. DASH picks up the flashlight, turns it off, then turns it back on again. Repeats the ritual.)

Can you hear me?

(No response. DASH tries again. Her hands are shaking this time.)

Hey - Petra?

(No response. She clenches her fists, shakes her hands out. Tries again.)

Petra? If you can hear me, do something. Give me a sign or something. Please.

(No response. DASH sits there. Waits, staring in the mirror. Blackout. A roll of thunder, low, ominous.)

Scene Three

(The cafeteria again. This time, the tables are set up for lunch. KAYLA and CHRISTA, sans vests, are sitting at a table together. KAYLA has a school lunch. CHRISTA is unpacking her brown bag. Without speaking, they swap certain aspects of it with each other - a daily ritual. At another table, NICOLETTE, JENNI, and ZAN. A few trays of food in front of them, but they are too busy talking and laughing to eat much. Every so often, ZAN looks over toward KAYLA and CHRISTA's table, before stopping herself and looking back. EMILY comes in and sits at KAYLA and CHRISTA's table. She has a bought lunch that consists almost entirely of fries and ketchup.)

CHRISTA

Aren't you getting over being sick?

EMILY

Yeah. So?

CHRISTA

Well, I mean - I don't know if french fries and ketchup is really -

EMILY

I didn't get sick from too much ketchup. I'm good.

KAYLA

Well - but shouldn't you eat like, soup or something? Or something healthy?

EMILY

What are you, gunning for your Healthy Hearts badge? Look. Potatoes and tomatoes. That's a vegetable and a fruit. I'm fine.

(She digs in. CHRISTA shrugs, starts eating her own lunch.)

So - what'd your mom say? About Expedition?

CHRISTA

We need five. Minimum. That's the only way to justify the cost of registration, and we need five to qualify for the whole troop competitions.

EMILY

Well. What about Marta?

CHRISTA

I have Earth Science with Marta, but. I mean, every time I try to talk to her she pretends she can't hear me, so. I mean, maybe if you guys try -

KAYLA

I already did. She couldn't hear me either.

EMILY

Okay. Shit. Well - I mean, I guess I could try and talk to her -

CHRISTA

Yeah, you can try.

(Beat.)

I mean, maybe it's not the worst thing. Not to go back, I mean. After last year.

KAYLA

My mom says we can't let what happened last year stop us from living our lives.

EMILY

Well. I mean - it's not like it was Expedition's fault.

CHRISTA

Not going to Expedition doesn't mean we're not living our lives. And I'm not saying it's Expedition's fault, but -

EMILY

If we can't get enough people, then maybe that's like God's way of telling us that we're not meant to go back?

(Awkward silence.)

I just meant - my dance teacher was saying that when things don't turn out the way we want them to, sometimes that's God trying to tell us something -

CHRISTA

Yeah. Got it.

(They eat a minute.)

Are you gonna eat that?

KAYLA

Nah. Go for it.

(CHRISTA helps herself. DASH enters the cafeteria. Still in clothes too small for her. Backpack on back. Balancing a lunch tray on her cast. The atmosphere in the room subtly shifts. Not necessarily something conscious, but no one wants to look at DASH or touch her. She starts picking her way through the

room, making a beeline for KAYLA, CHRISTA, and EMILY. She stumbles slightly, near ZAN's table. The contents of her tray slosh, but don't spill.)

NICOLETTE

Watch yourself, Scarecrow! You almost dumped that crap all over us.

(DASH doesn't say anything. Backs up, tries to go through another way. She can hear everything ZAN's table is saying.)

ZAN

You shouldn't call her that.

NICOLETTE

Why not? She looks like she stole her clothes from a cornfield. And like she doesn't know what a hairbrush is.

JENNI

Plus, she's scary. Don't you think she's scary?

ZAN

Well. Yeah, but. It's not her fault.

NICOLETTE

We're not saying it is. We're just saying she's scary and looks like a hobo. And she does. Right?

ZAN

Yeah. Right.

(DASH arrives at EMILY, CHRISTA, and KAYLA's table. Hovers, awkwardly.)

KAYLA

Dash!! Hi!!

EMILY

Hey!

DASH

Um. Can I -

(She motions at the table. The girls exchange looks, then launch into making enough space for DASH.)

EMILY

Yeah, yeah, of course. We'll, um -

KAYLA

Yeah, sit, there's room -

CHRISTA

Yeah. Hey, Dash.

(DASH sits. Tugs at her pants, her shirt. She focuses on the lunch tray. The other girls don't know what to do. Start eating again? Talk to her? Silence. Until, suddenly:)

KAYLA

So. Um. How are you, Dash? Long time no see!

DASH

We have third period algebra together.

KAYLA

Oh. I - well, yes. We do. But um - I mean, our seats are kinda far away from each other so it feels like -

DASH

Yeah. Right.

(Silence.)

KAYLA

What happened to your arm?

DASH

Wrist. It broke.

KAYLA

Oh. Ouch.

CHRISTA

How?

(DASH shrugs. Silence.)

EMILY

So - how is algebra? You guys have Farshtey, right?

(DASH doesn't say anything. Picks at her food.)

KAYLA

Oh. I mean, he's fine. Whatever. He gives you extra credit if you come to tests dressed up, so - that's cool?

CHRISTA

Do you think he'd give you extra credit if you came in dressed up but like, boys clothes dressed up? Like in a tie and a jacket and stuff? Because if he only gives you extra credit when you dress like a girl, that's sexism -

KAYLA

Oh. Um. I don't know. I mean - I guess I could investigate on the final exam? Except I'm like hovering at a C+ so I kinda need the extra credit so if he doesn't -

CHRISTA

If he doesn't it's sexism and you could sue. That's Title IX.

EMILY

I don't know if that's really what Title IX means.

CHRISTA

Whatever. You could still complain.

KAYLA

I - yeah. Maybe. Do you like him, Dash?

(DASH shrugs. No one knows what to say.)

Are you um - doing anything fun? For summer? Or -

DASH

We're moving.

CHRISTA

What? You are?

EMILY

When?

DASH

Soon as school lets out.

KAYLA

Where? Like, to a new house, or -

DASH

To Nevada. I guess my mom wants to be closer to my grandma and stuff.

EMILY

Oh. Um. Wow.

CHRISTA

What about your dad?

(DASH shrugs.)

EMILY

So like, when you say as soon as school lets out, do you mean -

DASH

Next week. Yeah.

KAYLA

Oh. Wow.

(Pause.)

I - well, we'll really -

DASH

You guys probably don't have enough people, do you?

CHRISTA

For what?

DASH

Expedition.

(Silence.)

EMILY

Um. No. Not technically.

DASH

Oh.

CHRISTA

Yeah. Well. We were even thinking - we don't even know if we'll go. Even if we had enough people -

DASH

You have to go.

(They stare at her.)

That's why I came over. I'm going with you. To Expedition.

(No one says anything. She looks up.)

I mean - you need to make up the numbers, right? So. I can go. If you need more people.

I - of course you can.

KAYLA

Kayla -

CHRISTA

What? She's a member of the troop! She can come if she wants to!

KAYLA

We don't even know if we'll have enough people to go yet, don't just tell her we'll get her there when -

CHRISTA

I mean - you really want to go? Back there? After -  
(She can't say it.)

EMILY

She just said she did.

KAYLA

But -

EMILY

Why?

CHRISTA

(Everyone looks at her.)

What? Like that isn't what you're all thinking.

KAYLA

She doesn't have to say. If she doesn't want.

EMILY

I mean - is it for like - closure, or something? My dance teacher said -  
(DASH doesn't respond.)

Sorry. I didn't mean -

DASH

It's fine. I mean. Yeah. Closure. Or, whatever.  
(Pause.)

There's just - something I have to do. So.  
(Dead silence.)

EMILY

Well, then. We'll, um. We'll get you there. Yeah.

CHRISTA

Em - we don't even know if we'll have enough -

KAYLA

We'll get enough. If it's something she has to do, we'll do it. 'I swear never to abandon my sisters.' Right?

(Beat.)

CHRISTA

I - yeah. Okay. I - okay.

(KAYLA leans over and touches DASH's hand. DASH almost jumps.)

KAYLA

We'll get you there, Dash. Promise.

DASH

Yeah. Thanks.

EMILY

Okay. So. I guess - I mean, I can try and talk to Marta, I guess, and -

CHRISTA

But if Marta won't? Then what -

(NICOLETTE, JENNI, and ZAN let out a sudden burst of laughter. EMILY, DASH, KAYLA, and CHRISTA all stop. Look at ZAN, with calculating looks. Look at each other. Lights out.)

Scene Four

(Lights up. The Woods, again. DASH, dressed almost the same, maybe with a jacket or something, with the same backpack, is sitting in the same place. She goes through a similar ritual of unloading - pulls out the flashlight, sets it up. Then pulls a plastic baggie full of rocks out of the bag. They all look roughly the same, like someone spent a lot of time trying to assemble a group as close to identical as possible. DASH starts to space them out in a circle around her. Pulls out the mirror again - props it up next to the flashlight.)

DASH

Um. Hello?

(She waits. Nothing. DASH adjusts a stone slightly.)

Hello? Are you here?

(No response.)

If you're here, give me a sign. Let me know you can hear me.

(She waits. Still nothing.) I'm going to find you. I know you're there, somewhere. You have to be.

(She maybe hears something. Stops. Still nothing.)

We never believed in ghosts before. Remember? At Expedition with the troop when we were in second grade, and Christa told that story about the little girl ghost that came out of the lake and Kayla peed in her sleeping bag, remember that? But you weren't scared. You didn't believe in ghosts. We didn't believe in a lot of things then.

