

The Peanut Butter Rallies of Penokin, Wisconsin

Three lesbians and a deaf man; the cover of a politically-correct Target ad. The headline reads: “Local Teenagers Advocate for a Lunch Essential!” across Tina LaPlant’s television screen. Jasmine Simmons (called ‘Simones’ on the screen; the only misspelled name), Michelle Roth, Sadie Munth, and Wilson Raynott: the proprietors. Jasmine stands front and center while the others are positioned diagonally behind as if to be silver, bronze, and runner-up. The newsman with his pomade-hair and faberge charm finishes blurbing on about allergies. He stands up and walks over to the rag-tag group, all standing off-kilter; obviously their business is not show business.

Tina throws her empty can of beer at the screen. It was *them*, them who took her reputation from her very own hands. She sighs, slouching deeper in her chair, the fabric of which is ripped to shreds; open-sourced cotton, a remnant of her dogs. Tina blinks twice, feeling immediate regret. She battled in her mind the innocence and guiltiness of it all. The root of the situation, and what those four *meant* over what they *did*. What was said and what wasn’t.

The newsman interrupts, “So, Jasmine, tell us where it all began?”

Jasmine looks down at the mic, expecting some small red light to tell her she is ‘on air’ or something, anything. But there is nothing. The question draws blanks from her head.

“I believe my friend Sadie could answer that question the best.” Jasmine passes the mic with shaking hands, disappointed with herself.

Tina turns the television off. Nods her head in regret. Goes to bed.

Six years prior; a cozy winter night. Jasmine’s family watches “Pirates of the Caribbean”. Jas is sprawled out on the sofa, cocooned in a blanket. The fire emanates from a brick grate, setting a certain enchantment to the scenery. There is a drizzle of rain on the rooftop, leaving a soothing stillness to the

atmosphere. Her mom and dad cuddle on the other end of the couch. Then, on the screen, Keira Knightley gets out of bed in a corset. Jasmine changes her posture, feeling a certain possession come over. Minutes pass, Keira Knightley marches onto a beach-side shore, drenched in water. Jasmine moves again. A horrifying thought sinks in. Dad rubs mother's thigh. Utter repulsion, and within it, the enchantment strengthens.

The next weeks bring a wave of confusion.

Jas takes mental notes of her surroundings. Seventh grade: fecal artists and heavy body odors, hormones and rumors. She tunes into the sweaty napes of the necks of boys after gym class, finding nothing but nausea. But beside them, talking to them, flows the luscious hair of her female peers. A similar repugnance, but one she feels comforting; worth following. At this point, life has a new path carved out; plans need to be revised.

You see, she always has this ruminating thought; though unsavory, it gives her safety, a back-up: *eat a little less, run a lot, and marry rich*. But that doesn't work with the modern lesbian itinerary, especially for one who doesn't want to hike up Mt. Lee every week. So, a new foundation is formed after many sleepless nights. The gist of it: do a lot of algebra and bulk up.

By junior year of highschool, her plan commences in a series of crooked, misshapen dominos. Lift, study, repeat. She finds enjoyment in living honestly, strength in her physical accomplishments, and intelligence in strict ethics.

On the side, Jasmine occasionally volunteers at the third-wave feminist school-adjacent extracurricular "Full Stop". A non-profit organized to provide feminine hygiene products to all in the name of equality within the Wolf County. Jasmine's provocative energy and progressive orientation quickly drives her close to the club and more importantly, the presidents: Sadie and Michelle.

All three find many things in common, especially exercise; one-part for physical health, the other part a symbolic middle finger to those who see them as fragile glass manikins. Throughout the winter, they run into each other between real-delts or squats at the B ('Brunt' gymnasium). It doesn't take long until they form an alliance, trading off between sets; making group chats to lift in-tandem.

Social media stalking unveils more: love for independent, soft-spoken female folk artists; a careful consideration for small bugs; a fascination with gemstones; an admiration for all shades of the moon; an unorthodox obsession with frogs. The list goes on. As she swipes between instagram tiles of personality traits, Jasmine squeezes her palm in excitement, savoring this moment for herself. But soon her romantic anxieties reign supreme under a multitude of *if-so* and *what-thens*. It is one thing to raise your hand in class and speak factual statements or lift a weight you never thought possible, but to share an attraction to another soul— making yourself completely vulnerable— that is a weight heavier than ten tons to the tongue, harder to pronounce than a never ending sentence. That is a treasure to be buried deep, never to be dug up. One kept for Jasmine and Michelle alone.