(She waits. Nothing.)

But then that other stuff was true. The rock, and - other stuff. So if - well then maybe I can believe in ghosts now too. Is all I'm saying. I can believe in anything. If I need to.

(A roll of thunder. DASH, immediately on high alert.)

Hello? Petra?

(She waits.)

Petra, please.

(Waits more. No response. Nothing. Lights out. More thunder.)

Scene Five

(Lights up. The lunchroom. It's a study period. EMILY, NICOLETTE, JENNI, CHRISTA, KAYLA, and ZAN are scattered at various tables, doing homework. A teacher presides over the group from a desk offstage. JENNI and ZAN are sitting at one table, textbook open in front of them, working. CHRISTA and KAYLA are at a table nearby. KAYLA whispers to ZAN.)

KAYLA

Zan? Psst. Zan.

(ZAN pretends not to hear her. KAYLA leans over, so she's almost at the same table as ZAN.)

Psst. PSSST.

(JENNI raises her hand.)

JENNI

Ms. Moscowitz? I have a question about the reading response. Do we have to do all the questions, or -

(The teacher waves JENNI up to her desk. JENNI goes, walking between ZAN and KAYLA. ZAN takes this opportunity to inch away from KAYLA. She puts her head closer to her work.)

KAYLA

(whispering louder)

Zan?

(No response. KAYLA's whispering gets progressively less stealthy until ZAN answers her.)

Hey. Hey, Zan? Zan. Zan -

ZAN

What?

KAYLA

Can you come to our meeting tomorrow?

ZAN

Meeting for what?

KAYLA

For Explorers. It's gonna be all about getting to Expedition and -

ZAN

I told you, I'm not going to go to -

(The teacher looks their way. ZAN and KAYLA both duck down and pretend to be doing work again. The teacher slowly returns to helping JENNI.)

EMILY

It's not going to be that long a meeting. You could go to softball after, maybe.

KAYLA

Mrs. O'Dowd is bringing brownies - you love brownies -

ZAN

Look. I can't - I'm not going back there. Sorry. Okay?

KAYLA

But you said -

ZAN

I said I can't and I can't. Okay? You'll find someone else. Marta -

CHRISTA

Mysteriously, Marta goes selectively deaf any time one of us tries to talk to her so -

ZAN

Whatever, that doesn't mean I'm going to -

KAYLA

You said if Dash came back, you'd come back. That's what you said.

ZAN

I said the only thing less likely than me coming back is Dash coming back, that's not the same thing -

KAYLA

But Dash came back. So.

(ZAN stops pretending to do work. Stares at KAYLA.)

ZAN

What?

EMILY

Dash is coming. To Expedition. So we only need one more.

Why?

ZAN

KAYLA

We need five for registration and to compete in the group events -

ZAN

No, I mean -

EMILY

She says it's something she has to do.  
(Pause.)

ZAN

I can't do it.

EMILY

Yeah, you can, Zan. It'll be okay, we'll all -

ZAN

I can't, I said!

(A little too loud - the teacher looks up again. CHRISTA grabs her math book and goes to sit at ZAN's table, next to her. Points to the textbook like she's asking a question. The teacher stops watching them.)

CHRISTA

We're doing this, okay? We have to do this.

KAYLA

It'll be okay. It'll be us five together again. Like before.

ZAN

That's what you're saying to get me to do it? I never want what happened before to happen again! I never want to -

CHRISTA

You think any of us want to? You think any of us think this is a good idea?  
(Silence.)

She asked us to. She said she needs to go.

ZAN

Chris -

CHRISTA

Look. You think I want you there? I don't. I never want to go back there again, especially not with you. You think I don't wish I could be like you and pretend none of it ever happened? Yeah, I wish that. Sometimes more than anything. But I can't pretend it away. Because it happened and it can never un-happen. We owe her. Right? If she wants to go to stupid Expedition, then we'll get her to stupid Expedition. That means we need five people. That means we need you.

ZAN

Why me, though. You could find someone else - Marta, or -

KAYLA

It's right that it's you. It's right that it's all of us again.

ZAN

It isn't all of us, though, is it!

(A silence.)

CHRISTA

We owe Dash. Don't we?

ZAN

Well - yeah, but this isn't -

CHRISTA

We owe Dash and we'll never be able to pay it back. But this is what we can do. So we're doing it. Emily, Kayla, me. And you. We owe her. Right?

ZAN

I - yeah. Right.

CHRISTA

Dash is going and it was her sister. She was just your friend.

ZAN

She was my best friend -

CHRISTA

So if she was really your best friend, prove it. You owe it to her. And to Dash. Don't you?

(ZAN, miserable, silent. A single nod.)

EMILY

So - you're in? You'll come?

ZAN

It's not like you're giving me a real choice.

CHRISTA

You're right. We're not.

ZAN

I'm not - I don't pretend it never happened.

CHRISTA

Whatever. Don't forget to get Nic and Jenni to tell Coach you'll have to miss softball. Or maybe Jason Boyd'll do it for you - that's what boyfriends are for, right?

ZAN

Whatever. I said I'll go. You don't have to -

(JENNI, finally finished with the teacher, re-enters and sits back down next to ZAN. Starts doing work again. ZAN doesn't. Watches CHRISTA go back to the others. Lights out.)

Scene Six

(DASH in the woods. Stones, mirror, etc. all set up. But it's still daytime. DASH, cross-legged, backpack beside her, looks into the mirror - she doesn't try and communicate, just watches the mirror, like waiting for something to come. She cocks her head - hears something? The snap of a twig. Her head rockets up - Petra? But then other snaps of other twigs - footsteps. Someone is coming. DASH scrambles, shoving everything into her backpack.)

ELLIE

(off-stage)

Hello? Are you there? Perdie?

(She enters. DASH barely finishes zipping her bag.)

Didn't you hear me calling?

(DASH shrugs.)

I was. It's time for dinner.

(DASH grabs her bag.)

What are you doing out here?

DASH

Homework.

ELLIE

Homework? Out here?

(DASH shrugs again.)

What's wrong with your desk?

(DASH looks at her.)

Or the kitchen table? Or the backyard? I don't like you so far out here that you can't hear me when I call you.

DASH

Okay.

ELLIE

I thought we said, after what happened to your wrist -

DASH

Okay.

ELLIE

And you're a mess. What are you wearing?

(DASH tries to hide her clothes with her sweatshirt.)

DASH

Clothes.

ELLIE

Hon. We've been over this. You can't keep wearing that stuff. It doesn't fit anymore. You know that, right?

(DASH shrinks into her sweatshirt.)

Your school called and told me that they could put me in touch with people, if we ever found ourselves in need. Do you know how embarrassing that was?

DASH

Sorry.

ELLIE

I don't want anyone thinking we can't take care of ourselves. You don't want that either, right?

(DASH shrugs.)

I was in your room earlier.

DASH

Why?

ELLIE

I was looking for you. You haven't packed anything.

(Silence.)

Everything has to be in boxes by Monday morning. All right? The stuff we're taking and the stuff we're giving away.

DASH

The stuff you're giving away.

ELLIE

It can't all come with us, hon. Gran's place is a lot smaller than here, and - it'll be a fresh start. It'll be good for us. Both of us. Right?

(DASH shrugs.)

Do you - if you want, I could - or maybe Dad could -

DASH

Could what?

ELLIE

Well. Help you.

(DASH looks at her.)

I know it's hard, but it's - it's just what we have to do -

DASH

I don't want help.

ELLIE

Then what do you want?

(Silence.)

Well - the stuff needs to get packed, Perdie. All right? By Monday. All of it. The stuff that's staying and the stuff that's coming. Or I'll have to pack it myself.

DASH

You can't. That stuff's mine.

ELLIE

Then you do it. Then you'll know the important things are coming with you, and the unimportant things can go to Goodwill.

DASH

It's all important. I need it.

ELLIE

Honey. You don't.

(Silence.)

Look, I know this move probably seems - but it's the right thing. For both of us. It really is.

DASH

Just because you keep saying that doesn't mean it's true.

(ELLIE looks away.)

Can't I leave stuff with Dad?

ELLIE

Well. Dad's in an apartment now. There isn't room.

(Pause.)

Just pack it, Perdie. Pack it up or I will.

DASH

I can't this weekend.

ELLIE

Why not?

DASH

It's Expedition.

(ELLIE reacts as if she's been struck.)

ELLIE

What?

DASH

It's Expedition. I'm going. With the troop.

ELLIE

I didn't think you were - you're still doing - I don't know about that, Perdie. I don't think that's such a good -

DASH

Mrs. O'Dowd said I could come. She said the candy money covered it, you won't need to pay anything.

ELLIE

It's not about the money. Perdie -

DASH

Christa and Kayla and Emily are going. Zan too. They need me to make up the numbers. If I don't go, no one can.

ELLIE

They'll find someone else. They'll figure it out -

DASH

They're my friends. We're moving all the way to Nevada so -

ELLIE

It's nothing against them. They could come over, maybe, instead. That'd be nice. I haven't seen them for a while.

DASH I'll see them at Expedition. I have to go. It's my last chance to - to say goodbye.

ELLIE

You could say goodbye here.

DASH

I can't!

ELLIE

Look, Perdie -

DASH

You can't keep taking everything away! It's not fair!  
(Silence. Long silence.)

ELLIE

Life's not fair. Is that what you want me to say?

DASH

No.

ELLIE

Then what do you want from me, Perdie? What do you want?

DASH

I just told you what I want.