As time passes, feelings deepen. Life continues through waves of beautiful longing and lost causes. Temporarily interrupted by a set of wandering eyes, belonging to a quick-shifting neck. It's a boy. A boy with baby cheeks and a soft suburban stubble. On a very fateful leg-day, the pupils prance over to the women in the midst of their bent-over rows; great timing. The boy has a general nervous tension attached to his presence. Michelle physically covers Jasmine as she labors over her form. The boy looks down at his feet, awkwardly trying to sway his intentions of innocence.

“Hello?” Michelle confronts. Sadie watches from the sidelines.

The boy gathers incoherent breaths. Then, he performs a series of hand gestures that make out “do you know what I’m saying?” in ASL.

Michelle and Sadie look at one another, a shared grin forms around their lips. *Of course, of course.*

Sadie responds by saying, “Hello, I’m Sadie and this is Michelle”. Her hands gesticulate with such precision it feels borderline offensive.

“My name is Wilson. Could one of you spot me? I’m sorry, I just don’t want to die on this bench.”

Sadie laughs, nodding her head far too much, signing “Yep, I will *totally* help!”

Before he leaves, Jasmine puts down her weights, appearing between her peers: “I’m Jasmine.”

They shake hands, soon setting in stone the fourth member of their lifting troupe. To the girls it does not matter how straight he is (though, especially Sadie and Michelle, tend to have a strong adverse reaction to the male species). They all find novel enjoyment in their diversity. It gives them the certain *oomph* that many teenagers search for but can never retrieve. The squad of an Old Navy pamphlet lifting more weight than your dad is a much cooler personality than dying your hair neon blue.

By the end of the school year, the four see each other nearly every day, forming a close bond. By night, Jasmine begins to dream of Mish in a corset parading into the waves of an unknown ocean. There is an enchanting quality to her, an uncomfortable itch that draws wells in the nape of Jasmine’s neck. Dangerous, scary. Jas is the pirate, wanting to steal her away from the world. Trap her, treat her like treasure. Then she wakes up, cold and drenched.

Months move: weights get heavier, burdens burrow deeper. Jas begins to suffer a revolving door of casts, wheels, and crutches. First rotator cuffs, then an ACL tear, a bicep sprain– the list goes on. The biggest blow to it all is the financial strain. Jasmine juggles two jobs, a challenging school load, and strict gym regiment (when she isn’t mummified in casts).

One afternoon, Mrs. Bourne (the doctor who now has a name-to-name relationship with Jas; her most frequent visitor) asks a very curious question, or rather, a very obvious question: “how is your recovery process?” The second biggest realization of Jasmine’s life sinks in. She is lacking sufficient healing for the constant damage of her joints. Protein, stretching, electrolytes: all that costs money. The material of a market she isn’t the luckiest to compete within. Protein bars are only good for a cheap fix and peanut butter ripe with nutrition is hard to continuously afford. The truth of the matter is the recovery rollers, the steak, the ultimate healing-elixirs– they are not a resource she can consistently access while saving up for a college education and three meals a day.

By the beginning of senior year, the problem becomes evident but void of any obvious answers. She can’t find the courage to ask for help (or even advice). Her friends offer, casually and platonically, to support her dozens of times. Each question makes her twitch in resolve; a matter of self-respect and

general drive. Michelle conveniently provides extra bottles of muscle-milk at lunch that she *totally wasn't gonna drink*. Sadie forcefully shares her new stretcher upon Jas at the gym; a gift she just *really wanted for Christmas*. Wilson holds garage sales, with shoes suddenly appearing when Jasmine arrives; they were far from her size.

To be blunt, Jasmine doesn't fold. A mind achieving a 3.9 GPA with 5 APs and a childhood of real-world traumas with real-world experiences will not be fooled by the transparent wall of performative philanthropy her friends attempt. In fact, she finds it insulting; why couldn't they ever just ask her—right to her face— if she needed more money? She felt it as a symptom of her surrounding culture: fish-fry Fridays, Superbowl holidays, and bathrooms with hand-driers right out of Star Trek.

And so, she concocts a solution. To play their game, and win. She has enough of the ulterior motives, the scheming, the workarounds.

And thus sets in stone the first Peanut Butter Rally of Penokin, Wisconsin.

March 2nd. A simple day. The snow can't decide if it believes in climate change or not. The windows of the cafeteria condensate. Jas and the trio sit at the lunch table, conversing in ASL about the recent rumor: Mrs. LaPlant was just put under suspension. Mish says *it's only a rumor* but apparently she asked to be paid as much as her male coworkers and the principal— *that sexist prick*— wouldn't allow it. *She's never gone on maternity leave or anything!* Jasmine nods, not really listening as Michelle moves her lips without words omitting, glossed with what must be Revlon or Dior.

“...it's just the same thing over and over again. They can change the color of the football field but can't pay LaPlant what she's entitled to? I mean, she's not my favorite,” she laughs, “but damn.”

Wilson signs, “Where did you hear this from?”

Michelle is having trouble translating. She has a look on her face when her control is lost because she looks like she has more control than usual.

Sadie leans in, signing, “Everyone. The socioeconomic grapevine.”

Wilson nods his head, mouth slightly agape. Faintly understanding.

There is a momentary silence, Jasmine uses this time of humpty-dumpty political rage to weasel in her plan.

She leans over to Michelle, “You have a background with fundraising, right? I have an idea: The Peanut Butter Rally. A nonprofit– organized by us– to enforce and strengthen those without financial equity to achieve a quality of health that is necessary for the modern world.” Jasmine is proud of her improvisational-change of the word “equity” from “equality” in her pitch. Know your audience.

Mish turns her face, meeting eyes. She’s never looked at Jasmine like this before.

“Jasmine, yes. That sounds amazing.”

The plan is later shared to the others, Sadie reciprocates support. Wilson is not convinced, asking about logistics and the Brunt’s pre-existing booster club. Jasmine explains that their efforts would act as a subgenre of the booster. The funds could be set aside in the mass-finance of the official booster. People in certain tax brackets and backgrounds can appeal for their program with the right paperwork and identification. Wilson shrugs, with a soft grin.

By April 12th the plan is ready to launch completely. Michelle raises support through Full Stop, taking advantage of her prior connections to gather initial kickstart funds. Sadie’s father is some suit that *pulled some strings* for the group.

Near the entryway of the Brunt, Jasmine and Wilson man a small station with pamphlets and a winning smile. The snow appears even loftier than the month prior. Jasmine is disappointed about the weather, but not discouraged.

She taps her foot under the podium, anxious about saying the right things. She spent nights going over how to answer each question properly, knowing she and Wilson are a risk as representatives. The thought was the diversity will be appealing to their target demographic through a false sense of pity and a general thought process that “*they*” *should be more like her; working hard*.

The day goes by in slow motion. Jasmine learns hastily that she needs extra precautions to secure an interaction; they will not simply come to her. She speaks up, makes stronger eye-contact, even walks

up to people, but the reactions turn more adverse. The funds are not raising. Jasmine goes back to her podium, laying her hands limply on the surface, burying her head within. She takes a deep breath, reconciling with the feeling she can never escape: she isn't selling a nonprofit, she is selling a part of herself.

“Sir!” Wilson yells abruptly, interrupting Jasmine’s train of thought. He speaks with an inviting masculine touch. Jasmine peeks up from her arms. The man looks Will in the eyes, then glares at Jasmine. He leaves the gym.

By afternoon the results are not reassuring. This is the feeling Jasmine is used to; a Stockholm comfort. They leave the gym for the day. Jasmine trails behind Wilson. His head is hung low.

She runs in front of him, walking backwards while signing, “We can tackle it tomorrow. It was probably just the weather.”

Wilson has this look in his eyes, one Jasmine is all too familiar with. He opens his mouth, closes it, thinks for a second, then opens his mouth again, without a sound coming out. He just nods his head no and signs, “I think Mish and Sadie should be at the station tomorrow.”

Jasmine understands.

The next couple of days, Mish and Sadie try the stands as spokespeople. The results are abrupt and fascinating: Raising thousands of dollars, community representatives reach out for further advertising.

Jasmine feels guilty, but enjoys rapid access to gear and health utilities she never had prior access to. And the praise— the praise is truly inspiring. Hopeful young minds reassure Mish of her efforts in the school hallway. Adults in the community acknowledge the hard work that Sadie has put in. Wilson is even nominated for Prom Court. Jasmine is just happy to be off the knee cart.

The snow finally melts, and time rolls by to the final remnants of senior year.

Jasmine strolls with Michelle down empty school corridors. They leave the library after a treacherous open-study night; last minute AP cramming.

“How are you feeling about the everything of it all?” Jasmine asks Mish.

She grins, “The test? I’m quite concerned,” chuckles, “Mr. Larson has taught us zilch. Zada. And it’s history, I just—” sighs, “I don’t know. I just want to learn about *now*. Not about Rutherford B. Hayes and the Townshend Act.”