ELLIE

We - I'm not going to do that, Perdie. I'm not going to let you go alone to -

DASH

What if I pack. Before I go.

(ELLIE looks at her - clearly torn. DASH, as if saying it gives her physical pain.)

I'll - I'll pack it up, all of it. Before Friday. I promise. The stuff to take and - to give away. I will. Just - let me go to Expedition.

ELLIE

You can't go there alone, Perdie. After last year, you -

DASH

I won't be alone there. Please.

(ELLIE looks at DASH. Moves closer.)

ELLIE

Well - if you get everything packed - then I - I guess, we could - figure it out.  
(She reaches out, tentatively, to touch DASH.  
DASH doesn't respond.)

We should head in. Dinner's probably cold by now.

DASH

I'm not hungry.

ELLIE

Come in anyway. It's getting dark.

(DASH stands there.)

Let's go. You can - get a start on packing.

(DASH stares. Nods once. Starts to move. Walks straight past ELLIE. ELLIE stands there like she's expecting a thank you, or a hug, or at least eye contact. She gets none of it. ELLIE looks around the woods for a moment. Then follows DASH off. Lights out. The sound of thunder.)

Scene Seven

(The lunchroom. After school - the chairs in their Explorer Meeting Configuration. CHRISTA, EMILY and KAYLA in their Girl Explorer vests. ZAN, looking uncomfortable, sits a little apart from them. She's not wearing a vest.)

EMILY

Um. Was your coach okay? With you missing practice?

ZAN

Oh. I just skipped. I mean - it's like, the last week. She's not gonna care.

EMILY

Oh.

(Pause.)

My dance teacher is like really strict about practice and stuff. She says even in the last week, it's no good to slack. But she excused me today because it's for Expedition. Since it's just like, a one time thing.

ZAN

That's cool. I didn't know you were doing dance.

EMILY

Oh, yeah. At Dance Factory? Yeah, it's great. I mean - it's really cool. My dance teacher said that they do this clinic in the summer that's audition only and that if I audition I'll probably make it. Which would be like - really cool.

ZAN

Cool, yeah. I think Nicolette wants to do that - she does hip hop or something at Dance Factory.

EMILY

With Genevieve? Or Tanya?

ZAN

Uh. I dunno.

EMILY

Tanya's my teacher. She's amazing. I mean I've only been taking classes there for like a year but it's like - I feel like I've just like really grown as a person doing it. Which sounds corny and stuff, but. Tanya's really into how you don't just dance with your body. Like it's not just muscles and stuff, right, it's like - kinda spiritual. The way Tanya talks about it. Which sounds lame, but. She's been like - really cool. She normally doesn't

excuse anyone for anything, but she excused me for Expedition because she knew - she's just really great.

CHRISTA

Hey, Em? Would you look at this?

(She's holding a Girl Explorers Guide. She waves it at EMILY, ignoring ZAN.)

I'm wondering if we can like qualify for this badge or if it's too -

EMILY

Oh, yeah - sure. Um.

(She gets up.)

Thanks for um. Coming, I guess. I hope you don't get in trouble for skipping.

ZAN

It's fine. Whatever.

CHRISTA

Em!

EMILY

Right. Um.

(She goes over to CHRISTA. ZAN sits alone for a moment, then KAYLA walks over and sits next to her. They sit in awkward silence.)

ZAN

Your um. Your vest is - nice.

KAYLA

Oh. Thanks! I mean, it's pretty much the same as last year -

ZAN

You got your Car Care badge, though. That's cool. I was gonna go for that one, this year.

KAYLA

Yeah, it was good. I mean, I just feel like I'm like, way ahead for driver's ed now. I had to change a tire and give a car a jump and then I had to research drunk driving and give a whole talk on it, so. I feel kinda ready.

(ZAN nods.)

I'm hoping this year I can get my Scuba-splorer one. Expedition is like the only place with the equipment - I was ready last year, but.

ZAN

Yeah.

KAYLA

All I need is to do my check out dive and retake the written and then I'll get my proficiency, and then I'll get the badge. But I mean, mostly I just want the proficiency.

ZAN

Yeah. I mean - that's cool. It'll be really cool. When you get it. I remember how hard you were working for it, last year.

KAYLA

Yeah.

(A moment.)

Did you bring your vest? For the meeting?

ZAN

Um. Nah. I mean - I don't know where it is. I think my mom put it somewhere, so. But I'll try and find it. Before Expedition.

KAYLA

Oh. Yeah.

ZAN

Yeah.

(DASH enters, still in too small clothes, still with backpack with Girl Explorer patch. ZAN jumps a little in her seat. EMILY and CHRISTA look up.)

KAYLA

Hey! Dash! Hi!

(DASH enters warily. Unsure of where to sit. The others watch what used to be her seat - two empty chairs near the center of the circle. DASH steadfastly does not look at them. Ends up sitting next to ZAN.)

ZAN

Oh. Hey.

DASH

Hey.

EMILY

Hey, Dash.

CHRISTA

Hey. You don't have to - I mean, we're glad you're here, but you don't have to come to the meeting if you don't want. My mom said -

DASH

Okay.

CHRISTA

Yeah. So. Okay.

(Awkward silence.)

DASH

I didn't bring my vest.

CHRISTA

That's fine. You - that's fine.

ZAN

I didn't bring mine either.

DASH

I forgot it. It's at home. I'll bring it next time.

CHRISTA

That's okay, Dash.

DASH

Okay.

CHRISTA

Um - I told my mom not to - but if she does anything like, weird or anything, I'm sorry.

DASH

Okay.

CHRISTA

She won't - she's just excited. To have a full troop again. And you know, when she gets excited, she can be kinda - she doesn't mean anything. She's just excited.

KAYLA

We're all excited. Right?

EMILY

Right!

Um. Right. ZAN  
(Awkward silence again.)  
How - how is everything?  
DASH  
You know. Fine. (ZAN nods.)  
I'm moving. After school ends.  
ZAN  
Oh. Where?  
DASH  
Nevada. My grandmother's there, so.  
ZAN  
Oh. I've - never been.  
DASH  
Me neither.  
ZAN  
Oh.  
DASH  
How's stuff with you?  
ZAN  
Good, yeah. Great. I'm doing softball?  
DASH  
Cool.  
ZAN  
Yeah. I'm catcher. We didn't make finals or anything but -  
DASH  
You wear the mask?  
ZAN  
What?  
DASH

Remember when we used to play baseball in the summer at the playing fields? And Michael Wiley used to play catcher? And he never wore a mask because normally we used that foam bat, right, but then one time we brought that wooden slugger bat and Petra took out Michael's front teeth? Remember that?

(It's the most DASH has said yet, and the first time anyone has said Petra's name around KAYLA, CHRISTA, EMILY and ZAN for a long time. A moment.)

KAYLA

I remember. He almost swallowed them.

(A moment. She starts to giggle.)

Remember his face - he'd been saying she'd whiff out like she always did and she pulled back and -

(She laughs. For a moment, there's an awful silence. DASH begins to laugh too.)

DASH

He was so mad. They were permanent teeth.

EMILY

Everyone called him Whistlin' Wiley after that, remember, till he got those caps.

(They all laugh. For a moment, it's nice. It fades.)

DASH

So. Um. Yeah. Don't forget the mask.

ZAN

Yeah, I - I don't.

(The silence again.)

What, um - what are you guys supposed to do today?

KAYLA

Last time we did tourniquets and splints and stuff. We're meant to do triage and head injuries this time so we can qualify for our Senior First Aid before Expedition.

CHRISTA

Mom thought it'd be - I don't know. But she'll do something else, if we ask her.

DASH

Why?

CHRISTA

Um. Just - if we wanted to do something else, I guess.

EMILY

We don't want you to be - uncomfortable or anything, so. We don't have to do first aid. If it would make you feel - uncomfortable.

DASH

I'm fine. Sounds like a good idea.

EMILY

I - yeah. Right.

(They sink into silence again.)

DASH

You got your Car Care badge.

KAYLA

Oh! Yeah! Yeah, I did! And I got my Voice for Animals patch too - and Christa's only one journey away from Silver Level.

DASH

Wow. That's great.

CHRISTA

Yeah, thanks. I mean - it's just Silver.

EMILY

Better than me, I'm stuck on Bronze. I still have to do four more badges and a presentation before I can bridge to Silver -

DASH

What was your project?

(Silence.)

For Silver.

CHRISTA

Um. I just did - like, I did tutoring with the elementary school girls. In math. For like, STEM stuff.

(Pause.)

It um. I didn't. Without Petra, it didn't feel -

DASH

Tutoring. Cool.

(CHRISTA looks at her, about to say something - and MRS. O'DOWD enters, with cardboard box of first aid supplies.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Hey hey hey, the gangs all here! Look at you all!

(She puts the box down and surveys them,  
beaming.)

Wow! Look at this troop of Sister Explorers!

(Everyone freezes. Avoids looking at DASH.)

Welcome back, girls. We're so glad to have you. I know Emily and Chrissy and Kayla were really bummed we were gonna miss Expedition, weren't you?

EMILY

Um. Yeah.

CHRISTA

Totally bummed.

MRS. O'DOWD

It's great. It's gonna be great. Gals, come over and give me a hand with this, will you?

(CHRISTA, EMILY, and KAYLA tromp over to  
the stuff. MRS. O'DOWD makes a beeline for ZAN  
and DASH.)

Alexandra, how are you? Everything good?

ZAN

Yeah, Mrs. O. Everything's great.

MRS. O'DOWD

Great.

(She goes over to DASH now. Without waiting for  
permission, she envelops DASH in a hug. Squeezes  
her. DASH looks uncomfortable, but after a few  
moments lets it happen, relaxes into it.)