Jasmine laughs, “I think it’s interesting. Like lore but real. Actually happened. Isn’t that crazy?”

“I guess so, yeah.”

Jasmine pivots, “I just wanted to say, on the other hand, thank you for all the fundraising support. I know juggling this all must be so much. Your efforts truly don’t go unnoticed.”

Michelle’s eyes grimace in sincerity, “Thank you, that’s really nice. But thank *you*. This will look like *gold* on my transcript.”

Jasmine nods, slightly irked by her statement. One comment in a series of small, little annoyances. As they turn past the cafeteria down the aisle of academic recognitions, Jasmine clears her throat, feeling a stone form where her heart should be.

“Michelle, I need to talk to you.” She says in a deeper, somber tone. Mish directs her stare pitch-point perfect to Jas’s pupil. She has flicked on the sensitivity switch, noticing a disturbance in her forest of passive tranquility. Jasmine has seen this same look plastered on Mish’s face before. Once when she was told-off by a teacher for ‘side-comments’, another when one of her mentoring-freshmen came to her in tears about a test coming up. The look, it’s always the same. She curves her neck— almost points it, like a cat— to face you head-on. Her eyes narrow slightly but enlarge in size. She lowers her eyebrows, tenses her nose. A whole show.

“Look, I’m just gonna be blunt here,” Jas proceeds, “everything you have done for The Peanut Butter Rally has been nothing short of spectacular. Really, truly. But that’s also the possible problem.”

“You and Sadie both have the professional connections. The actual physical face. And have done so so much for the cause.” Michelle nods her head in shocked confusion. “I mean really, *really*. There is no problem right now. And you are not the issue. It’s—” Jasmine twitches her hand “It’s what I can see

coming. Everything around you. The people who can be convinced to help us, the people we *need*, are also the problem.”

“Mhm.” Michelle says through a swollen throat.

“I’ve seen this so many times, throughout history. Even with mom and dad. I just want to stop it before it goes anywhere.” Jasmine puts her hand on her head, sighs, “God, okay. Sadie and you are two beautiful women. Though you have piercings and progressive beliefs, there is an easier gap bridging you from them. People are going to find some way to turn this on its head. Look—” Jasmine points to plaques on the wall; past administration, “We come from a lineage of copy-and-paste powerful people. And I know you want to see someone different on those plaques just as much as I, but they are the people we need to make this work. And they are also the people who will not hesitate to casually make you front and center of this all, turn this fundraiser into something else entirely and leave people like me, the one who needs it, out.”

Michelle nods her head, completely totally understanding.

“What I’m trying to say is continue everything, but can you promise me? Promise me that this rally will be used to help people. This rally will be used for what it was intended. And in this rally, you won’t forget me.” Jasmine exhales, as if she said it all in one breath.

Michelle’s eyes begin to water.

“Of course, Jasmine, of course. Have I—” she snuffles “I really haven’t meant to be ignorant or anything.”

“No no, you haven’t. I just know where these things tend to go. Especially in Penokin, Wisconsin. I mean, we have three statues in this town: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ronald Reagan. You see what I’m trying to say? It’s not you, it’s just, it’s the everything of it all.”

“No. You’re right.” Michelle buries her head in Jasmine’s shoulder. Jas’s posture perks up. She slowly brings her hand to her back, comforting her friend. She begins to feel goosebumps tingle up her spine. This feeling is not captivating though, rather riddled with shame and guilt. Jasmine has this

crushing feeling, as if she's taken the pearl from an oyster. Prohibiting a treasure to release their majesty to the world. A pirate suffocating their victim.

Finals pass and the sun finally unveils itself in its wake. People pop their heads out, ready to walk the streets once more. More attention is brought naturally to The Peanut Butter Rally leading to exponential success. The local news even runs a story on the project, inviting the four to discuss their drive center-stage.

The broadcast goes well enough, though Jasmine per-usual takes a step back for Sadie to take lead as center spokeswoman. She does a perfect job clarifying the mission statement and milestones of the rally, though Jasmine was the one who gathered the facts for her. Jasmine was the one who had the idea. Jasmine takes a deep breath

and lets the problem go.

Therein falls the final domino of the first rally. The ultimate goal has been achieved. On the local level, people now have the proper funding to achieve a safe lifestyle. In fact, Largerson Corp. (the local water-valve distributor; number one nationally) has picked up the cause and made a very-public promise to make annual distributions to the fund as seen necessary. The support is fanciful. No longer the era of braces, splints, and wheels.

So maybe there isn't a problem with any of it. Michelle has been weary to Jasmine's wish as well, apologizing profusely after the newscast but Jasmine understands that Sadie needed to be there, to say what she couldn't.

That night she dreams of a white tightrope lined with razors. They cut her feet, one-by-one, piercing her skin. The blood slowly seeps between her toes, recoloring the fibers of the rope to a deeper, darker complexion. And right as she reaches the end of the wire, reaching the light at the end of the tunnel, she falls. She holds her hand out, falling deeper into the dark abyss. She gains speed, feeling the bottom grow ever-closer. But as her head should tumble onto rubble, she suddenly finds herself levitating.

Or, instead, caught. Caught in the hands of Michelle. They stare at one another; so close yet so far.

Michelle brings her index finger to her mouth, quieting her. Then leans in to embrace.

Before the treasure is celebrated, Jasmine opens her eyes, staring at a llama plushie at the foot of her bed. There never seems to be an end to all this. She feels the sunlight radiate from her window. Her pupils dilate to the melancholia of the week; the final days of highschool. An end to the dominos she made so long ago. She stretches her hands up toward the ceiling. Saturating the sun bath gifted to her— a loud vibration punctures the air. Phone: Michelle. Jas picks it up—

“Jasmine, I’m sorry. Did I wake you up?”

Jas runs her hands through her hair, itching her scalp. Almost as if shaking herself physically will return herself emotionally to reality.

“No, you’re okay.” She covers her mouth to cough. Tips her body weight over the side of the bed.

“I have news. It’s not good.” Silence draws over the line. Jasmine begins to lay out her clothing for the day.

After ten seconds of mute over the receiver, Jasmine asks “Hello?”

“Sorry. Uhhh. It’s Sadie.” Jasmine walks over to the bathroom. “She’s talked to her dad and arranged a, uhm, *side-piece* for the Peanut Butter Rally.”

Jasmine begins to brush her teeth, though muffled translation she blurts, “A wha? A side-piece? Wha does tha even mean?” She brushes with more intensity.

“Basically, Sadie is uhh, taking the momentum of the whole movement and wants to use it to kickstart a fund for Mrs. LaPlant—”

Jasmine really, really spits out her toothpaste this time, as if it tasted of blood.

“No. What? Why? Veto. Bad.” Irritation rises in Jasmine. She puts down her brush and makes her way to the kitchen.

“Sadie has already begu—”

“Have you talked to her? I mean, like? Can’t she just *not* take the Peanut Butter Rally? Just start a new thing?” Jasmine takes her lunchbox from the fridge, gripping the handle with stark intensity.

“I- I don’t really know.” Michelle sounds labored, as if she’s just finished a marathon, “I was going to talk to her today, but I didn’t know if I should mention what we talked about or- It just seemed so personal– what you shared– You know?”

Jasmine zips her backpack. She can feel her veins pulsate through her skin. A mental image of Michelle’s face emanates through the phone. The pointed cat neck. Narrowed eyes. Tense nose. She takes a deep breath, running her hand through her hair again. Slouching slowly to the ground.

She told, *told*, Michelle that she specifically wanted to avoid this exact situation. Jasmine looks up at the wall, painted a mundane tan. The color is recognizable, but she can’t put her finger on it. Her brother turns on the sink from upstairs, the running water; the wall. Like sand on a beach. The glow of “Michelle Roth” emanates from her screen. Stealing her worries one second at a time.

“I’m sorry, Jasmine. I shouldn’t have let this go so far. I’ll talk to her right now. I’m just so sorry.” Michelle labors over the line.

“No.” There is an unbridled silence. The water stops. “I can talk to Sadie.” There is a lack of emotion in Jasmine’s tone.

“Jasmine, you don’t have to. Really. This is on me.”

“Michelle, I’m not mad. I think I should just tell her how I feel. You know? We’ll try honesty and see how it goes.”

Michelle makes a muffled sound from over the line, “I’m here for you if you need any help.”

Jasmine brings her feet to her chest, curling up in a warm ball. *I’m here for you.*

“Thanks, Michelle. I–” She takes a deep breath.

“Thanks.”

Hangs up.

Sadie is in the cafeteria signing to Wilson. Their silence is directly opposed to the evasive sound of kazoos bursting through the normally downtrodden morning-routine of high school circadian rhythms. Jasmine remembers today is senior-prank day. Whoever put it together bought the plastic party-toy in bulk

for everyone it seems. Between the outburst of plastic chants, a calming sound fades in: the soft drizzle of mist from outside. It makes a sheet of humidity along the tiles on the floor. Patters on the rooftop. Jasmine always liked days like these. Less dreary, more comfortable. She closes her eyes, for just one more moment.