Hey there, Perdie. We've missed you.

(She gives her one last squeeze, then releases her.)

It's not the same without you, kiddo. Without either of you.

DASH

I. Yeah.

MRS. O'DOWD

We're so happy you're here. You tell me if there's anything you want to do or anything you need, sweetheart, okay? We just want you to have a good time. All right?

DASH

I. Yeah. Thanks, Mrs. O'Dowd.

CHRISTA

Mom? Where'd you want this?

(She gestures with the box.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Oh, just plop them in the middle, that's great. Careful, don't squish the brownies! But no brownies until we finish with our work, right gang?

(Mumbles.)

All right, Explorer Scouts. We ready to commence with today's meeting?

(Nods, shrugs, shuffles.)

All right - who wants to start us off? Alexandra, Perdie, one of you want to do the honors?

ZAN

Oh. I. Um. I'm not sure I really remember it -

CHRISTA

Mom, it's okay, I can -

DASH

I'll do it.

(Total silence.)

MRS. O'DOWD

All rightie, then! Take it away, Perdie! Circle up, gals.

(They circle up. Reminiscent of the first scene of the play. DASH sticks her hand out in the salute.)

DASH

On my honor, I do swear

In the Spirit of Exploration

To do my best in all things

To help others in all ways

And to be true to the laws of my God, my Country, and my Sister Explorers.

(The others look at her. Solemn. MRS. O'DOWD, oblivious.)

MRS. O'DOWD

There we go! That's what we've been missing around here! Great, Perdie, just great. All right, gang, be seated. We're doing triage and head injuries today - Chrissy, you were the victim last time, how bout we let Kayla have a try?

(The girls sit. KAYLA and CHRISTA start pulling out bandages, first aid kits, manuals. DASH sits last. The two seats where she and Petra used to sit are empty. But there's an empty seat on one side of

DASH now, and she puts one hand on it, looking at the empty seats in the center. Lights out.)

Scene Eight

(The forest, again. DASH, leaning up against a tree. Same arrangement of stones, same mirror. But she's looking at it differently - less desperately, more determinedly.)

DASH

I guess it makes sense. It's just the wrong place, here. It's the closest I can get, but - it's still not right. You can't talk back, here. The place matters. I get that now. But I figured out the right place. And I'll be there. Expedition. And when I find the right place, then I'll find you. Then you'll hear me. And you'll talk back.

(She listens.)

I know we didn't always talk. When you were here. Or - just about stupid stuff, like who took longer in the bathroom or whose turn it was to sit in the front seat or - I know you liked to talk to other people more. About real stuff. And they liked to talk to you, too. Even Mom and Dad. You talked better than me. I knew that. I really did. But now - I just think now you'd talk to me. At least a little. If it was the right place.

(She listens.)

I know you can't talk back when I'm here. But maybe you can hear me. So I just wanted you to know - I'm coming, all right? I'm coming.

(She waits. The thunder starts again. DASH looks straight up. No rain falls. More thunder. Then, a streak of lightning. Another. Another. DASH smiles. Lights out.)

Scene Nine

(The lunchroom. A weekend day - that weird hushed feeling of a school on the weekend. KAYLA, EMILY, and CHRISTA are sorting out supplies for Expedition. Rolls of sleeping bags, tent poles, fire making supplies, tools, and weird odds and ends - a woodworking project, a stack of candy boxes, a trash bag full of empty water bottles - meant for some project, unclear what. MRS. O'DOWD is overseeing them with a clipboard. ZAN and DASH enter, almost at the same time. DASH is in her too-small clothes, this time with an Explorer Scout vest over the top of them. Toting her usual backpack. ZAN, still vest-less, has a duffel.)

ZAN

Hey, Dash. Uh. Happy Expedition, I guess.

(DASH shrugs.)

DASH

Yeah. I guess. Where's your vest?

ZAN

Oh. Um - my mom put it somewhere. Maybe storage or something. She can't remember. It's okay, though, I mean - it's not like I'm really going to do any of the group events or -

DASH

You can't go without uniform. They'll ding you.

ZAN

I don't care. I mean - I'm only going to, you know. Make up the numbers. I don't need a vest for that.

DASH

Here.

(She opens her bag and pulls out a slightly ruffled vest, almost identical to the one she's wearing. ZAN reaches out hesitantly, touches it.)

You can wear this one. If you want.

ZAN

I - I can't. That's - I mean - it isn't - you should keep it, Dash. It's special.

DASH

It's not Petra's. It's mine. Take it.

ZAN

Are you - sure? What if you want to wear it?

DASH

I won't.

(She runs her hands over the vest she is wearing - like her other clothes, a little too small, but not as noticeably as her shirt or pants.)

Take it. Really.

(ZAN reaches out, takes it. Slips it on. DASH grins, humorlessly.)

Now we're like twins, huh.

(ZAN flinches. DASH looks momentarily regretful.)

Sorry.

ZAN

No, I -

DASH

No, sorry. That was - I'm glad you're coming. I mean. That you're making up the numbers.

ZAN

Well. Christa said you wanted to go. So.

DASH

It's good. Really. I shouldn't have said that. Sometimes - I just get tired of everyone pretending everything's okay.

ZAN

Yeah. Right.

DASH

I mean - you know. You probably feel that way too.

(ZAN looks at her for a moment. Then looks down at the vest. Touches one of the patches. MRS. O'DOWD looks up, sees them. Claps her hands.)

MRS. O'DOWD

There they are, the girls of the hour! Come on in, gals! Got your stuff? Perdie, where's your mom, sweetheart?

DASH

My mom? She's - she signed my form, here, I brought it -

(She digs in her bag a little. As she does, ELLIE walks in, dressed in jeans, toting a duffel of her own. MRS. O'DOWD beams at her.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Hey there, you! Long time no see! C'mere.

(She wraps ELLIE in the same kind of enthusiastic hug she gave DASH earlier. ELLIE also seems a little bewildered by it.)

ELLIE

Cynthia, hey. Thanks for letting me tag along -

MRS. O'DOWD

Are you kidding? The more the merrier! Doing Expedition solo is a nightmare, honestly, I should be thanking *you*! Really thought we'd have to give it a miss this year, and we've never missed an Expedition, have we, Chrissy? So glad the girls decided to do it. It's gonna be great, right, gang?

(A ragged chorus of agreement. DASH is staring at her mother.)

All right now, Sister Explorers - we want to hit the road by 9:30 so we can make it there before dinner, so let's get this van loaded, what do you say?

(CHRISTA, KAYLA, and EMILY start shlepping stuff out to the van. ZAN tries to join in but is a little awkward - tries to take something that CHRISTA is carrying, then tries to help KAYLA with something she doesn't need help with. She grabs a couple sleeping bags and follows them. ELLIE, DASH, and MRS. O'DOWD, alone in the lunchroom.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Really, Ellie. It's great you've made it. I could use the help.

ELLIE

Right. Seems like it.

(MRS. O'DOWD looks at ELLIE. Steps closer in.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Really. I appreciate it. I know it's gotta be - well. Just a hard time of year for you two. I know anniversaries are meant to be - but keeping busy helps. Right?

ELLIE

Yeah. Well - we're still figuring it out. And we're plenty busy. We're moving down to my mom's place in Henderson right after school lets out, so.

MRS. O'DOWD

Oh, well! That's great! We'll miss you guys around here, that's for sure, but - that's great.

ELLIE

Yeah. Yeah, it's - I think it'll be good for all of us, you know. Change of scene. My mom's retired now so she's really looking forward to spending some quality time with Perdie -

MRS. O'DOWD

Of course - grandbaby time! Must be -

(CHRISTA sticks her head back in the door.)

CHRISTA

Mom, car's locked.

MRS. O'DOWD

Oh, doy! Of course! One sec, Ellie.

(MRS. O'DOWD exits with CHRISTA, looking for her keys. DASH and ELLIE, alone. DASH is looking at ELLIE. Silence.)

ELLIE

I tried to tell you last night but you were already asleep when I got in. And then this morning when I woke up you'd already gone. You should have said goodbye, at least, you know.

DASH

Well. Now I don't have to.

ELLIE

Well. Right.

(Pause.)

I just thought you might want -

DASH

You could have asked me what I wanted instead of guessing.

ELLIE

You said you wanted to go to Expedition. This is how you get to go. I told you I wouldn't let you go alone.

DASH

I told you, I wouldn't be -

ELLIE

I'm not going to let you be out there all alone and have to deal with that, if something - I wanted to be there with you. After - I'm not letting you go without supervision.

DASH

Okay.

ELLIE

We're - we're both getting what we want this way. Aren't we? You get to go. And I'll go with you. It'll be good. For both of us.

(Pause.)

You do what you need to do with your friends. Just - I'll be around too. If you need me. If anything happens.

(DASH stands there.)

I'm doing this for you, Perdie. You think I want - I'm doing this for you. For us. You understand?

DASH

Okay.

ELLIE

I'm trying here, Perdie.

DASH

I said okay.

ELLIE

I'm really - I'm trying.

(CHRISTA, KAYLA, EMILY and ZAN re-enter, grab another load of stuff for the van. DASH leans down, grabs something. Follows them out. ELLIE, alone. Lights out. End of Act One.)

Act Two  
Prologue

(Lights up. CHRISTA, KAYLA, EMILY, and ZAN all sitting around a campfire. PETRA, in the same clothes from the first scene, without cast, hair braided, in the center. They are singing a song and doing elaborate hand movements in sequence.)