When she was younger— before the rolodex of pain that came with money and love, weights and bruises, anxiety and restless studies, Michelle and Keria— there were solemn, beautiful mornings. The sky was a stunning gray, so downtrodden. Wind would flow through trees like a hand grazing through a field of grass. Jasmine would take her brother and march the street in rubber boots. Splashing among miniature excursions of puddles. Feel the moisture cocoon around their skin. The humidity— the gray— something so flawed, so magnificent.

Jasmine opens her eyes. Takes in the scenery of the cafeteria. The red and white pigment to every bench and tile. The last four years of her life. Every lunch, every team meeting, every late-night study. With that, she exhales, then walks up to Sadie.

“Hey.”

Sadie looks over, Wilson trails her with his eyes, having to pick up the scene through context clues. Jasmine swallows the air, trying to breathe correctly.

“Oh, sorry.” She says. Instantly repeating the phrase in sign. “Didn’t mean to address Sadie—” pauses— “individually.”

Wilson says “okay” with his mouth, opting not to sign. Her eyes trail between the two of them, wandering for the next words.

“Can I talk to you quickly?” She asks Sadie. Sadie looks almost offended. Jasmine realizes she is talking past Wilson again. Her eyes fidget in unison with her hands. Confrontation is not her best sport.

“Sorry, shit.” Jas transitions to sign. “Will, I’m not having the best morning. I just need to pull Sadie aside for a second.”

He nods, seeming to understand.

The two girls leave the glooming cafeteria to a nearby hallway. Filled from corner to corner in the dissociative micro-trauma-inducing academic orange coloring. There is complete silence except for the occasional footstep, and the continuous drivel of rain, sometimes strengthening and weakening in volume within a minute's notice.

Jasmine avoids eye contact, trying to find the right moment to talk. She wishes she wouldn't have to share anything; it takes less creativity to answer questions than create them. In preparation, she has formulated the general outline of what she wants to say. Each point and what order. How to address her concern without making herself look manipulative; a victim. How to compliment her friend without it seeming passive-aggressive.

"I think I know what this is about, Jasmine. Let me explain." Sadie initiates, requesting eye contact so effortlessly.

Jasmine throws her plan out the window.

"I understand how you feel and that is completely valid. You are not only entitled to those emotions but justified in feeling them." Jasmine can't tell if she wants to punch Sadie in the face or acclaim her for the diplomatic repertoire.

"To find out through a friend and not from my mouth, that's a douche-move. Really, I know. But what we've started—" *I've* "is something so impactful in the community. Your brother has donated so much." *Eric? What?* "Wilson and you have set each parameter, regulating every step to success. The foundation is already built. So why not use the blueprints to do more."

"Sorry, what has my brother done?" Jasmine interjects.

Sadie looks down at the ground, losing eye contact momentarily.

"That's a whole other thing. First, let me please say this. I apologize for starting this next rally without conferring with you first. I understand that my actions feel like they have ignored you, worked around you, and that has caused some distress. But from the bottom of my heart, that was not my intent. I know that doesn't excuse the way I have made you feel, nonetheless. And now, before you punch me, I need to share one more thing."

Jasmine is ready to respond. Ready to open her mouth and speak the words she feels on the inside. *I forgive you. I understand. Let's find a middle ground.* But first she lets Sadie finish.

"I hope you're okay with this, seeing that it's the last week of school. But, there are plans already in motion. Sixth mod, after all lunch-periods have ended—" she licks her lips; they're shaking— "I've organized the first step of the rally."

Jasmine curves your eyebrows, questioning the validity of wherever this train of dialogue is going.

"We've spread it through social media, word of mouth, general gossip. Each and every student will get up and leave class. Stand outside the school in an academic strike in honor of LaPlant. Hopefully raising awar—"

"No. What? Do you understand, it's senior prank-day! No one's gonna take this seriously." Jasmine blurts out. "And even if it wasn't, it's the last week of school. Everybody has left the building at-heart as it is!" She spits with passion.

"I know how you must feel, Jasmine." Sadie looks Jasmine in the eyes, tilting her head ever so slightly. There is a sense of honesty in her eyes. *No—pity.*

The school bell rings, stimulating Jasmine in a sudden fit of fright.

The frame of Sadie's face is recognizable. *That look.* Just like Michelle's. The face forms a shape to symbolize some broken down empathy. Playing into centuries of this falsified role of support. The girl who offers her hands for the beaten and bruised, unveiling their palms to offer a voice to those left silenced by the majority. A statue of peace and piety. A gentle touch, calming and resolving. *Bullshit.*

Jasmine tenses her chin, shaking her head in anger, "You don't understand. You really, really don't. It's helpless. All of it. Go and have your revolution, Sadie. I love you, but you can't even begin to know. You just won't, can't, and don't."

"You're right, but—" she reaches her hand out to touch Jasmine's knee ever so gently, tilting her head a little bit more, "isn't it worth it to try? To make a change you have to make an attempt. Right?"

“Oh, Sadie. With your face, and your words.” She puts her hand on her forehead. “*That* face. *Those* words.” Jasmine is too exhausted to cry, too numb for anger anymore. “I will talk to you later.”

Jasmine gets up, leaving Sadie on the floor. She continues down the hallway in a daze. Hordes of students head toward her in the opposite direction, shrouding her thoughts in echoes of laughter and gossip and finger pointing and ignorance. Michelle and Wilson pass Jasmine. They wave hello, Jasmine doesn’t bat them an eye. Maybe they look at her and think about how she feels right now. Wilson would rub her back and Michelle will give her *the face*.

But they have to make it to class first.

Hours pass, mods fold into another. Jasmine doesn’t hear a single question from any teacher. No answer from any student. She singles out the soft patter of rain through the roof. She attempts to mimic her breath to the cadence of the droplets; the outburst of spring showers. Taming the adverse reactions in her head. It’s not a betrayal to her, but a rewriting of the blueprint.

She hears the voices of peers in the hallways. Excitement for the strike. More specifically, excitement to skip school. The admiration is shared between bursts of kazoos, shaming Jasmine’s eardrums with each strike.

Lunch comes and goes. People eat and talk using their words to communicate. The sound of dying ducks filtered through plastic toys. Jasmine goes outside to breathe in fresh air, but no real oxygen comes into her.

12 becomes 1 and 1 becomes 1:30. All around, people check their phones in stark anticipation to leave school ninety minutes earlier than usual. Jasmine sits next to Michelle, trying to remain emotionally unscathed. Mr. Larson goes on about something unimportant; the final for AP American History was almost a month ago. There is nothing left to cover, no history left to repeat. He holds his hand out to the board, pointing at black and white figures. Their importance, how they changed history.

The rain outside intensifies. The big clock above the whiteboard now points to 1:40. Side-chatter raises. Feet fidget in excitement. Between the thin walls, other students in other classrooms begin to raise

their voice level. It becomes obvious there is something more than just kazoos today. Larson stops talking, eyeing the room.

“Okay, enough with the side conversations everyone. I’m shifting gears.” Michelle chuckles, she always found *shifting gears* funny. “Someone tell me the honest truth. Is there another prank being played today?” He raises his voice. A silence falls throughout the room. “What is happening? I thought it was last-week-wiggles but I’ve never seen an attention span this bad past lunch with upperclassmen.”

Nobody says a word. Each student softly stiffens back into place, correcting their posture.

Then comes the interruption.

A tidal wave of noise: kazoos and shouts and slamming doors echo through the hallways.

Through the limited gaze of the interior-set windows, students are seen leaving class early in swarms of grand jubilee. Socializing in rebellious torment. Larson peaks through the crack in the door, then closes it, locks the door. He nods his head very gently, as if finally understanding the grand ulterior motive. He forms his hand into a fist, laying them on his hips.

“Really guys, a strike? That’s the best prank you could think of? I thought the kazoos were kind of smart.” He tsks his tongue, crossing his head in disappointment.

The class continues their mute conduct. Everyone looks at each other, as if to see who will get up first. But now the door is locked. Blocking them from the growing chants of their peers, the youthful energy of freedom.

Michelle slowly raises her hand.

“Yes?” Larson asks.

“What’s going on out there is a rally, actually, Mr. Larson. S- some students planned an academic strike for LaPlant, trying to, like, raise awareness for her and the other women who get laid-off in unagreeable scenarios.” Michelle struggled through her words, but came out with a surprisingly clear sentence.

A grin appears across Larson’s face.

“Right, right.” He says, looking back outside to see a mob of students now skipping like it’s kindergarten.

He unlocks the door. “Well, who I am to stop the great feminist revolution of Penokin, Wisconsin!” Larson says with a hint of passive-aggressiveness, throwing his hands into the air.