ALL GIRLS

I'm a little piece of tin,  
Nobody knows what shape I'm in  
Got four wheels and a running board,  
I'm not a Chevy and I'm not a Ford  
Honk honk, rattle rattle rattle crash beep beep  
Honk honk, rattle rattle rattle crash beep beep  
Honk honk.

KAYLA

Rattle rattle rattle crash beep beep!

(The others groan good-naturedly, shove at KAYLA.)

PETRA

You heard her. Faster!

(They do the song and hand movements again, faster. Again, they end with 'honk honk.')

EMILY

Rattle rattle rattle crash beep beep!

(They all groan again. Someone throws a pillow at EMILY.)

ZAN

You heard her. Faster!

(They do it again. As they near the end, they sense that CHRISTA is going to make the song continue, so at the last moment, the other girls launch themselves at her, covering her mouth with their hands giggling.)

CHRISTA

Rattle rattle - help! Help! Explorer brutality!

(They collapse in a heap. Stay there a few seconds. CHRISTA pushes at them.)

Come on, get off, I'm sorry, I won't do it, I promise.

(The others slowly pull themselves off of her.) Lay off the marshmallows, you guys almost squashed me -

EMILY

Where's Dash?

PETRA

Whatever. I wasn't watching.

ZAN

Off in the woods, I think. Answering nature's call.

KAYLA

Are there more marshmallows? I'm starving -

EMILY

I think Mrs. O'Dowd has some in her tent -

CHRISTA

Don't go in there, you'll wake her up and she'll make us go to sleep.

ZAN

Really? Us getting marshmallows is going to wake her up? What about us screaming out here -

CHRISTA

I don't know, it's like the crinkle plastic makes is on some special frequency but voices she just kinda tunes out -

(A rumble of thunder. The girls groan.)

Oh man, great -

ZAN

At least it'll help us douse the fire.

KAYLA

I thought it wasn't gonna rain tonight -

CHRISTA

Rain listens to no weather man -

PETRA

We should go over to White Rock clearing, in the morning. You know how the rock never feels cold? I was wondering if it ever felt wet, or if like there's something in the rock that like repels moisture or something -

ZAN

Yeah, we were saying maybe that's why it's always like warmer than the stuff around it because -

CHRISTA

I'm telling you, that's a science thing. Stuff that repels moisture is like, a science thing and the rock -

KAYLA

The rock is special. Does it matter why?

CHRISTA

Duh, it matters. Special isn't an answer -

PETRA

We'll find an answer. I mean - "I swear to Explore in earnestness for the rest of my days." Right? That's not just like wandering around in the woods, that's having adventures, that's finding answers to mysteries, that's -

KAYLA

I don't know if that's all what they meant -

PETRA

Whatever. It's what we mean. Right?

ZAN

Right.

(The thunder again, closer. A streak of lightning.) Woah. Did you see that?

EMILY

Yeah. Woah.

KAYLA

Where's Dash?

EMILY

She just stepped off to pee - she's probably right in the tree line -

PETRA

She's okay, it's not like -

(More lightning.)

Woah.

ZAN

That's intense. We never see lightning like that at home.

CHRISTA

Everything's better out here.

(The lightning again. Then again.)

PETRA

Maybe we should find Dash.

(From off-stage, we hear DASH.)

DASH

Guys! C'mere! The rock - you gotta to see this!

(The other girls look off towards DASH's voice.  
Then look at each other. Blackout.)

Scene One

(Expedition! A big stone bonfire circle, with tents around it. SARAH, and MELISSA are working on the fire. ZAN and KAYLA are setting up smores supplies. DASH, CHRISTA, and EMILY enter with sticks for roasting marshmallows. DASH back in her cast, hair undone.)

EMILY

Have you guys heard the one about the girl who lives in the lake?

SARAH

Duh, everyone's heard that one -

MELISSA

Shut up, let her tell it.

KAYLA

Christa, you tell it, you tell it best, remember that time -

CHRISTA

I don't know, you could -

EMILY

No, come on, Christa, do it. You always do it best.

KAYLA

(chanting)

Christa, Christa, Christa -

CHRISTA

Okay, okay. Well. There's a little girl who lives in the lake. But she didn't always live there.

SARAH

Yeah, she used to live in a toilet but then -

CHRISTA

You want me to tell it or not?

ZAN

Shut up, Sarah.

MELISSA

Tell it, Chris, come on.

CHRISTA

All right. She used to live at home with her mom and dad. She was just a normal little girl. She had just started doing Explorer Scouts and it was her first year at Expedition. She stayed in tent twelve, down near the edge of the lake. She was really homesick, so every night she'd cry herself to sleep, missing her mom and dad. All the other girls thought she was a baby, but she knew that some of them were homesick too, because in the middle of the night sometimes, she'd wake up and hear them crying. But in the morning, all the other girls swore it wasn't them. They'd tease her and say she was going to cry so much that she'd flood the tent, that they'd all float away into the lake.

One night, the little girl woke up and heard someone crying, and this time she decided she'd get up and see who it was, so that the other girls would stop teasing her for being the only crybaby in the tent. So she got up and started checking sleeping bags. But every other girl was fast asleep. And she kept hearing the crying. She thought, maybe it's coming from one of the other tents. So she got her flashlight and left her tent and started looking in other tents, trying to follow the sound of the crying. But every tent she looked in, all the girls were asleep. But the crying never stopped. Finally, the little girl sat down by the edge of the lake, tired and confused. And all of the sudden, the crying stopped.

"Hello," said a voice, and the little girl jumped. There was another girl, sitting in the water of the lake. She was all wet, and she was dressed in her uniform still.

"Who are you? What are you doing in the lake?" the little girl asked.

And the girl in the lake said, "I've been in this lake for a long time."

"Were you the one crying?" the little girl said. "What are you crying for?" "I miss my mom and dad," the lake girl said. "I miss being warm and dry at home."

"Me too," said the little girl. She tried to comfort the lake girl. "But we'll go home soon." "Yes," the lake girl said. "I know." And then she lunged forward and grabbed the little girl by the hair and pulled her into the lake!

(As she says lunge, CHRISTA lunges forward and grabs SARAH, who screams, despite herself. The others also scream, but then giggle as CHRISTA releases SARAH.)

The next morning, the girls in the tent got up and got ready for the day. They didn't notice the little girl was missing, because there was someone else in her sleeping bag. Her pillow was wet, but the other girls thought that was from the little girl crying. But after that day, none of the girls in the tent ever heard her cry again. Ever. But on the last day of Expedition, as they all packed up and got on the bus to go home, some of them thought they heard a wailing noise. Coming from the lake. Because the little girl didn't go home soon. She never went home again. She's still there, out in the lake. Waiting for someone

to hear her crying and come and take her place.

(Silence. Some of the girls shiver.)

The end.

KAYLA

See - Christa always tells it best.

SARAH

Whatever. That story is old as dirt. I heard a good one today at ropes course, want to hear that?

MELISSA

Ooh, I heard this one too. It's good. It's really good. Tell it, Sarah.

EMILY

Give me a stick first, I'm starving.

(The marshmallow sticks are distributed, and they start setting up s'mores supplies.)

KAYLA

All right, lay it on us. What's the new one?

SARAH

Okay. Ready? It was Expedition.

CHRISTA

Duh, it's always Expedition -

SARAH

Shut up. I didn't interrupt you, did I?

KAYLA

Well, actually -

CHRISTA

Fine, fine. Sorry.

SARAH

It was Expedition. The troop had arrived and set up camp and stuff and they all went off into the woods to collect branches and stuff for kindling. They were meant to stay in pairs, but two of them split up because they thought they'd get done faster. So one of the girls stays pretty close to camp, but the other one ends up going deeper and deeper into the forrest. Until soon she can't tell which way she's meant to go to get out. And it's getting darker and darker, but it's not night time - there was a storm coming. A huge, ugly storm.

(The others shift a little in their seats. SARAH and MELISSA, oblivious.)

The other girls from her troop had set out to find the girl, so they were going all over the woods yelling her name, when all of a sudden they saw a huge flash of lightning crack across the sky. It struck somewhere in the forest, so the girls decided to follow it, even though they weren't supposed to, because it was a mystery. So they start walking towards the flash, when it happens again. So they start running to the flash, and it happens one more time. And finally, they get to this clearing and there's the missing girl, standing right there. So her Sister Explorers run to her but the lightning flashes one more time and before they can reach her - BANG! The girl gets hit and all that's left is this huge rock. That's where White Rock Clearing comes from.

(The other girls look decidedly uncomfortable. Someone touches DASH's arm. She shakes them off.)

MELISSA

Nu-uh, that's not the way they told it earlier - earlier they said that they get to the clearing right and they see the missing scout and they run to her, yeah, but the lightning strikes one more time and hits her and sets her on fire so she burns up into a pillar of smoke right in front of them, and then rain started and it hit the steam and then the steam turned into a solid chunk of rock and THAT'S where White Rock Clearing comes from.

CHRISTA

Shut up.

SARAH

Chill, you had your turn -

ZAN

She said SHUT UP.

(She stands up. The other girls exchange looks. Stand up too.)

MELISSA

What's your problem? It's just a story.

ZAN

What's your problem? What kind of story is that?

SARAH

What, like it's any worse than the little girl in the lake -

EMILY

You guys should go.

MELISSA

What? Why?

KAYLA

Yeah. You guys should go.

SARAH

Lay off, we didn't do anything wrong, all we did was tell a stupid story -

(Without warning, DASH picks up a piece of kindling and throws it in their direction.)

MELISSA

What the hell! Watch it! What is wrong with you?

DASH

Go, they said!

SARAH

Come on, Melissa, let's get out of here. You throw anything else at us we're telling the camp director.

MELISSA

Yeah!

CHRISTA

Then you should leave before we have to throw more things at you!

(SARAH and MELISSA leave. The others stay there, still standing. Silent.)

KAYLA

Sorry. I'm really - I didn't know what she was going to say or I never would have asked her to -

CHRISTA

Of course not. None of us knew.

ZAN

Are you okay?

EMILY

Forget them. They're -

DASH

That's not what happened.

(Everyone quiet. The crackle of the fire.)  
How can they say that, like it's - like it's just another story, when -

KAYLA

Yeah.

(DASH walks one way, then another. Hits something with her bad wrist.)

EMILY

Hey. It's okay -

DASH

It's not!

(She hits something again. And again.)

CHRISTA

Dash, stop -

DASH

That's not what happened! That's - she didn't wander off alone like some -

KAYLA

Dash, we know, we -

DASH

She only came because I called her - she wouldn't -

EMILY

Dash, stop, your arm -

(MRS. O'DOWD and ELLIE enter. The girls jump, try and look normal. DASH nurses her arm.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Hey there, girls! How're you all settling in?

(Some shrugs.)

KAYLA

Um. Good.

ZAN

Yeah, good, Mrs. O. Thanks.

MRS. O'DOWD

Thought that some of the girls from troop 2251 were going to come over, say hey.

EMILY

Oh. Yeah. Um - they said hey.

MRS. O'DOWD

All right. You sure you're all okay?

(ELLIE edges over to DASH. Touches her arm.  
DASH pulls away.)

CHRISTA

Yeah, Mom. We're good.

KAYLA

Yeah. We're great.

MRS. O'DOWD

Okay. Well - if you're great -

on

(In the distance, a recording of TAPS starts to play the bugle. Out of muscle memory, every girl turns towards the center of camp, where the flag pole is, and puts a hand over their heart. All conversation stops until TAPS is over.)

All right, well. Everyone better get a good night's sleep - we've got a full day tomorrow! Ropes course in the morning, archery competition after lunch, and Kayla, scuba qualification is at 3.

KAYLA

Cool. Thanks, Mrs. O'Dowd.

MRS. O'DOWD

Just remember, we're really enforcing the buddy system this year, so. Pairs everywhere! Right? Chrissy?

CHRISTA

Why are you just saying me?

MRS. O'DOWD

I'm not! I just - everyone, right? Kayla, Em, Alexandra, Perdie - no one is going off without a buddy. Right?

KAYLA

Um. Sure. Right.

EMILY

Yeah. Okay.

ELLIE

Perdie?

(DASH looks at her.)

No one off alone. Right?

(DASH stares at her. Nods, once.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Okay, great! And - not that you'll - but - the woods are off limits this year. To everyone. All right?

(Silence from the girls.)

ELLIE

Perdie? The woods are off limits, Perdie. Right?

DASH

I heard you. Right.

MRS. O'DOWD

All right. Well. Good night, girls.

KAYLA

Night, Mrs. O'Dowd.

EMILY

Yeah, night.

CHRISTA

Night, Mom.

ELLIE

Night, girls. Night, Perdie.

GIRLS

Night.

(DASH doesn't say anything. Is the first one to duck into her tent. The others follow, leaving ELLIE and MRS. O'DOWD outside. They start to put out the fire, tidy up the circle, etc. Some whispering and scuffling noises from the tent, but we can't make it out. A roll of thunder. ELLIE and MRS. O'DOWD look up. The tent becomes instantly silent.)

ELLIE

Was that -

MRS. O'DOWD

Just a little thunder. It all sounds louder up here.

ELLIE

Where do we go? If the storm -

MRS. O'DOWD

We can head to Central Lodge if we need to, but. It should be okay. It's normally just -  
(The thunder again. Loud.)

Once or twice, like that. Then it stops. We're perfectly safe.

ELLIE

You think?

MRS. O'DOWD

I - yes. I wouldn't - Of course.

ELLIE

Of course. Sure.

MRS. O'DOWD

Come on. Let's get in.

(MRS. O'DOWD ducks into her tent. ELLIE stays outside for a moment. Looks up. Lights out. Thunder, low, ominous.)

Scene Two

(Outside the tents again. Daytime. ELLIE is sitting outside the tent, next to the extinguished fire. DASH exits the tent, in Petra's vest, backpack on back, looking determined. Stops short seeing ELLIE. )

Hey, Perdie. Morning.

ELLIE

What are you doing?

DASH

Waiting for you. I thought we could walk over to the lodge and get breakfast or something.

ELLIE

(DASH shifts the backpack on her shoulders.)

Where are you going?

DASH

Nowhere. Just - gonna wait here. For the others to wake up.

ELLIE

Buddy system. Don't forget.

DASH

I didn't.

(She turns around to go back to her tent.)

ELLIE

Wait, I meant - I can be your buddy. That's why I'm here.

(DASH looks at her.)

Or we could - we could wait for the others together. For breakfast.

(DASH looks at her.)

Come on. Sit a second.

(DASH, hesitantly, sits. Not right next to her. ELLIE scootches closer.)

It's nice up here. I can see why you two always - well. It's nice.

DASH

I guess.

ELLIE

What do you think you'll do today?

I don't know.

DASH

You don't know?

ELLIE

Yeah. I mean - maybe I'll just hang out here for a little. Near the tent.

DASH

You didn't come all the way out here to hang out alone at the tent, though. What are your friends doing?

ELLIE

Dunno. Haven't asked.

DASH

What about Zan? You and her used to -

ELLIE

That wasn't me.

DASH

Of course that was you. You're still you, even without -

ELLIE

I mean, that wasn't me. She was Petra's friend, not mine.  
(Silence.)

DASH

Right. Right. Well, then what do you want to do? It's high ropes and archery and swimming today, right? You could do one of those. You used to like swimming, didn't you?

ELLIE

No.

(She shivers slightly, tugs at her jeans, which as per usual stop way short of her ankle.)

DASH

You cold?

ELLIE

No.

DASH

ELLIE

You sure? Maybe you should change. If you're cold.

DASH

I'm fine.

ELLIE

I brought some other clothes for you. If you want, you could -

DASH

I don't want them.

ELLIE

At least let me brush your hair. I wish you'd let me braid it - remember how you guys always used to line up in the morning when you were little and let me -

DASH

I. Don't. Want that.

ELLIE

You can't keep wearing her things.

DASH

They aren't her things. They're ours.

ELLIE

They were, but. You've outgrown them.

DASH

They're my clothes too. You can't just throw them away.

ELLIE

Hon -

DASH

You want me to throw out all her stuff but that isn't just her stuff. It's mine too. It's ours. It's always been ours. That's what you said, the best part of being a twin was you had -

ELLIE

All right, all right, I -

DASH

Was you had twice as much stuff because you got to share everything. That's what you said, you can't just take that back because she's -

ELLIE

I'm not trying to - Perdie. You don't need all those things. They aren't - there's no use for them, anymore. They just keep you stuck.

DASH

I'm not stuck. I'm fine.

ELLIE

Perdie -

DASH

I'm fine! And throwing all our things in the trash isn't going to make me any different, is it? You keep talking about it like there's some magic fix, like if I wear clothes that fit or let you braid my hair or move to Nevada all of a sudden I'll feel different, but it's not like I'm sick and there's some cure out there somewhere. I'm not sick.

ELLIE

I didn't say you were - I just want you to feel better. That's all.

DASH

It's never going to get better, okay? Everyone keeps saying that, like it's something possible, but it's not possible. So move me to Nevada and make me throw out everything I care about and get a divorce, do whatever you want, but the only thing that would fix me is if Petra came back. I'm sorry that's not the answer you want.

ELLIE

That's not what I meant!

DASH

That's what you want though, isn't it? Don't you want her back?

ELLIE

Of course I do. We all do -

DASH

I'm sorry you're just stuck with me.

ELLIE

Don't you ever - That's not what I said, Perdie! Of course I'm not stuck with you -

(DASH walks off, past the tents.)

Where are you going? Don't storm off, let's talk about this, let's -

DASH

I need the bathroom.

ELLIE

Wait - you're meant to be on the buddy system -

DASH

Follow me, then, if you don't even trust me to pee by myself.

(ELLIE stands, debates following her. MRS. O'DOWD pokes her head out of the other tent.)

MRS. O'DOWD

Hey there - it's okay. Let her walk it off a little.

ELLIE

Sorry, did we wake you?

MRS. O'DOWD

Oh, no, I was up already. Oh - sorry about that, couldn't help but overhear. You okay?

ELLIE

I - fine.

MRS. O'DOWD

She'll be okay. She's a survivor, that kid. She'll make it.

ELLIE

Yeah. Sure.

MRS. O'DOWD

I didn't know. About you and Daniel.

ELLIE

Yeah, well. It happens. Apparently, when you lose a - well. It happens a lot.

MRS. O'DOWD

She'd be having a hard time even without all this other stuff. She's fourteen, that's hard enough on anybody. She'll get through it. She really will.

ELLIE

Yeah. Sometimes I just wonder if I'll get through it.

(Silence. MRS. O'DOWD moves closer, touches ELLIE's arm.)

MRS. O'DOWD

You will. You have to. For her.

ELLIE

Right.

MRS. O'DOWD

I'll never - I'll never forgive myself. For not being there. When it happened. For not watching them more closely. I shouldn't have fallen asleep -

ELLIE

It was an accident. I know -

MRS. O'DOWD

But still. I should have -

ELLIE

Yeah. You should have.