Students look at one another, as if to get validation from the other that it’s okay to join their friends. Michelle begins to pull her seat from the table.

“But first everyone, I have an exit card for today. Each of you tell me one famous female activist, abolitionist, politician— any— that we learned from the curriculum this year. I want a name and their impact. Then—” Larson pauses for a moment, letting the cheers of the students just outside the thin walls of room 237 ruminate— “I will let you leave.”

The torrential silence continues within the enclosed walls for a few blinks. Every millisecond taunts the students with the anticipation of an event they cannot yet take part in.

Desmond raises his hand first. Larson stares at him, inviting him to speak. “Does Harriet Tubman count?”

“That’s a perfect one. What about her impact?”

“She helped nearly a hundred people pass through the underground railroad with either little help or solely herself, putting her own life at risk in the process.”

Larson clicks his tongue, then points his thumb towards the door, “Grab your backpack. You’re free to go!”

Desmond is hesitant at first, as if the reward is too good to be true. After a moment to confirm the prize is in fact real, he grabs his bag and laughs. Opens the door, unleashing a momentary burst of heightened shouts with the new hole in the hole unveiled. Larson lets the door stay wide open.

Michelle speaks up next, “I got one. The Grimke’s. Sarah and uh…”

“Angelica.” Larson helps.

“Angelica. They were pioneers of the abolitionist movement, but also staunch promoters for female equality.”

“Amazing, next.”

Michelle smiles, nearly throwing her chair from under herself to the ground. She grabs her backpack and begins to head out before she can throw it over her back. Her walk is closer to a run. Mish looks back at Jasmine, finally not forgetting her in the flurry of excitement. She has a new face on; Jas can't quite understand it. Maybe pity? Maybe enjoyment? Her mouth is curved in waves, tilting upward on one end and downward the other. Nose is enlarged. No head-tilt. Mish nudges her head in the direction of all the action, mouthing “c'mon” to her friend.

Jasmine waves her off, shrugging. Michelle lowers her shoulders, then turns away, joining the crowd.

The class continues: “Louisa May Alcott. She wrote *Little Women* and other novels that brought a female perspective to a literary world dominated primarily by men.”

“Susan B. Anthony was really important to the suffrage movement which later gave way for the right for women to vote.”

One-by-one, the class empties rapidly. Some take out their phone to do some quick research, informing themselves on a makeshift historical matriarch.

“Grace Hopper was a member of the navy and a computer scientist who helped create the first computer.”

“Barabara Jordan was not only the first female representative of Texas but one of the only African American representatives in congress.”

Jasmine watched faces she has grown up with list off the importance of women who changed the world— who formed it with their courageous actions— all to leave school early. She tucked her head into her arms.

“Helen Keller didn't let her disabilities define her. Instead, she wrote and delivered speeches to advocate for citizens with disabilities and was an activist for women's suffrage as well.”

After a minute, it is down to just Jasmine and her teacher. The echoes of protest migrated down the hallways, now fading in a fit of kazoos and woos. Larson stares at Jasmine, expecting her to speak up, but she sits loosely in her chair softly tapping her foot on the ground.

“Jasmine, I know you have one. Don’t you want to get out of here early? I know I got two daughters and a baloney sandwich that won’t make itself.” At that, Larson zips up his hiking backpack, throw.

“You can hear it out there. It’s all peanut butter.” Jasmine comments.

“Peanut butter?” Larson questions.

“Exactly.”

Jasmine walks through the crowd, trekking past shoulders with no real reason. The students kept the revolution in the hallways as if to avoid the trinkle outside. Jasmine thinks they should yell, *a drop will stop ‘em!*

The teachers have begun herding them to certain sections of the school. Not particularly trying to gather them back to class, but not particularly allowing them to roam free with their evasive energy. Students have begun to form moshing circles and breakdance bubbles. Jasmine feels that this is about right.

She breaks free from the crowd and finds an exit. Maybe she can get her workout done early. Opening the door to a wave of fresh air and mist from mother nature, Jasmine finally takes in a deep breath and smiles. On the final foot of concrete within the school premises, she takes a seat. Brings her knees to her head, and inhales in all the fumes of the leaves. Appreciates the flowing wind through her hair.

Behind her she can hear teachers yell at students to stay within the suggested parameters. She can picture their arms flailing, eyes widened. Jas laughs. Then walks to her car, shrugging off the great Peanut Butter Rally of Penokin, Wisconsin: in honor of those who can afford nothing better.