(Silence. Suddenly, reveille plays in the distance. Sounds of stirring from the tent.)

MRS. O'DOWD

I'd better make sure they're getting up. Otherwise we'll miss all the good pancakes. But just - let her have a little space. She'll come to you. When she's ready.

ELLIE

Right.

MRS. O'DOWD

And I - I did the best I could. Last year, I - I did the best I could. I think a lot about what I could have done different, what I could have - but you think that way, you'll break. All we can do is the best we can do. And my best wasn't enough. I know that. I - I know.

ELLIE

Cynthia, I -

MRS. O'DOWD

It's not enough. But - I did what I could. I tried to give her CPR, I never - I did the best I could. I'm sorry it wasn't enough.

(MRS. O'DOWD enters the tent. ELLIE sits at the campfire. Lights out.)

Scene Three

(The tents again. Later that afternoon. ZAN is sitting next to the remains of the campfire, hands on knees, staring at it. She's wearing DASH's vest. CHRISTA enters, fresh from ropes course. She slows as she sees ZAN.)

CHRISTA

Oh. I didn't know you were here.

ZAN

Yeah, I - I guess I didn't really have anything else I wanted to do, so. Thought I'd stay around here.

(Silence.)

Um. Where's your buddy?

CHRISTA

Ugh, don't. My mom's been on me about that the whole time here - I think I'm old enough to walk back from High Ropes by myself. Plus, where's your buddy?

ZAN

I don't know if I need one. If I'm not going anywhere -

CHRISTA

Yeah. Sure. Guess it'd be hard to find one, anyway.

(She brushes past ZAN, towards the tent.)

ZAN

Why are you acting like this?

CHRISTA

Like what?

ZAN

Like you hate me.

CHRISTA

What are you, five? I don't hate you.

ZAN

I didn't do anything anyone else didn't do.

CHRISTA

You left.

ZAN

So did Marta, and Dash, I don't see why I -

CHRISTA

Marta doesn't count. She wasn't in the clearing with us, she and Petra weren't attached at the hip, she -

ZAN

Dash -

CHRISTA

Dash has an excuse! What's yours?

(Silence.)

ZAN

I don't know. I got - scared.

CHRISTA

Like we weren't all scared. But we kept coming -

ZAN

It just - it was too much. I couldn't do it. I'm not like you, or Kayla, or Emily, okay, I'm not brave -

CHRISTA

Like I needed you to tell me that.

ZAN

And like I need you to say that! You think I don't think every day about - what a coward I am? I do. Maybe it would have been better if I'd stayed in the troop but - I couldn't. Without Petra -

CHRISTA

Yeah. Right. You're so much of a coward you had to run straight into Jason Boyd's arms, didn't you -

ZAN

What's your problem with Jason? He hasn't done anything to you. You don't even know him.

CHRISTA

I know that when things got too hard and scary you forgot us and ran straight to some guy, and to girls who don't talk about anything other than guys -

ZAN

That's not fair. You don't know any of them. You don't get to decide -

CHRISTA

What happened to 'I swear never to abandon my Sisters?'

ZAN

Look - it wasn't like we were going to be best friends forever anyway, all right? It's middle school. Next year, we'll be in high school and everything will be different. You're going to still do this shit next year?

CHRISTA

I might.

ZAN

Yeah, well, don't count on Kayla or Emily or Dash to do it with you. They'll find their own thing. Like softball is my thing now. And yeah, so is Jason. He's really sweet to me, and - it's what people do, okay? So maybe I did it earlier because I couldn't - but we're all going to do it sooner or later.

CHRISTA

I would never do that.

ZAN

Please.

CHRISTA

I wouldn't! And neither would Kayla or Emily. Or Dash -

ZAN

Wake up. Emily's for sure going to go out for dance team in high school next year, and Kayla only stayed this year because she wanted her scuba patch. And Dash - well. I'm just saying that it's not like I'm the only person whose left something. So you don't have to treat me like that.

(Silence.) I - look. I am sorry. About what happened. And that I couldn't - I wish I could be brave, but. I'm not. And yeah, maybe with Petra it would have been different, if last year hadn't - maybe we all would have stuck it out through high school together. But probably not. Probably even Petra wouldn't have. So - I'm just saying it doesn't make sense to hate me for something that everyone has to do anyway.

(EMILY and KAYLA, buddies, enter. KAYLA, incandescent in happiness and brandishing a badge, wet from the lake.)

KAYLA

I did it! I did it! You're looking at a certified scuba-splorer!

EMILY

It was amazing. She was down there forever. I thought she was gonna drown.

KAYLA

But I did not drown because I am an expert at scuba diving! I am qualified! I am proficient! I am excellent at scuba-ing!

ZAN

Congrats.

(EMILY and KAYLA notice the tension. Exchange looks.)

EMILY

What's going on?

CHRISTA

Nothing. Zan's running her stupid mouth -

KAYLA

Christa, don't -

ZAN

Oh yeah, great leadership skills, top notch -

CHRISTA

Better than you! At least I don't run when people are counting on me -

ZAN

Well, no one would ever have counted on you if Petra was here, would they! She was a ten times better leader than you -

(CHRISTA throws herself at ZAN. They fight. KAYLA and EMILY dive in, try and pull them apart.)

EMILY

Stop! Stop, you guys, stop, this isn't -

CHRISTA

Don't say it like that! Don't you ever -

ZAN

What? Say that you're not as good as Petra -

CHRISTA

Of course I'm not as good as Petra! Don't say it like I'm glad she's gone so I can be -

ZAN

I didn't say that!

KAYLA

Chris, stop -

ZAN

I'd never say that! Of course you're not glad she's gone!

CHRISTA

But you are, aren't you?

ZAN

Of course I'm not!

(ELLIE enters. Like lightning, the fight stops. ZAN and CHRISTA and EMILY and KAYLA jump up, dust each other off, pretend everything is normal.)

ELLIE

Hey, girls. Kayla, congrats!

KAYLA

Oh. Um.

ELLIE

Didn't you make your scuba qualification?

KAYLA

Oh! That! Yeah, yeah, I did, thanks, Mrs. Dashell.

ELLIE

Oh, you don't - you can call me Ellie, Kayla. You don't have to call me Mrs. Dashell anymore.

KAYLA

Oh. Right. Um. Thanks.

(ELLIE exits into the girls tent. The girls watch her, then whisper at each other.)

CHRISTA

You're not.

ZAN

Of course I'm not! Everything was better when she was here, of course I -

EMILY

Even if it wasn't better, I'd still want her back.

KAYLA

Me too.

CHRISTA

Yeah.

(They look at each other. ELLIE exits the tent.)

ELLIE

Where's Perdie?

(The girls exchange looks.)

KAYLA

Perdie? Um.

CHRISTA

She was at the lake with you guys, right?

EMILY

No. Or I mean - I didn't see her.

ELLIE

She said she didn't want to go swimming.

CHRISTA

She wasn't at high ropes. For sure. I'd have seen her.

ZAN

I mean - I've been here since after breakfast. She hasn't been here.

(A moment of total silence.)

ELLIE

Who was meant to be her buddy?

(No one answers.)

Well? She came out here to be with you all, didn't she? Where is she?

(No one answers.)

All right. All right. You - she's probably just - in the bathroom or something.

CHRISTA

I'll go check -

ELLIE

No! You girls stay right here! Don't go anywhere!

CHRISTA

But we can help -

ELLIE

Just stay here, I said! Haven't you done enough?

(The girls react as if struck. ELLIE doesn't notice.)

I'll check. Just - stay here. If she comes back, tell her - or tell your mom, Christa, that she's -

(ELLIE starts off in the direction of the bathrooms. Is almost running. The girls look at each other, then immediately spring into action. Someone goes through the tent, another rummages through belongings, someone checks the adult tent.)

ZAN

Her backpack's gone -

CHRISTA

My mom's map isn't here, but maybe she has it with her - but if Dash took it -

EMILY

I haven't seen her since -

ZAN

She was at breakfast, right? Wasn't she at breakfast?

(CHRISTA exits her mother's tent, with the first aid training kit and book, a lantern, a flashlight, and other survival equipment. She's loading it all up into the backpack. The other girls emerge from what they were doing, watch her. In the distance, a low roll of thunder.)

What are you doing?

CHRISTA

What does it look like I'm doing? I'm going to find Dash.

KAYLA

Mrs. Dashell said to wait here -

CHRISTA

Whatever. Dash is out there and I'm not going to sit here and just wait when she might need us -

EMILY

But - after last time - she just said -

CHRISTA

You don't have to come. None of you. But I'm going.

ZAN

Maybe we should wait. For an adult. I mean - what if we just make everything worse?

CHRISTA

Dash is our friend. We owe her. We're not leaving her. I swear never to abandon my Sisters. Right?

(She finishes loading up the bag.)

You don't have to come, I said. But I'm going. I'm not leaving Dash, not this time, not when we can do something about it. So?

(The others look at her.)

Fine.

EMILY

Wait!

(She grabs her flashlight, joins CHRISTA.)

KAYLA

Well - wait.

(Grabs her stuff, joins CHRISTA. CHRISTA starts off.)

ZAN

Wait!

CHRISTA

What?

(ZAN hesitates. Then, grabs her stuff. Joins them.)

ZAN

I just - I don't want anything bad to happen.

CHRISTA

Let's go.

(They exit into the treeline. Lights out. Thunder.)

Scene Four

(The woods. Later that afternoon. It's getting close to evening. We see the girls' flashlights peeking through the trees. as they search for DASH. Every so often, far in the distance, the low roll of thunder.)

Dash? Hey, Dash, where are you? EMILY

Dash - you there? KAYLA

How much further? ZAN

I don't know - Dash? Hey, Dash! CHRISTA

Petra? DASH

(Everyone stops.)

Did you - ZAN

No. CHRISTA

Yeah. I did. KAYLA

Dash? Is that you? EMILY

Dash - ZAN

Dash! CHRISTA

(They spread out. Search.)

How much further to - ZAN

I said I don't know!

CHRISTA

Wait - I see it. Dash?

EMILY

How can you see it?

ZAN

I see it too. The rock. Dash? Hey, Dash?

KAYLA

(Hesitantly, they stumble forward and finally come across DASH, who is sitting in her usual configuration - a circle of stones, flashlight, mirror. She's sitting in front of an enormous white rock.)

Dash - there you are.

EMILY

Are you okay?

KAYLA

Come on, your mom came back to camp and saw you weren't there and freaked out, we have to -

CHRISTA

She's not here.

DASH

No, she's back at camp, but maybe we can beat her back to the tents and tell her you were in the bathroom or something -

KAYLA

No. Petra. Petra isn't here.

DASH

(The others freeze.)

Dash -

ZAN

She isn't here. I - I thought she'd be here. I thought she really would be.

DASH

(Thunder. The others all look up.)

That's the only reason I'm here. Because I thought - but she's still gone.

CHRISTA

Yeah, Dash. She's gone.

DASH

It's not like when she were alive we were together every second or anything. Or did all the same things or dressed the same, or. We were different people. We never finished each other's sentences or thought each other's thoughts. We weren't like that. You know that.

ZAN

Yeah, Dash. We know.

DASH

I mean half the time it felt like she didn't even like me.

ZAN

She liked you, Dash. She loved you -

DASH

She liked you better. As a friend. Instead of a sister. She chose you. She didn't have a choice about me.

(ZAN is silent.)

I can't do this anymore. It's too hard. I don't like it. I don't like being alone.

CHRISTA

You don't have to be - alone.

DASH

But I am. My dad left and I heard him tell my mom it was too hard to look at me and not see - and my mom thinks that's my fault. Because I won't stop wearing her stuff. But it's my stuff too. It's the only things I have left. Even when I look in the mirror - I don't look like her anymore.

(She looks at the mirror.)

My face looks wrong.

EMILY

You still look like her, Dash.

DASH

But my face is wrong. It's too old.

(She looks in the mirror. Looks away.)

Remember when Petra broke her wrist? In fourth grade. And she was on the monkey bars in recess and she fell? And she didn't cry, remember - everyone just kept saying how brave she was. Remember?

KAYLA

Yeah. We remember.

DASH

She got five dollars for sitting still when they set it and being brave. And I'd never broken a bone.

(She rubs at her cast.)

I wasn't trying to - I just thought. I've been trying and trying to find her but - I thought maybe it just wasn't quite right. That there were all these little things I needed to - but none of them are working. Maybe they aren't - big enough.

(Silence.)

Do you believe in ghosts?

CHRISTA

Dash. Let's go back to camp. Let's -

DASH

I thought I did. I really thought I did.

KAYLA

Come on. We can go back to the tents and - and we'll start a fire and eat marshmallows and - it'll be okay, Dash.

DASH

It won't.

(She hits her head against the stone she's sitting against.)

EMILY

No -

KAYLA

Dash, don't -

CHRISTA

Stop!

(She moves over to DASH and shoves her hand between DASH's head and the stone. DASH blinks up at her.)

Stop it, Dash. You can't - we're not going to let you do this.

DASH

Do what?

CHRISTA

We need to - we have to go back to camp. Now. Are you hurt?  
(DASH starts laughing.)

Seriously, Dash - are you okay?

DASH

No.

KAYLA

Then let's - let's get you back to camp. Can you move?

DASH

You don't have to.

EMILY

We can do it. We did all that first aid training - where are you hurt, we can patch you up until we -

DASH

I'm not - I just want to stay here. For a little.

(The thunder. Then - a streak of lightning across the sky.)

Just a little longer.

ZAN

We can't stay out here in a storm. Come on.

DASH

You go. I'm fine.

CHRISTA

We're not leaving you, all right? So stop being stupid and get up already!

KAYLA

Dash - you're scaring me.

(DASH looks up at KAYLA. Blinks.)

DASH

Why? You haven't talked to me for like a year. None of you have.

KAYLA

That doesn't mean - I'm sorry. We're sorry.

DASH

If people could choose, I knew they wouldn't choose me. Petra was better. I knew that. I

always did.

EMILY

That's not true. That's not why -

CHRISTA

We didn't want - we were - we didn't know what to do. None of us knew - we're sorry, Dash. We are.

KAYLA

Come back to camp, we'll - we'll be okay. We'll all be okay, we'll make it okay, we just - let's go back to camp and talk, we can't stay out here -

(More lightning.)

DASH

I thought it just had to be the right place. But maybe it needs more than that.

CHRISTA

There's no such thing as ghosts, Dash. They're just stories, okay, you can't - you can't stay out here for a story.

DASH

We thought a lot of things were stories once. But maybe they weren't.

(Lightning.)

If we had a choice - I'd choose her, too. Instead of me. She's the better pick.

CHRISTA

Get up, Dash.

(She grabs DASH by the arms, tries to lift her.)

Come on, Dash, we're going - we'll drag you out of here if we have to, but -

DASH

Why?

CHRISTA

Because maybe we couldn't do anything for Petra but we can do something for you so I'm not going to let you stay out here and get electrocuted for no good reason!

(She wrenches and lifts DASH off the ground. The other girls rush in, help steady her so DASH is on feet. She wrenches her arms away from them.)

two

DASH

Who are you to get to decide what a good reason is?

EMILY

Maybe we should go get help.

KAYLA

There isn't a good reason for that, Dash -  
(Lightning.)

DASH

I mean. I guess it's right that you're all here, at least. That was one of the other things I could never get right. Because we were never together after that. Not really.  
(Silence.)

Do you think that's why it's all broken?

ZAN

What?

DASH

You know. Me. Us. Do you think that's why it won't work?  
(Lightning.)

Petra? Can you hear me? If you can hear me, give me a sign - let me know what to do. Come back, all right? Come back and I'll go, and - we can make a different choice. Come back, okay, just come back, come back, come back -  
(Thunder. Lightning. Then, for the first time - a sprinkling of raindrops. DASH looks up. So do the others.)

Petra?

(The rain intensifies. DASH closes her eyes. Leans her head back. The thunder and lightning stop. It's just rain. Underneath it, the sound of a twig snapping. Then another. Footsteps. ELLIE enters, with flashlight, looking half out of her mind with worry. Seeing DASH, she drops the flashlight and runs to her.)

ELLIE

Perdie! Don't you ever do that again, don't you ever -  
(She can't decide whether to hug her or shake her. She does both.)

Never, ever - I thought I'd lost you, I thought -

DASH

Petra's here.

(ELLIE looks at DASH. Looks at the clearing.)

I mean - she isn't. But she is.

(ELLIE crushes her closer.)

ELLIE

Oh. Honey.

DASH

No, really. Listen.

(The girls, DASH, and ELLIE listen to the rain. They listen a long time. Soaked to the skin. DASH shivers.)

ELLIE

I don't know what I'd do if I - don't do that to me, Perdie. Don't do that to me ever again. All right?

(DASH nods. Shivers.)

You're soaked. C'mere.

(ELLIE digs into her backpack. Pulls out a hooded sweatshirt - mostly dry, definitely new. In DASH's size. She holds it out.)

Put this on. Then let's get back. You girls all right?

(The other girls nod. DASH takes the sweatshirt. Rubs at the sleeve.)

Here. Let me - can I -

(She reaches out, tentatively. Peels DASH's wet vest off. Like dressing a smaller child, starts to negotiate DASH's arms through the sleeves. DASH pulls away. ELLIE steps back, face shuttering, steeling herself for rejection.)

DASH

No. I got it.

(She finishes pulling herself into the sweatshirt. Zips it up. Listens again, to the rain. Leans in to ELLIE. ELLIE holds her. They both listen. A long time. Lights out.)

## Scene Five

(The tents. The next afternoon. The really bright sun after a storm - everything looks new. The girls are packing up their stuff, unloading tents, putting the campsite to sleep. They do so in companionable silence. DASH enters, still in her same too small clothes but with the new sweatshirt, hauling a bucket of water. Without speaking, out of sheer tradition, the girls and the adults circle up around the campfire. Arms around each other's shoulders. ELLIE and DASH are next to each other. They start to sing.)

### ALL THE GIRLS

Mhm, I want to linger  
Mhm, a little longer  
Mhm, a little longer  
Here with you

Mhm, it's such a perfect night  
Mhm, it doesn't seem quite right  
Mhm, that this should be  
my last with you

Mhm, and come September  
Mhm, I will remember,  
Mhm, our scouting days  
And friendships true

Mhm, and as the years go by  
Mhm, I'll think of you and sigh,  
Mhm, this is goodnight And not goodbye.

(DASH picks up the bucket of water. Pours it over the fire. A moment of steam. She puts down the bucket. Everyone grabs what stuff is left and starts to exit. DASH stays a moment, watching the fire. Then, grabs her backpack. Opens it up. Takes out the mirror, the baggie of rocks, the flashlight. Takes the rocks and adds them to the stone circle around the campfire. Takes the mirror and puts it underneath the logs that the girls were sitting on. Puts the flashlight back in the bag, after a moment. Sits there, alone, on her knees. Then, gets up. Leaves. Lights out. **End of play.**)